



Lesson: Caste in Politics and the Politicisation of Caste

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CASTE IN POLITICS AND THE POLITICISATION OF CASTE

Introduction

The discourse on caste and politics in India shall begin with the nature of Indian society. This is primarily because of the fact that such discussion cannot ignore the implication of social structure over the functions of political system. The other probability is the diverse nature of the society, which is seen as the compete grid of caste, ethnicity, religions etc., where different social groups have been located in various levels of social structure, thereby experiencing different degree and magnitude of social, economic, cultural and political developments and deprivation. Their capability to take independence decisions while casting vote in the electoral processes of the country and active or inactive participation in political affairs of the state have much to do with their experiences in different spheres of life. The changing relationship between caste and politics and the increasing relevance of caste in Indian politics raises some pertinent questions, such as what form is caste taking under the impact of modern politics? What form is politics taking in a cadre-ridden society? Does caste use politics? Or does politics use caste? Some of these questions assume centre stage while discussing about caste and politics in Indian context. The proceeding pages attempt to address these questions.

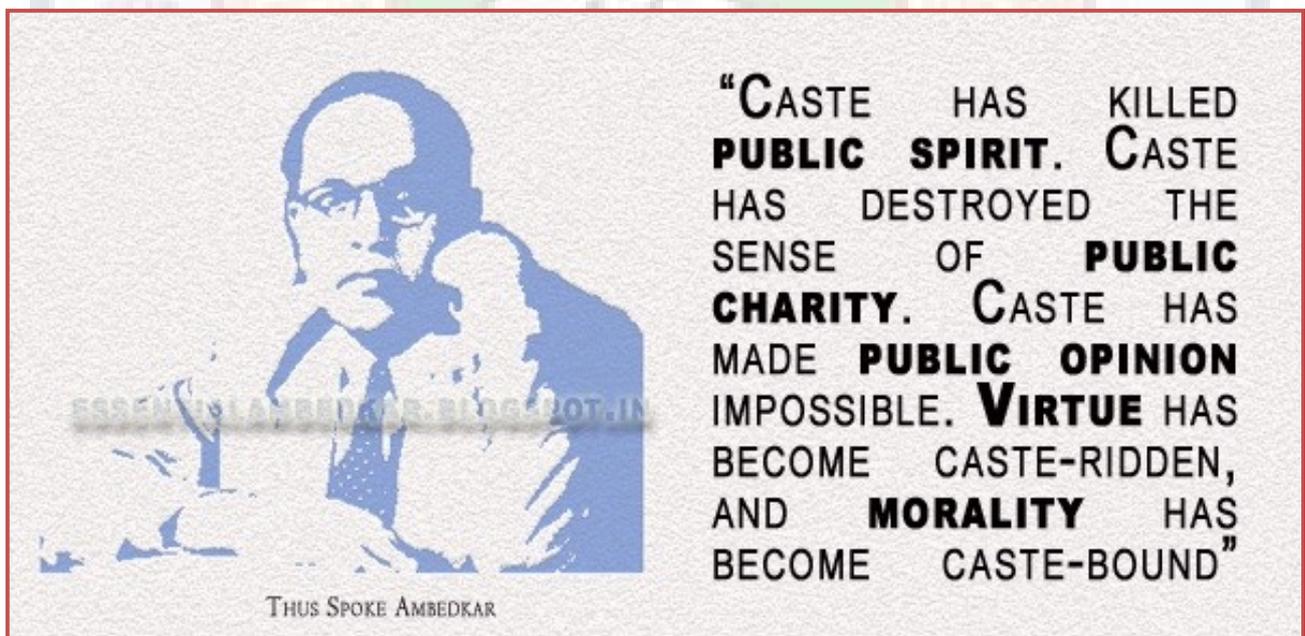
Caste and Politics in Colonial Period

The relationship between the caste and politics during the colonial period is essentially linked with the discussion on the practice of social discrimination against the marginalised groups of the society such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). These social groups have been discriminated against for centuries in social, economic, cultural and political spheres of life. They have not been allowed to equally participate in the public life. The area of operation of public sphere was limited to certain sections of the society, who are perceived to be considered as 'higher caste'. The higher castes developed the notion of 'superiority' and 'inferiority', 'purity and pollution', where the SCs have been apparently considered as 'inferior' and associated with 'pollution'. This notion of the Hindu social order pushed the SCs/Dalits to the margin and practised the notion of untouchability. This perception of the Indian society leads to the emergence of anti-caste movements in different parts of the country and produced great leaders such as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Periyar etc., who tirelessly fought for the recognition of the distinct identities and for the protection and promotion of rights and dignity of the marginalised groups.

The role of these leaders in democratising the Indian democracy had has increasing relevance to explore the changing relationship between caste and politics both in colonial and post-colonial period. These leaders always tried to address the issues of discrimination, untouchability and making the public sphere more 'inclusive' (which would not only widen the

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base of Indian democratic politics but also enable to establish equitable and just society) irrespective of different social identities. In the first round table conference, Ambedkar demanded equal rights for the Dalits. There shall be substantial representation of the Dalits in politics as well as in the government services. In order to achieve their objectives and goals, these leaders adopted different strategies. They initiated movement against the caste discrimination and went ahead to form their own political party. In this context, the formation of Indian Labour Party by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in August 1936 can be demonstrated, which was the first ever political party formed by the Dalits. Ambedkar also demanded for separate electorate for the Dalits, where only the Dalits would participate in the electoral process to elect their representatives. But this was not acceptable to Gandhi and he sat on fast unto death. This scenario and pressure from different quarters forced Ambedkar to reconsider his decision for demanding separate electorate for the Dalits. Consequently, separate electorate was replaced with the joint electorate, where the candidate standing for the election would be from the SCs/STs but all the electorate would caste vote including the Dalits. The provision of joint electorate paved way for the establishment of 'reserved constituency' in the post-independence period. In other words, relevance of caste has never been absent in politics during the colonial period and it is essentially linked to the fact that unless the Dalits enter into the power relationship, their socio-economic and political conditions would not improve. This can only be done by occupying the contentious power compartment in Indian democracy and in this context, Ambedkar underlined that Dalit must become a ruling community.



Source: <http://essentialambedkar.blogspot.in/2012/05/morality-hindu-caste-varna-system.html>, accessed on January 20, 2015

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Caste and Politics in the Post-Colonial Period

After India's independence in 1947, India drafted its constitution by taking into consideration of different dynamics of Indian society. During the debate in the Constituent Assembly for drafting the constitution, issues such as diversity, liberty, equality, freedom, justice etc. dominated the table of discussion. After the long drawn debate (1946-1949), the members of the Constituent Assembly arrived at a conclusion that all sections of the society should be given equal opportunity to flourish their personality in independent India. So, taking these differences and distinctiveness of different social groups into consideration, Indian constitution adopted number of positive provisions for the protection and promotion of different social groups in independent India.

Value addition-know it more

Further reading

To know more on Dalit movement against caste system during the colonial period read: Rosalind O'Hanlon (1985), *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In this context, one of the important provisions of the constitution is to give due recognition to the social identity and adopting ameliorative measures for enabling them to become or feel equal citizen of the sovereign state and the constitutional measures range from recognition of caste based discrimination to the enactment of political reservation and number of Acts that directly or indirectly address the need of doing away with discrimination on the basis of community social identity. In other words, the constitution adopted certain legal and institutional mechanism, albeit temporarily, to the historically disadvantaged and marginalised groups, such as SCs and STs, to have their voice in the democratic politics of the country. These measures not only aim to protect and promote the interest and expectation of SCs and STs in political sphere in the form of political reservation but also extended to other integral part of their life such as economic, social and educational spheres. The economic interests of these communities force the state to adopt certain preferences in economic sphere in the form of specially considering the economic needs of the community. This approach of the government has reflected in various welfare schemes such as reserving job opportunities in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

Employment Act (MGNREGA), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NHRM), reservation in government employment [Article 16(4)] on the basis of proportionality etc. Their interests are promoted and protected in social spheres mainly within the context of Articles 17 and 46 along with numerous legislative measures to curb the practice of untouchability atrocities act etc. The extension of preferential treatment in educational sphere was meted out by the 1st



FIRM GROUND: There is no law barring the calling of a political meeting of a caste, for example, of Dalits to discuss the problems facing that community. A rally at Jantar Mantar. Photo: Shiv Kumar Pushpakar

Source: Markendey Katju (2013), "Crime, Caste and Judicial Restraint", *The Hindu*, July 18, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/crime-caste-and-judicial-restraint/article4921389.ece>, accessed on January 20, 2015.

constitutional amendment in 1951, essentially because of the fact that granting reservation in politics and government jobs will not help the Dalits without their educational advancement. Within this broader framework, caste politics in the post-colonial state of India has been experiencing number of emerging trends/patterns, which can be explored in the following way.

Role of Caste Associations in Politics

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, different parts of the subcontinent saw the emergence of caste associations. Caste associations act as pressure group in Indian politics and influence the governance agenda of the Indian state at local, regional and national levels (Jodhka, 2010: 154; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1960; Shah, 2002: 18). Different caste groups form their own organisation or association to address their issues and concerns. Many caste associations do not necessarily directly involve themselves in the day-to-day politics but they carry out significant social, economic, educational and political functions. For Rudolph, the participation of caste association in politics is 'the democratic incarnation of caste' (Rudolph, 1965: 975-989), whereas Kothari calls it as the '**democratisation**' of castes (Shah, 2002: 19). Though most of the caste organisations may not be engaging directly themselves in politics but they apparently create consciousness among the members of their community, strengthening their bonds and protecting their rights, thereby there is a direct impact of this consciousness over politics in India.

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Caste in Politics and the Politicisation of Caste

The role of caste associations has also changed over the period. At the initial stage, they were more concerned with raising their caste status in a caste ridden society. But gradually, with the expansion of liberal democracy, their aims also began to change accordingly. Instead of demanding for temple entry and their caste status, they demanded space for themselves in the administrative, educational and political spheres. The operationalisation of adult franchise opened up the sphere for such demands. In this context, Rudolph and Rudolph summarises the role of caste associations in politics in the following way: "Caste associations attempted to have their own members nominated for elective office, working through existing parties or forming their own; to maximize caste representation and influence in state cabinets and lesser governing bodies; and to use ministerial, legislative and administrative channels to press for action on caste objectives in the welfare, educational and economic realms. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the caste association in the contemporary era, however, is its capacity to organize politically illiterate mass electorate, thus making possible in some measure the realization of its aspirations and educating large section of it in the methods and values of political democracy" (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1960: 7-8). To put it differently, caste associations assume the role of disseminating political education and the day to day functioning of political system to its members and mobilise and organise them accordingly. This strategy would enable them to enter into political bargaining with the existing political system in terms of demanding for the maximisation of their representation in politics and addressing their problems.

Caste and Democratic Upsurge

After independence, even though there was a political reservation for the SCs and STs, their active participation in politics did not take place. Consequently, the traditional upper castes continue to rule in most parts of India. But this trend did not last for long. Soon the political sphere emerged as a contested space between different castes and thereby having greater implication of caste in politics. Such political scenario emerged in the mid-1960s and the Congress party gradually started losing its vote bank in different parts of India. During this period, number of lower castes challenged the political dominance of higher caste. For instance, traditional peasant castes such as Ahirs, Kurmis, Jats began to dominate the political scenario of north India. Similarly, in the south, Lingayats played an important role in Karnataka (Gupta, 2005: 415). The significant aspect that witnessed during this period suggests that peasant classes, to whom we consider today as Other Backward Classes (OBCs), experienced political assertion and this period has been considered by Yadav as 'first democratic upsurge' (Yadav, 2000). Subsequently, for the first time in the political history of India, there was the formation of non-Congress government by the Janata Party at the Centre in 1977. This also invariably reflects that the representation of higher castes in politics declined to a large extent in different parts of the country (Gupta, 2005: 415; Jaffrelot, 2005). It is, however, worthwhile

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to mention here that the **first democratic upsurge** did not make any significant political impact on the most marginalised sections of the society such as the Dalits and Adivasis.

The process of democratisation gradually moved downwards to the smaller and poor castes. The increasing political assertion has been experienced by the Dalits and Adivasis in the 1980s, where they actively started participating in the political affairs of the state and this phase has apparently been described by Yadav as the '**second democratic upsurge**' (Yadav, 2000). The Indian politics in the contemporary period is witnessing an increasing support of Dalits for Dalit parties and the probable reason is that it is extremely difficult for them to find a place in the mainstream political parties which establish patron-client relationship with them, but it becomes easier for them to find a place in lower caste parties (Conversation on Caste). The other probable reason for turning down to Dalit parties is based on the fact that Dalit parties also target deeper aspect of caste based discrimination and exploitation. During the second democratic upsurge, the marginalised groups actively involved the politics not only by forming their own political parties (example BSP) but also occupied the significant political echelon of the India state (Mayawati as the first Dalit Chief Minister of UP). Sukhdeo Thorat explains the reason of late assertiveness of the most marginalised groups. He emphasises that initially Dalits did not take the implication of political reservation seriously. But gradually they have recognised its value in terms of acquiring power (Conversation on Caste Today). In short, the expansion and liberal and democratic ideas and implementation of political reservation created awareness among the marginalised groups and provided the opportunity to actively participate in the political affairs of the state.

Caste and Voting Behaviour

Caste plays a significant role in influencing the functional structure of Indian politics. Caste is a predominant consideration that influences political behaviour. Different political parties, therefore, pay due attention to caste while distributing party tickets. While nominating party candidates, they take into account the caste *arithmetic*, that is, the numerical presence of a specific caste group in a particular constituency and the probability of supporting the standing caste candidate. In this context, caste associations play pertinent role in a situation where they are not affiliated with any political party. Exploring the role of caste associations in influencing the voting pattern of the caste groups, in Rajasthan, Meenas were told: 'Do not give your daughter or your vote to anyone but a Meena' (Shah, 2002: 24). Similarly, slogans were raised in Tamil Nadu suggesting that 'The Vanniya vote is not for anyone else' (Ibid).

Andre Beteille summarises the role of caste in politics in the following way:

'Caste may enter into the political process in a number of ways. Firstly, appeals may be made to caste loyalties in a general way....Secondly, networks of interpersonal relations are activated both during elections and at other times for mobilizing support along caste lines.'

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Since kinship, marriage and commensality often stop short at the boundaries of caste, intra-caste relations are very important. Finally, caste associations...may seek to articulate caste interests in an organized manner' (quoted in Sashay, 2009: 412).

In responding to a question on the discourse on caste, Sudha Pai emphasised the changing role of caste in voting behaviour. To quote her, "Caste is also a vote bank, but *not* in the same way as it was earlier when Dalits formed the vote banks of mainstream parties. Today Dalits, and in some cases other lower castes, form the *core constituency* of Dalit parties and they are proud of it. Their support is on the basis of identity and not on the earlier patron-client relationship which have broken down" (Conversation on Caste). In other words, caste is not only important for occupying political position for the Dalit parties, but continues to be relevant for mainstream political parties.

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Caste Consciousness and Politics

Rajni Kothari emphasised on three aspects while discussion about the interaction between caste and politics in India:

The **first aspect** can be seen in the form of 'secularisation of caste through their political involvement. This will alter the traditionally maintained rigid features and lead to a break up of the old (socio-political) order. This enables to process of alignment and realignment of various strata and the gradually embracing the process of social mobility .

The **second aspect** is related to the integration dimension. The caste system not only differentiate individuals on the basis of their caste/social identity but also distinguishes on the basis of occupational and economic roles. 'At the same time, it is an integral structure of a specific type, namely one that is more intense in its small group orientation and particularistic loyalties and where wider loyalties operate only when they are structured through the prevailing differentiations. This aspect is important in understanding the structural impact of democratic nation-building' (Kothari, 2010: 10).

The **third aspect** is related to consciousness, that is, caste enters politics through consciousness and then gets politicised. The practice of adult franchise in association with the provision of political reservation for the Dalits has further strengthen consciousness among the concerned communities.

Dalits and Caste Politics

The caste politics in independent India is marked by assertion of different social groups over the period. The middle-level caste groups began to consolidate their position at the local and regional level of Indian politics during the first three decades. While these groups gained from the developmental process and democratic politics during this period but those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy continue to suffer marginalisation, discrimination and subjugation within the broader framework of social and political exclusion.

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The relationship between caste and politics experienced drastic change with the emergence of lower caste politics in the context of pursuit of power. These lower caste groups started following the significance of Ambedkar, where he had urged to become a ruling group. Consequently, these groups started forming their own organisations as well as political party, which is seminally to fight to protect the interests of the marginalised groups.

In this context, the formation of Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) by Kanshi Ram on the occasion of Ambedkar's death anniversary in 1981 can be demonstrated. They turned out to be more aggressive in terms of protecting their rights and interests. During the initial phase of the formation of DS-4, they did not focus much attention on other dimensions of Dalit communities (Vora, 2004) and their major concern was how to capture political power, as it is clear from the words of Kanshi Ram, where he spelt out that 'We have a one point programmes-take power' (Hasan, 2000: 155).

The principle slogan of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) underscored this trust: ***mat hamara, raj tumhara, nahin chalega, nahin chalega*** (We vote you rule, this cannot go on) or, ***vote se lenge PM/CM, arakshan se SP/DM*** (Through the vote we will take the post of Prime Minister and Chief Minister; through reservation we will take the posts of district magistrate and superintendent of police) [cited in Hasan, 2000: 155]. The other celebrated slogan of BSP was *Brahmin, bania, thakur chor; Baki sab DS4* (cited in Ibid: 173, note 11). They have also been able to mobilise the Dalits and galvanised their support on the basis of caste line and Mayawati became the first Dalit woman to occupy the highest echelon (Chief Minister) of political structure of an Indian state, Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Value addition-Did you know

Political profile

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a Dalit political party led by the Dalit woman Mayawati did not even win a single Parliamentary seat in the 2014 general election from Uttar Pradesh.

Though the Dalit community may not get the direct benefit from the Dalit Chief Ministership across the country in the broader democratic framework that categorically rules out the protection of sectarian interest in a democratic politics, the alleviation of Mayawati to the position of Chief Minister has significant impact on Dalit society which has enabled them to *feel* their political presence, thereby leading to the political assertion of Dalit communities in different parts of India.

Insert q. no 4

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<http://theviewpaper.net/caste-based-politics/> accessed on January 20, 2015

Socialist Party and Caste Politics

Socialist party was formed by Ram Manohar Lohia in 1955. The political crisis that emerged in the Praja Socialist Party compelled him to leave the party in 1954 and formed his own party. He formed the party during the time when there was an intensive debate on the recommendation of **the First Backward Commission Report** submitted in 1955 and the movement to demand for the entry of Harijan to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi. In such a situation, Socialist Party was bound to have turn towards caste politics in India in the post-independence period. The other important factor that bent Lohia towards caste politics is the defeat of his party in the 1957 election in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere. Consequently, he came in contact with major anti-caste movements, socio-political organisations, leaders of scheduled castes and backward classes in different parts of the country, which increasingly contributed to the merger of the Indian National Backward Classes Federation with Lohia's Socialist Party in 1957 (Kumar, 2010: 66). He was in favour of extending preferential policies to the backward sections and advocated for the new conceptualisation of 'backward classes' to include depressed sections among the Muslims and Christians (Ibid). He went ahead to demand for the 60 percent reservation of seats in all key positions in public life for backward classes constituting 'women, Harijans, Shudras, depressed Muslims and Christians, and adivasis' (Ibid), a significant step towards deconstructing caste system in India. Some of the pertinent issues such as addressing poverty, ending the compulsory learning of English in schools and colleges, helping women by providing them with drinking water facilities and toilets etc. raised by Lohia across the caste line led to the emergence of non-Congress coalition governments in different parts of the country. His 11 points goals of 'equality and prosperity' in 1966 helped non-Congress alliances to a large extent to come to power in the 1967 election (Ibid). While campaigning for the 1967 election, he appealed the people of India to completely reject the 'old caste policy' that establishes vertical solidarity of castes and accept the 'new

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caste policy' advocated by the socialists that establishes horizontal solidarity across caste, gender and religion (Ibid).

Value addition-know it more

Understanding Reservation

Reservation policy is a preferential policy which reserves seats for the SCs, STs and OBCs in proportion to their population due to their historical marginalisation. It has reserved seats in politics, education and government services for the SCs and STs, while the OBCs are granted only in education and services not in politics.



CASTE EQUATIONS: Studies have found strong affiliations of specific castes to specific parties such as the Samajwadi party. File photo: Arunangsu Roy Chowdhury

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-continuing-grip-of-caste/article5789482.ece>, accessed on January 20, 2015

Mulayam Singh Yadav carried forward the legacies of Ram Manohar Lohia, though he was the followers of Chaudhary Charan Singh and became the MLA for the first time in 1967 election on a ticket of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal, Charan Singh's party. Mulayam Singh Yadav used the reservation policy of the Janata Dal (extension of reservation policy to the OBCs) to protect and promote their caste interests. Even before the implementation of recommendations of the Mandal Commission, that is, 27 percent reservation for the OBCs, when Mulayam Singh Yadav
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became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1989, he had promulgated an ordinance providing a quota of 15 percent to the OBCs in the state administration. To put it differently, Mulayam Singh Yadav put far more emphasis on the collective identities of the backward classes, the vision that was envisaged by Ram Manohar Lohia. Accepting Lohia as the ideologue, Mulayam Singh Yadav formed his own party, Samajwadi Party, in 1992. Samajwadi Party contested the 1993 Assembly election by promising 27 quota for the OBCs in the state administration and it implemented the quota when Singh became the Chief Minister for the second time through the Uttar Pradesh Public Services (Reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) Act of 1994 (Jaffrelot, 2000: 101).

AJGAR Formation and Caste Politics

The implication of caste in politics was never unnoticed in the pre- and post-independence period. Like the formation of different caste groups to influence political scenario of the country in the post-independence period, political leaders of the pre-independence period made number of attempts to mobilise people by forming caste groups and play decisive role in the political process of the country. The formation of the AJGAR goes back to the period of pre-independence era and revived during the post-independence period. AJGAR stands for Ahir, Jat, Gujar and Rajput castes. The proposal of such caste alliance was proposed by a rural leader and politician, Sir Chhotu Ram, during the pre-colonial period. Later this formation acquired the name of MAJGAR by including Muslims in its block.

In the post-independence period, Charan Singh exploited the benefits of such formation to challenge the monopoly of Indian National Congress in Indian Politics, especially in the arena of state politics. He revived AJGAR in the late 1960s and 1970s in Uttar Pradesh to create vote bank for his party by adopting the strategy of promoting polarisation. The revival of such block by Charan Singh was based on the notion that all these peasant castes, such as Ahir, Jat, Gujar and Rajput share the common social and racial group, the Kshetriyas. This combination had helped Charan Singh to a large extent and became the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1967.

After independence, Charan Singh identified himself with the interest of the peasants. He promoted the interests of the middle peasantry (where his own caste, Jat, also forms a significant part) by abolishing zamindari system in the capacity of Revenue Minister in charge of land reforms in Uttar Pradesh. When he came the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Finance under the Morarji Desai government (1977-1979), his budget in 1979 reduced several indirect taxes on mechanical tillers, diesel for electric water pump, and chemical fertilisers by 50 percent for some of them. In addition to this, the budget lowered interest rates for rural loans, increased subsidy of minor irrigation and earmarked fund for rural electrification and grain storage facilities (Jaffrelot, 94). In other words, the caste politics under the leadership of Charan Singh took the form of what Chandra calls as the patronage politics (Chandra, 2009).

Emergence of OBCs

Another significant aspect of caste and politics that was visible in the 1990s was, unlike the political assertion of Dalits that has much to do with the electoral reservation, the significant increasing representation of OBCs in political sphere in North India without the formal extension of the electoral reservation to them (Jaffrelot, 2003). Jaffrelot examines the nature of representation, how and why such representation was absent in the political scenario prior to 1990s. He underlined the fact that the sudden increase of political representation of the OBCs in North India has much to do with the implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendation of 27% reservation of seats for them in the government services. The implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendation revived the question of caste and politics in India and provided a new political legitimacy to caste. The expansion of the scope of reservation to the OBCs has deep impact over politics and subsequently different political parties began to realise the potentiality of political behaviour of the OBCs as 'a group'. While implementing the Mandal Commission's report, the former Prime Minister of India, V. P. Singh, focused on the centrality accorded to power, where he pointed out that: 'Through Mandal we knew we were going to bring in changes in the basic nature of power. I was putting my hand on the real structure of power. I knew I was not giving jobs, Mandal is not an employment scheme, but I was seeking to place people in the instrument of power through the use of governmental power' (quoted in Hasan, 2000: 155). This announcement did not go uncontested. The upper caste youth, who consider their loss of job opportunities and the socio-political order they had always dominated, came to the street and launched violent protests (Jaffrelot, 2005). This resistance gave rise to counter mobilisation among the OBCs, who for the first time formed the common front to defend the quota. The counter mobilisation of OBCs had significant political implications and changed the orientation of different political parties towards the OBCs.

Value addition-know it more

Define Patronage Politics

Patronage politics is the kind of politics practised by political parties in terms of distributing resources to the members of their supporters/community. In patronage democracy, people judge politicians not by assessing their policies but by whether the candidate will favour them in distribution of patronage.

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In such a situation of polarisation on the basis of social identity, the OBCs were bound to make a difference in the electoral processes of the country due to their substantial population. They can be a means of occupying power in the political sphere for those who recognise their numerical strength and at the same time they can also be an agent of ousting some from the political leverage, who do not acknowledge their population proportionality. In this context, realising their potential impact in the elections, different political parties both regional and national parties including the BJP and the Congress changed their approach towards this caste group and gave party tickets to large number of OBC candidates. Consequently, the proportion of OBC elected representatives went from 11% in 1994 to 25% in 1996 affecting the political representation of the upper caste which went down from 47% to 35% (Jaffrelot, 2005).

The changing role of the OBCs in Indian politics is not only confined to Uttar Pradesh alone, but also extended to other states of the Hindi belt, albeit uneven manner. For instance, in Rajasthan, the share of OBC among the MPs has remained stable at 12 percent between 1984 and 1998, whereas during the same period, it has increased from 7.5 percent to 20.5 percent in Madhya Pradesh. In Bihar, the share of OBC MPs increased from 17 percent to 43 percent between 1984 to 1996 (Jaffrelot, 2000: 98). In other words, even without the formal extension of electoral reservation to the OBCs, caste influenced the political scenario of the country to a great extent. This scenario has been considered by Jaffrelot as India's silent revolution (Jaffrelot, 2003).

Insert q. no 6

Politicisation of Caste

Politics does not function in vacuum. Due to the increasing significance of 'politics of number' or 'number game', politicians cannot just ignore or sideline the role of caste in politics. Caste provides an extensive basis for organisation of democratic politics. Such implications have not only influenced the campaigning strategy of different political parties but also altered the distribution of tickets by different political parties. As has already pointed out that while distributing tickets, political parties take into account the proportion of caste/sub-caste in a particular constituency. They always prefer to give party tickets to the contender of caste member, which has substantial number. Even without political reservation for the OBCs, exploring the possibility of casting vote as 'a group' by this section during the elections, all political parties including the major parties such as the Congress and the BJP issue party tickets to the OBCs and subsequently, the representation of OBCs in politics increased to a large extent. In such a situation, caste/sub-caste had has always been at the forefront during the election rally and campaigns. In order to galvanise support, political parties/candidates mobilise people on the basis of caste line. The other significant aspect of caste and politics is the role of caste associations. Though the role of caste associations has decreased to some extent in the recent period due to the impact of modern education and the emergence of middle class among the Dalits, they still mould the political behaviour of their caste members.

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These associations provide support to political parties as 'a block'. In other words, politics always look for articulation of support through organisation, where caste structure provides one of the principal organisational cluster. In this context, Rajni Kothari underscores that the alleged 'casteism in politics' is thus no more or no less than *politicisation* of caste (Kothari, 2010: 5). In other words, it is not politics that gets caste-ridden, it is caste that gets politicised. On the contrary, the political parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party, which was initially confined to the Dalits only and later extended to others, use their caste leaders such as Ambedkar, as a symbol of dignity. The BSP considered that the establishment of Ambedkar's statue in different parts of the state symbolises the empowerment and dignity of the Dalits. In short, caste itself becomes a political category and it is difficult to demonstrate whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste.

Issues and Concerns of Caste Politics in India

Caste politics does not function in vacuum. Caste politics does have certain issues and concerns that are having deep implications over social groups while having political interactions in public sphere. Different issues and concerns of the caste politics can be grouped as under:

A. Identity and Recognition

As it has been pointed out that caste has become political category in the present context. Consequently, caste has also undergone a change in the contemporary period. Different caste groups are demanding for the recognition of their cultural distinctiveness. They are emphasising the importance of their caste identity. In this context, Ghanashyam Shah points out that caste is being mobilised as identity and such mobilisation leads to ever increasing participation of the deprived communities in the democratic process (Conversation on Caste Today). With such demands of the Dalit communities, the nature of discourse on caste and politics has changed from hierarchy to difference (Ibid).

B. Reservation

Reservation has become one of the significant means of Dalit empowerment. Though reservation was primarily adopted for a period of ten years (Article 334) under the original India constitution, it has been consistently extended periodically. The primary reason behind this fact is that now the marginalised groups have emerged as assertive communities and at the moment, whoever forms the government at the Centre, no political party dares to do away with reservation. It is worthwhile to mention that the provision of reservation has enacted only in the lower houses of the Indian Parliament and State Legislatures due to the nature of representation, where the members are directly elected by the people. Articles 330 and 332 deal with political reservation for SCs and STs in the House of the People and Legislative Assemblies of the State respectively. With the implementation of reservation, two positive changes have occurred in India, first, the level of discrimination is decreased, and second,

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middle class within the community has emerged that would otherwise be lacking (Galanter, 1984).

Value addition-Did you know

Ambedkar, a representative of the Dalits, had raised the time framework of reservation policy in the Constituent Assembly for 10 years. The reason was to ensure the periodical evaluation of the reservation policies for the Dalits.

Insert q. no 5

C. Education

Education has considered a significant means of Dalit empowerment. Amartya Sen recognises the role of education in expanding the capability of the individual. Education invariably enhance the freedom of the individual. It leads to the development of human personality of the individual. In this context, Dalits demand for equal educational opportunities as well as quality education.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment of the Dalits has also become important concerns of the caste politics today. As the Dalits have been unevenly trapped under poverty, economic empowerment is key to address the issues of poverty, migration and exploitation of Dalit communities as well as it helps the Dalits to stand independently. More and more economic development initiatives are required to break their present conditions, which has been considered marginalisation, subjugation and exploitation. Accordingly, different caste groups are incrementally changing role and demanding for more and more economic benefits, educational facilities, health facilities etc.

D. Discrimination

Discrimination and exploitation has become the moment of the day. Dalit have been discriminated against and untouchability has been practised. The practice of discrimination and untouchability is less visible in urban areas, but such practice is widely visible in rural areas. Though the protagonist of reservation may claim that reservation has decreased the level of discrimination, it has invariably failed to completely check such practice against the Dalits. This happens more often with those Dalits who are illiterate and most poor within the community but the political elite of this community are also not out of such sufferings. For instance, when the Women and Child Welfare Minister, Pramila Mallick, a Dalit, visited the temple's sanctum sanctum in Bhadrak district of Odisha in January 2009, the priest of the temple considered that Ms Mallick's visit made the premises 'impure' and threw all the holy offerings and washed

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floors. Similarly, when the Bihar Chief Minister, Jita Ram Manjhi, a Dalit, visited a temple in Madhubani district in September 2014, the temple was purified. The latest survey on the practice of caste discrimination and untouchability was carried out by the National Council of Applied Economic Research and the University of Maryland, US, and the report reveals that one in four Indians admit to practicing untouchability in India (*The Indian Express*). To put it differently, though the caste based discrimination or untouchability was banned in 1955, India still practices such discrimination in one form or the other.

Value addition-Did you know

Word of fact

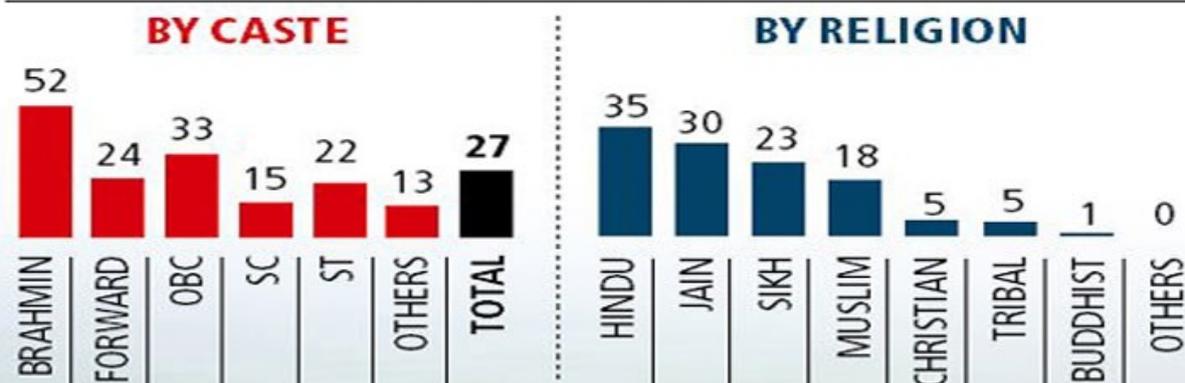
Reservation has not been extended to the upper house of the Parliament and Legislative Councils of the states. The reason is that the members of these houses are not directly elected by the people.

E. Equality of Opportunity

As the Dalits have been denied of equality of opportunity for centuries, they are demanding for equality of opportunity in social, economic, cultural and political spheres. They are demanding for equal access to public sphere and public institutions. In such spheres, their access should not be restricted on the basis of their social identity.

'WILL YOU LET AN SC ENTER YOUR KITCHEN, USE YOUR UTENSILS?'

THOSE WHO SAY NO



* Share of households reporting practising untouchability, all India.
All figures in per cent

Source: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/one-in-four-indians-admit-to-practising-untouchability-biggest-caste-survey/>, accessed on January 20, 2015

F. Dignity

Liberty, equality, justice, freedom and human dignity have been a significant part of the Indian constitution. According to these formal provisions of the Indian constitution, all individuals should have equal access to these and similar dignity. But the Dalits have not been treated with similar dignity. They continue to face inhuman treatment in different parts of the country. The practice of caste based discrimination or untouchability demonstrates this position. They demand for the treatment with similar dignity as anyone else in the society.

G. Human Rights

Human rights of the Dalits have become the concern of the day. Though there are number of developmental and welfare projects have been implemented for the benefits of Dalits, they are still at the margins of the society. Their constitutionally guaranteed rights have not been fully protected. They are the worst sufferers of poverty, illiteracy, growing human rights violation etc. They are discriminated against, denied to have access to land and valued offices, forced to work in inhuman conditions. There is, therefore, a demand from the Dalit community for the protection and promotion of their basic rights.

H. Distribution of Power and Authority

Finally, there is a demand for the distribution and redistribution of power and authority. The rationale of such demand rests on the fact that the practice of caste based discrimination against the Dalits for centuries pushed them to a position of marginalization, impoverishment and dispossessed. The distribution and redistribution of power and authority would improve the marginalised position of the Dalit communities in India.

Conclusion

The relationship between caste and politics has undergone a dramatic change in the contemporary period. As caste is already become political category and due to the increasing influence of caste on politics and mobilization of people on the basis of caste line during political rally and campaigning by different political leaders, it is ambivalent that whether the caste uses politics or politics uses caste. Political parties such as BSP, which was primarily concerned to the issues and problems of the Dalits and the membership of the party was initially confined to the marginalized groups has changed its dimensions and expanded its scope to other caste groups. On the contrary, the village level politics still reflects the idea of strong caste belongingness during elections. They are still casting votes on the basis of their caste/community identities in rural areas. Exploring the relationship between caste and politics, Jodhka emphasised that caste is much more active institution today than it ever was in

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the past and this is largely thanks to the electoral processes and competitive politics (Jodhka, 2010: 155). With the impact of politics and other factors, the caste system has been increasingly experiencing change and subsequently, discourse on caste has changed from hierarchy to difference in the contemporary period.

In an interview with Surinder Jodhka, addressing the question of current moment of caste, Sudha Pai emphasised that there is a steady decline of ritual hierarchy in the discourse on caste since 1950s. She emphasised that

"the present day context of change is primarily in the arena of society and politics at various levels. First, 'power' relationship among caste groups at the village or local level are undergoing significant change. Here both collaboration and competition among dominant and lower castes takes place... Second, in politics, caste still matters in voting patterns. Third, there is greater awareness about sub-castes and they are playing a more important role than earlier. Fourth, there is increasing talk about the rise of a small but influential educated middle class generation of Dalits who are demanding a share in the fruits of development. In sum, there is a greater diversity in the political and the socio-economic position of caste groups particularly at the lower levels of the caste ladder" (Conversation on Caste Today). In short, on the basis of above discussions, it is futile to argue that caste uses politics or politics uses caste, but what is prominent here is both caste and politics have experienced changes in their nature while interfacing as well as interacting with each other.

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Questions:

1. Discuss the role of B R Ambedkar in the rise of Dalit consciousness in India.
2. Explain the term "Politization of Caste". How this has changed the contours of caste system in India.
3. Define the term Democratic Upsurge .How it helps in understanding the dynamics of Indian politics.
4. Discuss the rise of OBC phenomena in Indian politics .
5. Evaluate and assess the performance of Socialist parties in India.

Exercise/Practice

1. Match the following

A

B.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| i. Separate Electorate | i. Yogendra Yadav |
| ii. Joint Electorate | ii. B. R. Ambedkar |
| iii. First Democratic Upsurge | iii. Rudolph and Rudolph |
| iv. Democratic incarnation of Caste | iv. Mahatma Gandhi |

2. Who was the Dalit chief minister of India?

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| a. Kanshiram | b. Mayawati |
| c. Jita Ram Manjhi | d. Pramila Mallick |

3. Who formed the Labour Party?

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| a. Mayawati | b. Kanshiram |
| c. B. R. Ambedkar | d. Mahatma Gandhi |

4. Fill in the blank

The concept of 'first democratic upsurge' is associated with _____

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| a. Yogendra Yadav | b. Rajni Kothari |
| c. Rudolph and Rudolph | d. Christoph Jaffrelot |

5. Who among the following launched the anti-caste movement in different parts of India?

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| a. Ambedkar | b. Periyar |
| d. Jyotirao Phule | d. All of the above |

6. When was the Labour Party formed?

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| a. 1935 | b. 1947 |
|---------|---------|

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c. 1936

d. 1937

7. Who among the following has considered the rise of OBCs in North India as India's Silent Revolution?

a. Rajni Kothari

b. Christoph Jaffrelot

c. James Manor

d. Kanshi Ram

8. The provision of reservation for the Dalits was initially enacted for a period of _____

a. 20 years

b. 15 years

c. 10 years

d. 25 years

9. Which Article of the Indian Constitution deals with reservation for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha?

a. Article 330

b. Article 331

c. Article 332

d. Article 333

10. Who had formed Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS4)?

a. Mayawati

b. Ambedkar

c. Mahatma Gandhi

d. Kanshiram

Answers

1. I-II, II-IV, III-I, IV-III

2. b

3. c

4. a

5. d

6. c

7. b

8. c

9. a

10. d

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