

Caste Based Politics In India And Its Impact on Political Representation

Dr. B N Kamal, Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
Govt. College Solan HP

Abstract

The caste system in India has a significant impact on the country's politics, economy, and society. This system of social stratification has its origins in Indian history and is characterised by the transmission of economic status, social standing, and ways of life from one generation to the next. For a long time, various social groups in India were allocated specific roles under the country's rigid caste system. In Hindu civilization, there are four primary castes or varnas: the upper-caste Brahmins, the lower-caste Vaishyas, the Kshatriyas, and the Shudras (laborers and service providers). Beyond this, there are the Dalits, often known as the "Untouchables," who were socially and politically marginalised and subjected to severe discrimination since they were not part of the varna system. An integral part of Indian politics has been caste. Political parties often enact laws that favour certain castes in an effort to win over those voters. This has led to the rise of "vote banks"—politicians who promise particular castes future benefits in exchange for their support—as a result. These procedures serve to solidify people's sense of caste while, at times, putting national interests on the back burner. The caste structure has an impact on India's democracy as well. The democratic system aims to provide justice and equality for all individuals, but caste-based discrimination and favoritism might undermine these ideals. In contrast to the egalitarian concept of democracy, the caste system is hierarchical. Things are already complicated enough without members of historically disadvantaged lower castes using their caste identity to further their political careers. This tactic helps them resist the oppression of upper castes while also maintaining caste as a political issue. Thus, caste-based politics substantially impedes India's efforts towards national unity. Because of this, a more inclusive society that values individuals based on their abilities and character rather than their caste can never be realised. Conflicts between democratic values and India's long-standing caste structure are among the country's most critical cultural and political issues today.

Keywords: Caste Based Politics, Political Representation, social, economic, India

Introduction

The social, economic, and political fabric of India has been shaped by the caste system for many years. Carrying on one's profession, social standing, and way of life from one generation to another is profoundly ingrained in Indian culture. In ancient India, people's roles and duties determined their social status via a system of divisions called the caste system. The main socioeconomic classes in Hinduism are called varnas. In Hinduism, there are four

distinct social classes: the vaishyas, who work as merchants and farmers; the kshatriyas, who are rulers and fighters; the brahmins, who are also teachers and priests, make up the highest caste; and the shudras, who are the lowest (laborers and service providers). The Dalits are another group that has historically been politically and socially marginalised; they were once known as the "Untouchables" and shared this fate with everyone else who did not belong to the varna system. Caste has a significant role in Indian politics. Political parties often attempt to influence voters by appealing to certain castes in their bids for public office. This led to the formation of "vote banks" wherein members of certain castes provide perks in return for partisan support. These things not only perpetuate social inequality along caste lines, but they also obscure more general national objectives. The caste system is one of several factors that make India's democracy difficult to implement. Discrimination and favouritism based on caste pose a danger to democratic goals of achieving justice and equality for everyone. The democratic ideal of equality is fundamentally at odds with the caste system. The already complex situation is being further compounded by the fact that members of lower castes who have traditionally been disadvantaged are now using their caste identity to advance politically and get advantages. Even though caste is still a big factor in politics, this strategy aids lower-caste groups in resisting the tyranny of higher-caste groups. As a result, India's caste-based politics makes the nation less united. It prevents us from achieving a more equitable society that places more importance on people's skills and character than on their caste. The tension between modern democratic principles and ancient caste hierarchies is important to modern Indian politics and culture.

Objective

1. To scrutinize the influence of caste on the political landscape in India.
2. To explore the constitutional frameworks intended for fostering a society devoid of caste barriers.
3. To formulate and present constructive proposals.

Caste Factor In Political Socialization And Leadership Recruitment

In India, a person's caste, which is decided automatically at birth, plays a vital influence in determining their political affiliations and the possibilities they have to take on leadership roles. It is possible for a person to be classified as belonging to a Scheduled Caste or a higher caste, and this classification has an impact on the political views, attitudes, and engagement of the individual. Values and interests that are associated with a certain caste have a significant impact on the process of political socialisation, which in turn shapes the political perspective and behaviour of a person. When it comes to leadership responsibilities, caste solidarity often becomes an important element, particularly in regions like Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh that have a strong inclination toward caste awareness. In the state of Andhra

Pradesh, for example, Reddys, Kammas, and Velamas are often found in positions of authority responsibilities.

In addition, the influence of caste may be seen in the establishment of political parties throughout history. A great number of political parties in India are created on the basis of caste, with the intention of representing and protecting the interests of certain caste groups. In particular, this is the case with regard to regional parties. By way of illustration, the DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu are predominantly appealing to populations who are not Brahmin. The Jat vs non-Jat conflicts in Punjab have a huge impact on the Akali Dal, which is a political party. There is a utilisation of caste affiliations by political parties across the political spectrum in order to obtain electoral support. Those who belong to the Scheduled Castes are the focus of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is well-liked by members of the Hindu caste community and the trade community.

One may find several caste-based pressure groups in India alongside the country's many political parties. These groups influence government policymaking in order to further the interests of their respective castes. Arya Samaj Sabha, the Sanatan Dharam Sabha, and the Scheduled Caste Federation are just a few examples of such organisations that work to protect certain communities' rights.

Caste And Nomination Of Candidates

The caste system has a great amount of influence over electoral politics in India. One of the most important factors that political parties take into account when selecting candidates for different seats is the castes of both voters and politicians. Using this strategy, candidates often succeed in gaining support among members of their own caste. As an example, political parties often choose Muslim candidates for districts in which Muslims comprise a significant proportion of the population. On the other hand, Jat politicians have a tendency to enjoy more popularity in regions where Jats constitute the majority of the population. The Congress, the Janata Dal, the CPI, and the CPM are examples of secular parties that take caste dynamics into consideration when selecting candidates. This strategy is not limited to parties that are founded on caste or regional politics. It is important to note that this practise brings to light the pervasive influence that caste has on the voting procedures in India, regardless of the political ideas or affiliations of the individual.

Caste and voting behaviour:

Candidates in Indian elections often appeal to voters' awareness of caste in order to get their support. According to what N.D. Palmer has told me, political initiatives often rely on wooing caste groups to get support in any situation. As a major factor in candidate selection and platform development, caste is a crucial concern.

In this context, the importance of caste is greater than that of any other political association when it comes to voting. Many political politicians use expressions such as "jat ki beti jat ko, jat ki vote jat ko" (which translates to "a Jat's daughter for a Jat, a Jat's vote for a Jat") to appeal to the caste identities of voters while also soliciting their support. Listeners to these phrases often vote for candidates from the same social class as themselves. This incident highlights the role of caste in influencing voting behaviour and policymaking in India.

In Indian politics, caste functions as both a divisive and a unifying force.

In the realm of Indian politics, caste has the ability to both divide and bring people together. As a consequence of this, a number of separate interest groups have developed on the political landscape in India, each of which is competing for a share of the pie. As an example of how caste may be a factor that divides people, consider the fact that this form of competition can lead to the emergence of unpleasant power disputes. On the other hand, within certain caste groups, it often serves as a unifying force, urging members to remain together. When individuals in rural India live in close proximity to one another, often within a radius of only 15 or 20 kilometres, caste becomes an immensely strong element that brings people together. A great number of individuals who have spent their whole lives in rural regions have been raised with caste systems serving as their primary (or only) social organisation. It's possible that this familiarity will help strengthen the cohesion of the group. In contrast, the existence of distinct caste groups may result in the development of factionalism, as members of different castes compete with one another for power and status. In both rural and political life, factionalism is a persistent phenomenon that can be seen everywhere from local administration to national representation.

Caste And Organization Of Government

Caste is an enduring part of Indian society and has a substantial impact in many areas, including the decision-making process. This concept influenced the reorganisation of governments because it aims to ensure that no one caste group may amass too much power in any one place.

Even state governments' policymaking and decision-making are impacted by the caste system. Political parties, especially those in power, often create policies that pander to the interests of important caste groups in an attempt to secure the support of those caste groups. As an instance, the Congress party has, for a considerable amount of time, acknowledged the significance of the Scheduled Castes as a unit of voters and has endeavoured to establish relationships with them. At the regional level, a pattern that is similar to this one arises, in which influential political people may prioritise the requirements of certain caste groups above their own requirements.

In the Indian Constitution, the end aim of an unified electorate and a political system that is free of castes is idealised; however, in practise, this is seldom the case. There are still a great number of aspects of politics in which the caste system plays a very important role. People's voting patterns, the ways in which they participate in political activities, the organisational structures of political parties, and even the choices that the government takes are all influenced by this factor. The enduring effects of caste shed light on how challenging it is for India to transition towards a democratic system that is more egalitarian and welcoming to citizens of all backgrounds.

Caste Factor And Local Governments:

Local self-governance systems in India, such as Panchayati Raj, are known to be influenced by caste. In rural areas, caste-based factionalism makes the establishment and maintenance of Panchayati Raj governments infamously difficult. Caste is a potent organising mechanism in rural India. It has a crucial role in facilitating communication among community members, which in turn affects their involvement and representation in local government. Additionally, caste has a significant role in selecting and developing leaders within these organisations. In many societies, caste relations play a role in choosing leaders, which impacts the kind and effectiveness of governance. In addition, caste acts as a go-between when it comes to rural areas' political and electoral systems. Its effect on voters' preferences and party identification is a common factor influencing the outcome of local elections. Rural politics is deeply influenced by caste, which means that choices and policies may be shaped to benefit caste interests rather than community needs.

As a result of extreme power struggles fueled by entrenched social stratification, caste-based violence has recently emerged as a troubling trend in India's political landscape. Disputes arising from caste dynamics are not uncommon in rural areas, where this is prevalent.

Caste violence has been an ongoing problem in rural and even some urban parts of states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Anger and even violence might break out when members of the intermediate or upper castes try to demonstrate their superiority over those of the lower castes. As a reflection of the persistent power struggles and dynamics in Indian culture, those higher in the caste hierarchy terrorise those lower in the hierarchy. There have been attempts to address these concerns, but caste-based violence is still a hallmark of rural politics in India. It shows the long-standing socioeconomic problems that still affect rural and, more and more, urban India, and it presents a serious threat to social peace and the efficiency of democratic processes.

The Demand For Reservation By Other Communities:

While the Indian Constitution's reservation system was meant to ensure that Scheduled Caste members have equal opportunities, it has, on several occasions, backfired. There is mounting pressure on the government to broaden these laws since non-scheduled castes have now started asking reservations. The political and social divide in India has become even more pronounced as a result.

Within the public administration bureaucracy, caste plays a significant role. The custom of taking officials' caste ties into account while deciding on their posting, transfer, or employment is an example of how caste is still prevalent in administrative operations.

The appointment of federal and state ministerial council members is also influenced by caste. Cabinets should be formed by prime ministers and chief ministers with members from diverse castes, according to many. One way members of oppressed groups might influence lawmakers is by calling for a greater representation of their group in elected positions. This dynamic demonstrates how executive organisations are formed and how choices made at the highest levels may be impacted by caste issues.

Caste and Indian Constitution:

1. **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976:** This law was enacted with the intention of eliminating discrimination based on religion and caste. It aspires to protect the civil rights of individuals, particularly those from lower castes, by banning all kinds of discrimination and untouchability. The criminalization of untouchability is part of a larger attempt to eradicate caste-based inequities and advance social justice.
2. **Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC & ST) Act, 1989:** This law is aimed at the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The widespread bigotry and brutality toward these individuals prompted its passage with the intention of punishing and limiting such acts. By outlining severe penalties for certain transgressions, the law seeks to ensure that victims of caste-based violence and abuse get justice.

Fundamental Rights – First Right is the Right to Equality:

A casteless society may be established thanks to certain crucial provisions of the Indian constitution that prohibit discrimination and encourage equality. The social and legal foundations outlined in these sections are essential for dismantling the ancient caste system and the behaviours that accompanied it. The following things are relevant:

1. **Article 14 – Equality before the Law:** This article ensures that all citizens of India are treated equitably and have equal rights. By laying the groundwork for the concept of legal equality, it bans all forms of state discrimination.
2. **Article 15 – Prohibition of Discrimination on the Basis of Religion, Race, Caste, Gender, and Colour:** Discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender, or country of birth is expressly prohibited in this article. It seeks to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in society and establishes a foundation for social equality.
3. **Article 16 – Equal Opportunities in Public Employment:** In terms of government jobs, this clause guarantees equal opportunity. It outlaws in the workplace any kind of discrimination based on an individual's religion, race, caste, sex, descent, national origin, or residential status.
4. **Article 17 – Abolition of Untouchability:** Provision 17 dismantles "untouchability" and outlaws its practise in any form; it is perhaps the most important article for abolishing caste-based discrimination. Any kind of discrimination based on untouchability is illegal and subject to punishment.
5. **Article 18 – Abolition of Titles:** The state is forbidden from bestowing any titles under this provision. Part of the larger goal of guaranteeing equality among all people, it seeks to eliminate social divisions.

Directive Principles of State Policy

Particularly for underprivileged groups, the Indian Constitution has many provisions meant to promote social justice and lessen inequality. An crucial component of the legislative system aiming to promote a more egalitarian society is these articles:

1. **Article 38:** It requires the government to work for the common good by reducing economic, social, and political inequality and creating a more equitable distribution of resources.
2. **Article 46:** This article mandates that the government should prioritise the economic and educational well-being of marginalised groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Additionally, it demands that these communities be protected from prejudice and exploitation of any kind.
3. **Article 330:** It mandates that some seats in India's lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha, be reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.
4. **Article 332:** The State Legislative Assemblies are required to set aside seats for SCs and STs, as outlined in this article and Article 330.

There are a number of options for addressing caste's influence in politics and society:

1. **Economic Basis for Reservation:** To ensure that all economically disadvantaged groups of society benefit, reservation criteria should be based on economic condition rather than caste.

2. **Neutral Role of Media:** Instead of reinforcing prejudices and stereotypical ideas based on caste, the media should report the news objectively.
3. **Elimination of Caste-based Violence:** In order to prevent politics based on caste, political parties whose primary operation is based on caste should not be recognised.
4. **Withdraw Recognition of Caste-based Political Parties:** To prevent caste-based politics, political parties that mostly function according to caste should not be recognised.
5. **Rise Above Caste in Politics:** Efforts should be made by politicians to formulate policies and tactics that do not take caste into account.
6. **Secular Education System:** It is time for a change in the educational system that prioritises secular and inclusive values.
7. **Community Living in Schools:** Community dinners are one way that schools may promote communal life and bring students of all castes together.
8. **Revision of School Textbooks:** Rather of presenting the caste system as an inherent social order, educational materials should emphasise that it is a product of human ingenuity.
9. **Promotion of Inter-Caste Marriages:** Perhaps a more tolerant society might be possible in the future if there was an incentive system that encouraged marriages between people of various castes.

Conclusion

To sum up, caste and politics in India are deeply intertwined and impact each other in significant ways. As a fundamental part of Indian culture, caste influences politics at many levels of the country. The fundamental values of freedom, equality, and justice are in conflict with the very unequal caste system in India, which is founded on hereditary rank and is therefore a major obstacle to the country's democracy.

Caste and other ethnic considerations, rather than beliefs, tend to separate political parties in India. Both the campaigns for violent politics and the violence itself stem from disputes about caste. This implies that numerous caste groups are politically engaged in pursuit of their own objectives, and that caste is an ever-present component in political discussions.

More and more people want to see their voices heard, and democracies can help marginalised groups find new leaders. Both the people's fundamental needs and the political leaders' pursuit of democracy must be addressed.

American political scientists I. Rudolf and S.H. Rudolf claim in their book "Modernity of Tradition" that caste politics in India has contributed to reduced inequality and greater political non-discrimination. But if we want to build a nation that endures, it is imperative that our children learn to be kind to one another in the classroom.

As a last point, the government should make sure that fair and equitable political practises and procedures benefit all communities, regions, and organisations. It is only through such concerted action that India may attain a society that is really democratic and egalitarian.

References

1. Béteille, A. (1991). *Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Perspective*. Athlone Press.
2. Chandra, K. (2004). *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Deshpande, S. (2003). *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*. Penguin Books.
4. D'Souza, O. (1999). *Caste and Political Power: Emerging Trends*. Rupa & Co.
5. Engineer, A. A. (1995). *Caste and Communal Violence in India*. Manohar Publishers.
6. Frankel, F. R., & Rao, M. S. A. (1989). *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*. Oxford University Press.
7. Hasan, Z. (2009). *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities, and Affirmative Action*. Oxford University Press.
8. Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*. Columbia University Press.
9. Kothari, R. (1970). *Caste in Indian Politics*. Orient Blackswan.
10. Kumar, A. (2002). *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. Wiley-Blackwell.
11. Mendelsohn, O., & Vicziany, M. (1998). *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*. Cambridge University Press.
12. Pai, S. (2002). *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*. Sage Publications.
13. Rudolph, L. I., & Rudolph, S. H. (1987). *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*. University of Chicago Press.
14. Shah, G. (2002). *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*. Permanent Black.
15. Varshney, A. (2000). *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press.