



CASTE POLITICS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Socially and culturally India is highly diversified country. In India caste is an important component of the social system and cast has made its special place in the Indian Political system also and both interact with one another at various levels. In other words we can say that caste has also become very much important part of Indian political system and due to caste considerations it took deep roots into the Indian Political system.

Caste has been one of the basic features of the Indian society. It exercised profound influence on the Political life of the country. The Britishers fully exploited the caste system to keep the Indians divided and exploited sectional loyalties based on caste to promote their own interests. In view of the harm done by the caste system the early governments wants to check this evil in the post independence period. For this purpose it incorporated in the constitution the ideals of justice equality liberty and Fraternity. Therefore, to understand a particular political system we need to understand the interaction among social, Political and economic factors and caste play an important role in Indian Politics.

Meaning of Caste: The term caste has been derived from the Portuguese term Casta meaning race and according to famous author E. Blunt, "A Caste is an endogamous group or collection of endogamous groups bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary imposing on its members certain restrictions in matter of social intercourse either following a common traditional occupation of claiming a common origin and generally regarded as forming a single homogeneous community". Anderson and Parker describes Caste as, "Caste is that extreme form of social class organization in which the position of the individual status hierarchy is determined by descent and birth." The introduction of the democratic system and Universal adult franchise imparted new vigour to the Caste in India. As the democratic government rested on Popular votes the different Political parties openly indulged in vote manipulation to get into power, so many caste based Political Parties which try to promote and protect the interest of particular caste like AIADMK AND DMK parties in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry are committed to the protection of the interests of non-brahmins. The two political parties have their influence only in South Indian states. Today, the Bahujan Samaj Party is committed to the protection of the interest of Dalits, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other suppressed classes.

The validity of the caste factor in politics is further demonstrated by the style of the functioning of the various political parties while selecting candidate for elections from different constituencies, the Political parties keep in mind the caste of the candidate and the caste of the voters in that particulars constituency and only that person is nominated whose caste go with the caste of the majority of the voters in that constituency. As a result of this he is sure to get the votes of voters of his caste. According to Morris Jones, " Behind the formal list of party candidates nominated for the contest, there is probably an inside story of careful calculations in term of caste appeal".

While formulating Campaign strategies and while manipulating votes they make a liberal use of the Caste factor. The candidates ask for vote in the name of Caste and they raise the caste based slogans like 'Jat



Ki beti Jat Ko, Jat Ki Vote Jat Ko' and such slogans do have effect on the voters and they get influenced to cast their votes in favour of the candidate belonging to their caste.

Even while formulating the ministries the cast considerations invariably creep in. This confirms the words of Prof. Rudolphs "Within the new context of Political democracy caste remains a central elements of India's society even while adapting itself to the values and methods of democratic politics. Indeed, it has become one of the Chief means by which the Indian mass has been attached to the process of democratic politics" and Prof. Srinivas also says that caste is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including most vocals in condemning it, that it is everywhere the unit of social action.

The framers of the constitution were aware of the problem of different castes so, while making constitution they made special provisions in the constitution for the protection of the interests of Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes etc. Though the purpose of reservation was to uplift the people belonging to lower castes, but today it has taken the form of a political weapon and every political party tries to use it for the promotion of its political interests and to consolidate their vote bank.

In India, the caste has also influenced the policy making by the government. Through a judgment delivered on April 10,2008, the Supreme Court has upheld the validity of the decision of the government by which 27% seats were reserved for OBCs in the educational institutions of higher learning. But the Supreme Court has kept the creamy layer among OBCs out of the purview of this benefit. With the purpose to decrease the effect of this judgment of the supreme Court, the U.P.A. Government had taken the decision to raise the upper limit of 'creamy layer' from the annual income of Rs. 2.5 lakh per year to Rs. 4.5 lakh per year so that the rich people belonging to OBCs could also get the benefit . So that in future elections this class give political benefit to that party.

Keeping in mind the importance of caste factor in India on May 9, 2011 the union Cabinet gave approval to Conduct Caste based Census. The political parties like Rashtriya Janta Dal. Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj party were putting pressure on the government to conduct caste based census. The government is of the view that caste base census will help assess the social, economic and educational status of the people belonging to different castes and to make policies accordingly. The government will come to know that how many people of a particular caste were living below poverty line and what type of policies were needed to bring change in their living conditions. The government will also be able to know that how many people have benefitted from the various welfare schemes enforced by the government from time to time Prof. Morris Jones has discovered that " Politics is more important to castes and castes are more important to politics than before". He analysis that the top leaders may proclaim the goal of casteless society, but "the newly enfranchised rural masses know only the language of traditional politics which so largely turn about caste..... Behind the formal list of party candidates nominated for the contests, there is probably an inside story of careful calculation in terms of caste appeal".

At the end I feel that caste plays a significant role in Indian Politics. Without going into the depth regarding the good or the bad effects of caste on politics in India, it can be said that the introduction of representative democracy based on the Principal of one man one vote has drawn Caste into web of electoral politics. The various caste groups generally assert their right to participate in elections and contest for powers, and have thus given new dimensions to Indian Politics.



Conclusion

At the end we come to the conclusion that there is a close interaction between caste and politics in India and both influence each other, as we know that social system, Economic system and Political system are closely related to one another and also influence each other. The fact is that caste is an important component of the Social as well political system.

References

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