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## Caste in Indian Politics

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### **Abstract:**

*[Caste is playing vital role in Indian politics. It is known to all that Indian society is a caste ridden society. Some of the scholars felt that after independence the caste will gradually disappear and it will have no impact on Indian political system. Because caste has no place in the constitution of India. Prof. Ghanashyam Shah in his book 'Caste and Democratic Politics in India' rightly remarked, "The Indian constitution seeks to prevent the perpetuation of caste and build a casteless social system. But this has not happened. Therefore no understanding of Indian politics is possible without a thorough understanding of the complexities of caste" it is clear from the above statement that caste is playing a significant role in determining the processes of political socialization, political mobilization and institutionalization within the frame work of modern democracy. The dynamics of caste is at the root of the complexity of Indian politics in its functioning. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze, evaluate and critically examine the factors responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics.]*

**Keywords:** Caste, Indian Politics, Democracy, Institutionalization, Caste Consciousness, Complexity

### **1. Introduction**

Caste as a social institution has been in existence in India since ancient times. It is the basis for social hierarchies, based on purity – impurity considerations. Many scholarly works led by M. N. Srinivas and Andre Beteille have analyzed the concept and socio-economic, political significance and role of caste in our society and its implications for future growth and development. Rajvir Sharma in his article "Social conflict and social assimilation: Constitution, Politics and Administration in India" has rightly observed that "Caste consciousness, moreover, is not merely a rural phenomenon backed by illiterate backward people over there but it is equally entrenched in the minds of the progressives as well as the most educated urban class". This article seeks to focus on factors responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics.

### **2. The Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study are as follows.

- To examine the factors responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics.
- To examine caste influence on Indian politics.
- To evaluate the role of caste in Indian politics.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper is descriptive in nature. It is mainly based on secondary data and is largely collected from different sources like books, journals, articles and periodicals. In addition to all these the articles and editorials written in the leading news papers have been referred.

### **4. Analysis and Findings**

Before we discuss the factors responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics it is essential for us to know the meaning of caste. The word caste has different meanings to different people in different contexts. There is no unanimity among scholars about the definition of caste. According to Cooley, "When a class is somewhat hereditary we call it caste." In the words of Maciver, "When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any of change in it, then the class takes the extreme form of caste." According to G.S. Ghurye, "Castes are small and complete social worlds in themselves, marked off definitely from one another, though subsisting within the larger society. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar says, "The root of untouchability is the caste system, the root of the caste system is religion attached to varna and ashram, the root of varnashrama is Brahminical religion, and the root of the Brahminical religion is authoritarianism or political power." In the words of Prof. M.N. Srinivas, "The elections of 1957 may be said to have awakened the Indian intelligentsia as to actual considerations which influenced voting. It also led to the widespread consideration of exploitation of caste links for election purpose. Election to panchayats and municipalities held in subsequent years has shown conclusively that caste considerations are potent". During the 1990's Indian democracy witnessed an

upurge in the political participation of lower castes and communities and emergence of political leaders from humble social backgrounds who present themselves as promoters of social justice for under privileged communities.

The above two statements clearly indicate that caste has influenced election and selection of candidates both at state level and national level. In Karnataka Lingayats and Vokkaliga's influence political life of the state. Patidars and Baniyas influence political life of the Gujarat state. In Kerala Nayar and Izavas decide political life of the state. In Orissa Bhumiya, Kayastha and Rajputs influence political life of the state. In Andhra Pradesh Kammas and Reddys are two dominant castes. They decide political life of the state. In Bihar there are four dominant castes namely the Brahmins, the Rajputs, Kshatriyas and the Adivasis. These four castes influence political life of the state.

Now the fundamental question arises here is what are the factors responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics? There are many factors responsible for this. Some of them are discussed under the following heads.

The first and foremost important factor responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics is establishment of Panchayat Raj Institutions. In these days panchayats have been given more powers and authority. It is quite natural that people belonging to different castes try to have maximum control over panchayats. So caste plays decisive role in local elections.

Another factor responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics is presence of huge rural electorates. The rural electorates are not broad in their outlook. They always exercise their franchise on caste basis. While exercising their vote, they take caste of the candidate into consideration. This tendency of exercising vote on caste basis still persists in Indian politics.

The third important factor is some castes particularly lower castes are not ready to give up their privileges. These castes are enjoying certain privileges in the form of reservation of seats in educational institutions, services and elected bodies. These castes always try to strengthen their caste. This is visible particularly at the time elections.

Extension of adult franchise is another important factor responsible for strengthening caste in Indian politics. Under this system, every adult who has attained age of 18 years or above has right to vote. It means every adult in every Caste has a right to vote. So people belonging to different castes favor to vote candidates of their own caste. Extension of adult franchise is another reason for strengthening caste in Indian politics.

Vote bank politics is the major reason for strengthening caste in Indian politics. K. C. Suri in his article rightly pointed out that, "The political leaders are trying to appease the depressed and backward castes for their selfish interest. Indira Gandhi and those in power during her time evolved a strategy of winning over the SCs and BCs. Political leadership in the states extended reservations to the BCs keeping in view a similar political strategy. During Hegde's government in Karnataka an ad hoc scheme of reservations was evolved whereby 92 percent of the total population was treated backward and fitted into the reservation framework. V. P. Singh's decision to implement job reservations for the BCs was seen as a master stroke to meet the challenge posed to his leadership within the party by Devi Lal and outside by Kanshi Ram". Every political party tries to become champion of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and thereby they try to keep caste factor alive in Indian politics.

## 5. Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to one aspect of the subject i.e. Caste in Indian Politics. It is entirely based on the secondary data i.e. books, journals, periodicals, News papers etc this constitutes a major constraint of the study as the journals, periodicals are sometimes subject to manipulations and information available in them is in historical nature.

## 6. Conclusion

As long as political parties try to make vote bank on caste basis so long as caste persist in Indian politics. This should be stopped. Political parties should ask vote not on caste basis but on the basis of development work. People also vote not taking caste of the candidate into consideration but integrity, honesty and work culture of the candidate. If this becomes reality caste will automatically disappear from Indian politics.

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