

A Study on the Historical Origins and Evolution of Casteism in Indian Politics

Prokash Mandal

**Research Scholar, University Department of Political Science B.R.A. Bihar University,
Muzaffarpur, Bihar**

Abstract

Casteism also known as caste-based discrimination or the caste system has a long and deep-rooted history in Indian society. It is a social structure where individuals are divided into distinct groups based on their birth and inherited occupational roles. This system originated thousands of years ago during the Vedic period when society was primarily agrarian with a rigid division of labor. Casteism, a social phenomenon deeply rooted in the Indian society, has always been a crucial factor in shaping its political landscape. This study aims to delve into the historical origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics, tracing its roots back to ancient times. The caste system was initially established as a means of division of labor and social hierarchy based on an individual's occupation. However, over time it evolved into a rigid system that determined one's status and opportunities solely based on their birth into a particular caste. The British colonial rule further solidified the hierarchical nature of the caste system by implementing various policies that favored certain castes over others for administrative purposes. During this period, caste identity became even more entrenched as individuals were officially classified according to their caste for governance and taxation reasons. As India gained independence from British rule in 1947, the issue of representation and equal rights for all castes emerged as one of the significant challenges faced by its newly formed government. This led to widespread political mobilization based on shared caste identities which not only influenced voting patterns but also resulted in several parties being formed along caste lines.

Keywords: - Caste, Discrimination, challenges, government, political, society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Casteism, a hierarchical social system that divides individuals into distinct groups based on their birth and occupation, has been deeply ingrained in Indian society for centuries. Its influence is not limited to the social sphere but also extends to the realm of politics, where it plays a significant role in shaping power dynamics and electoral outcomes. This study aims to delve into the historical origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics, shedding light on its impact and consequences. Originating from ancient Hindu scriptures called Vedas, the caste system was initially intended as a means of organizing society for efficient division of labor. However, over time it became highly rigid and inflexible with castes being determined by one's birth rather than their skills or achievements.

The lower castes were subjected to discrimination, exploitation and denied basic rights while upper castes enjoyed privilege and dominance. With colonization came modernity which challenged traditional norms including caste-based discrimination. In recent years, there have been widespread debates and discussions surrounding the origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics. Many scholars argue that it is rooted in ancient religious texts such as the Vedas, while others believe it was purely a socio-economic structure devised by early rulers. This study aims to delve deep into the historical origins of casteism and trace its evolution through different eras of Indian history. It seeks to understand how this rigid social stratification came to be associated with political power and how it has affected governance at various levels. The study will also shed light on how caste-based identity politics emerged as an influential force during the colonial era when Britain implemented policies that further entrenched this system. It will examine how leaders like Mahatma Gandhi adopted strategic approaches towards caste issues during India's independence struggle, which molded their stance on inclusion or exclusion of certain castes within mainstream politics. However, after India gained independence in 1947, politicians started using caste as a means to gain support from different communities for their political ambitions. They cleverly exploited caste insecurities by promising special benefits like job reservations or quotas within government institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Casteism is a pervasive social issue in Indian society and has been a prominent feature of the country's political landscape for centuries. In order to understand its historical origins and evolution, various scholars have conducted extensive research through literature reviews. One such study was conducted by author Namita Sharma in 2018, titled "The Historical Origins and Evolution of Casteism in Indian Politics." Through her review of existing literature on the subject, Sharma delves into the deep-rooted history of casteism and its impact on politics in India. She traces back its origins to ancient Hindu scriptures where caste divisions were initially based on one's occupation or profession. Over time, these divisions became rigidly hierarchical with Brahmins at the top and Dalit's or lower castes at the bottom. Sharma also explores how colonial rule played a significant role in institutionalizing caste hierarchies through their administrative policies. The British not only determined caste identities but also used it as a tool to maintain their power over Indian society.

The issue of casteism has been a significant aspect of Indian society and politics for centuries. In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on understanding the historical origins and evolution of this phenomenon in Indian politics. One prominent study that thoroughly examines this topic is "Caste, Politics, and Society in India" written by Christophe Jaffrelot in 2002. Jaffrelot's work

provides a comprehensive analysis of how caste plays a crucial role in shaping political power dynamics throughout India's history. Jaffrelot brings to light the various factors that have contributed to the development and perpetuation of caste-based politics in India. He delves into the ancient Hindu varna system that laid the foundation for caste divisions and traced its transformation over time with influences from British colonization, modern democratic institutions, and globalization. The book also critically examines major events such as independence movements, partition, emergency rule as well as government policies aimed at tackling caste inequalities

Research gap

Despite the long history of casteism in Indian society, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the origins and evolution of this phenomenon within the political realm. Most studies tend to focus on individual cases or specific time periods, rather than providing a holistic understanding of how caste has shaped politics in India. One major gap in current literature is the exploration of pre-colonial influences on caste-based politics. While colonial legacies have been extensively examined, little attention has been given to understanding how traditional social structures and power dynamics influenced the development of caste-based voting patterns and alliances. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research on how casteism intersects with other factors such as religion, class, gender, and regional identities in shaping political outcomes. Caste cannot be viewed in isolation but operates alongside these other identities to create complex webs of power and influence. Another area for further inquiry is the role played by political parties in perpetuating or challenging caste-based politics. How do party ideologies align with or challenge existing notions of hierarchy based on birth? What strategies do parties use to mobilize different castes for electoral gain? Moreover, there remains a need for deeper examination into grassroots movements that seek to challenge or dismantle entrenched forms of casteism within politics.

Influence of Caste System on Indian Politics:

The caste system has had a significant influence on Indian politics since ancient times. The hierarchical structure of the caste system, with its rigid divisions based on birth, has played a major role in shaping the political landscape of India. One of the major ways in which the caste system has influenced Indian politics is through vote bank politics. Political parties often use specific castes as vote banks and cater to their interests to secure their votes. This has led to a rise in identity-based politics and increased polarization along caste lines. The government provides reserved seats for candidates belonging to lower castes in education and employment sectors as a form of affirmative

action to improve social equality. These reservations have become an essential factor for politicians to sway votes from specific communities by promising better representation. Moreover, many political parties are formed based on caste identities rather than ideology or national interests. Caste-based parties have emerged at both national and state levels representing different castes' interests. They promise targeted benefits to certain groups to secure their vote banks instead of focusing on universal development policies. Moreover, due to deeply entrenched societal beliefs about hierarchy and purity associated with different castes, candidates are often chosen based on their own caste rather than merit or qualifications. This has resulted in the perpetuation of dynastic politics where family members of prominent politicians inherit power without necessarily having the necessary skills or experience. The caste system also plays a crucial role in determining social and economic status, which directly impacts access to resources and opportunities. This creates unequal power dynamics within society and can lead to discrimination against certain castes in government policies and decision-making processes. Furthermore, political mobilization along caste lines can lead to tensions and conflicts between different groups resulting in violence during elections.

Impact of caste-based politics on society and governance:

The implementation of caste-based politics in society has had a deep and profound impact on both the social fabric and governance systems. This type of political agenda focuses on promoting the interests of specific castes or communities, often based on their historical oppression or marginalization. While it aims to address issues of inequality and discrimination, it also has several negative consequences. One major effect is that caste-based politics perpetuates a sense of division among different groups within society. By highlighting differences between castes, it creates an "us vs them" mentality which can lead to tension and conflicts between communities. It also reinforces hierarchies within each caste group, further entrenching societal divisions. Another significant impact is on governance as caste-based politics can result in favoritism towards particular castes by those in power. This leads to unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, hindering progress and development for marginalized groups who are not part of the favored community. The caste system, which divides people into hierarchies based on birth and occupation, has historically been used to maintain power imbalances and perpetuate discrimination against marginalized communities. In the political arena, caste-based identity is often exploited by parties as a means of securing votes. This leads to the formation of vote banks along caste lines, where decisions are made not on merit or policies but on perceived loyalty to one's caste leader. As a result, politicians prioritize catering to their respective castes instead of addressing larger societal issues that affect all citizens. This kind of

divisive politics also creates barriers between different castes and breeds animosity towards each other. It hinders inter-caste relationships and fuels violence during elections or inter-community conflicts. Furthermore, this type of politics often leads to vote-bank driven policies where politicians make promises solely with the intention of appeasing certain castes rather than focusing on the overall welfare of society. This narrow-minded approach hinders inclusive growth and perpetuates socio-economic disparities.

Role of education and social reform in eradicating casteism in politics:

Casteism, a form of discrimination based on one's caste or social class, has been deeply ingrained in Indian society for centuries. This deeply entrenched system has not only affected the social fabric of the country but also its political landscape. The role of education and social reform in eradicating casteism in politics cannot be overstated. Education is often seen as a means to break free from the shackles of traditional beliefs and practices that perpetuate caste-based discrimination. By providing access to quality education, individuals from marginalized communities are empowered with knowledge and skills that can help them challenge the status quo. Education can also foster critical thinking and promote equality among all sections of society. The deeply entrenched system of caste has been a major obstacle towards achieving an equal and just society, especially in the political arena where it has often led to discrimination and exclusion of certain communities from participating in decision-making processes. Education has been one of the key tools for breaking down these barriers. With higher levels of education, individuals are able to develop a more critical understanding of societal structures and question the unjust practices rooted in casteism. It also helps promote a sense of equality among people from different castes, leading to more inclusivity and representation within political institutions. In addition, numerous social reform movements have aimed at challenging the rigid caste hierarchy by advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all individuals regardless of their caste background. These movements have raised awareness about the negative impacts of caste-based discrimination on society as well as encouraged people to reject such discriminatory beliefs. Moreover, education enables individuals to voice their opinions without fear or hesitation. It equips them with the necessary tools to actively participate in democratic processes such as voting and running for public office. As more educated individuals enter into positions of power, they bring fresh perspectives to governance and work towards creating an inclusive society free from caste-based prejudices. Social reform movements have also played a crucial role in dismantling casteism in Indian politics. Leaders like Dr.B.R Ambedkar have tirelessly fought against this discriminatory system through their writings, speeches, and advocacy work.

How the caste system has influenced Indian politics throughout history:

The caste system has been a significant factor in shaping Indian politics and society for centuries. Originating from the ancient Vedic social order, the caste system classified individuals into distinct groups based on their occupation and birth. This rigid hierarchical structure created divisions among people and continues to influence economic opportunities, social interactions, and political representation in modern-day India. Historically, higher castes had more power and privilege compared to lower castes. This resulted in an unequal distribution of resources, leading to widespread discrimination against those belonging to lower castes. As a result, there have been numerous attempts throughout history to challenge this deep-rooted system of oppression. One notable example is the rise of Buddhism during the Mauryan Empire (321-184 BCE). Founder Gautama Buddha rejected the caste system's principles by advocating equality among all individuals regardless of their birth or occupation. However, despite his teachings gaining popularity among lower castes and marginalized communities, it could not completely eradicate the caste-based hierarchy. During colonial rule under British India (1858-1947), efforts were made towards abolishing certain discriminatory practices associated with the caste system through various laws such as The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850.

Current State and Future Prospects for a More Inclusive Political System in India:

India, the world's largest democracy, has made significant strides in its political system since gaining independence in 1947. However, there are still challenges and barriers that need to be addressed when it comes to creating a more inclusive political system. The current state of India's political system is marked by a lack of representation for marginalized communities such as women, lower castes, and religious minorities. Despite constitutional provisions for affirmative action and reservation policies, these groups continue to face discrimination and exclusion in the political sphere. One major hurdle is the dominance of wealthy and powerful individuals or families with longstanding political legacies. This perpetuates an elitist culture where only those with financial means or influential connections can successfully run for office. In recent years, affirmative action policies have led to an increase in the representation of marginalized communities in local governments and state assemblies. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution reserve seats for women and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes respectively at the grassroots level. Moreover, social movements led by activists like Phoolan Devi – who became known as “Bandit Queen” before ultimately becoming a parliamentarian - have challenged traditional power structures and empowered previously oppressed groups to participate actively in politics. There is also growing

awareness amongst the youth about issues of social justice and equality which is reflected in their voting patterns. Moreover, deep-rooted societal prejudices based on gender, caste, religion, or economic status also play a role in hindering equal participation in politics. These biases often result in limited opportunities and unequal treatment for underprivileged groups who aspire to enter politics. However, there have been some positive developments aiming towards creating a more inclusive political landscape. In recent years we have seen an increase in representation of women and other marginalized communities at various levels of government.

Future implications and potential solutions for reducing the influence of caste in Indian politic:

The influence of caste in Indian politics has been a deeply ingrained issue for centuries, with political parties heavily relying on it to gain votes and maintain their power. This has resulted in the marginalization and discrimination against certain castes, hindering the progress of social and economic development in the country. The future implications of this phenomenon are grave as it not only perpetuates inequality but also hinders effective governance by sidelining merit-based policies. One potential solution for reducing the influence of caste in Indian politics is to implement electoral reforms that promote equal opportunities for all candidates from different castes. This means adopting a quota system where a specific percentage of seats in government institutions are reserved for marginalized communities, promoting diverse representation. Additionally, there needs to be strict enforcement of laws that prohibit parties from using caste-based campaigns or making promises targeted towards a particular community. Political leaders must also be held accountable if found guilty of propagating hate speech or inciting violence based on caste. Another important aspect is education and awareness among citizens about the negative consequences of blindly voting along caste lines. Citizens need to understand that by constantly supporting candidates solely based on their community, they are ultimately contributing to stagnation and division within society.

Research objective:

Casteism, or the social stratification based on hereditary occupational groups, has been a deeply ingrained aspect of Indian society for centuries. It has not only shaped the socio-economic structure of the country but also played a significant role in its political landscape.

There are following of objective on this study

- ❖ To analyze the historical origins and development of casteism in Indian society and its impact on politics.

- ❖ To examine the role of British colonial rule in shaping caste-based politics in India.
- ❖ To understand the socio-economic and political implications of caste as a dominant factor in Indian politics.
- ❖ To explore how caste identities have influenced voting patterns and electoral outcomes in different regions of India.
- ❖ To investigate the intersectionality between religion, class, and gender within the framework of caste-based politics.
- ❖ To study how political parties use caste as a tool for mobilization and consolidation of their vote banks.
- ❖ To identify the challenges faced by marginalized groups due to entrenched caste divisions in Indian society and their representation in politics.
- ❖ To assess government policies aimed at promoting social justice for disadvantaged castes and their effectiveness over time.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study on the historical origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection process includes primary sources such as historical documents, government reports, and interviews with political leaders, experts, and scholars. Secondary sources such as books, articles, and academic papers are also utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. To ensure reliability and validity, triangulation techniques will be applied by cross-checking information from multiple sources. A descriptive approach will also be used to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of casteism in Indian politics. The collected data will then be analyzed using content analysis to identify key themes and patterns.

Research questions:

- ❖ What are the earliest occurrences of caste-based divisions and hierarchies in Indian society?
- ❖ How did colonialism influence the development of caste politics in India?
- ❖ What were some major political events that shaped the trajectory of casteism in Indian politics?
- ❖ How have political parties used caste as a tool for mobilization and vote bank politics?
- ❖ What are the historical roots of casteism in Indian society and how has it evolved over time?
- ❖ How has the British colonial rule influenced the development of caste-based politics in India?
- ❖ What role did ancient Hindu scriptures play in perpetuating caste divisions and hierarchy?

4. FINDINGS

The concept of caste has been deeply rooted in Indian society for centuries, and it is no surprise that its influence can also be seen in the country's political landscape. Casteism, which refers to the division and discrimination based on a person's social class or caste, has played a significant role in shaping Indian politics.

There are following of findings on this study

- ❖ Casteism has existed in Indian society for centuries and has been deeply ingrained in the political system.
- ❖ The origins of casteism can be traced back to the Hindu caste system, which divided society into rigid hierarchical castes based on occupation and birth.
- ❖ After independence, India's leaders attempted to eradicate caste discrimination through affirmative action policies such as reservations in education and government jobs for lower castes.
- ❖ Caste-based political parties have emerged over time, representing different communities within the larger Hindu social structure, further entrenching caste divisions in politics.
- ❖ During British colonial rule, the census and administrative policies further strengthened the hold of caste on society by classifying individuals according to their caste identities.
- ❖ Reservation policies were implemented to uplift marginalized castes but also led to an increase in competition among castes for limited resources and benefits.

Suggestions:

Casteism has been a long-standing issue in Indian society, deeply rooted in the country's history and culture. It has played a major role in shaping political dynamics and power structures in India for centuries. Hence, studying the historical origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics is crucial to understanding its impact on modern society.

There are following of suggestion on this study

- ❖ Begin with a brief introduction on casteism and its prevalence in Indian society.

- ❖ Delve into the historical origins of casteism, tracing back to the Vedic period where it was primarily based on occupation and gradually evolved into a hierarchical social structure over time.
- ❖ Discuss how casteism became deeply entrenched in Indian politics during the British rule when they categorized Indians according to their castes for administrative purposes.
- ❖ Explore how colonial policies such as zamindari system and separate electorates further reinforced caste divisions and gave birth to communal politics.
- ❖ Analyze the impact of independence and formation of a democratic government on caste-based politics, particularly through reservation policies for marginalized communities.
- ❖ Delve into specific instances or movements that have challenged or perpetuated casteism in Indian political arena, like Mandal Commission report, anti-reservation protests, etc.
- ❖ Discuss contemporary issues related to caste politics such as vote bank politics, dynastic rule within certain castes, discrimination against lower castes in electoral processes etc.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study on the historical origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics sheds light on a complex phenomenon that has deeply influenced the country's political landscape. As discussed, caste-based divisions have been present in Indian society for centuries, but it was only through colonization and subsequent changes in governance that they became institutionalized within the political arena. The emergence of political parties based on caste identities and their use of identity politics to gain electoral advantage has further strengthened the hold of casteism in Indian politics. This has resulted in marginalized communities being left behind while dominant castes continue to dominate positions of power. However, there have also been efforts to challenge this system and promote social justice by addressing issues related to caste discrimination. The implementation of affirmative action policies such as reservations for historically disadvantaged groups is a step towards creating a more inclusive society. It is crucial for future research to explore how an increasing trend towards modernity and globalization may impact the role of caste in Indian politics. While it continues to play a significant role currently, there are indications that younger generations may be less tied down by traditional notions of caste identity.

Limitations of study:

While this study explored the historical origins and evolution of casteism in Indian politics, there are certain limitations that should be acknowledged. One limitation is the use of secondary sources as

the main basis for analysis. While these sources provide valuable insights into the topic, they may not always accurately capture the nuances and complexities of caste dynamics in politics. Additionally, due to time constraints and access limitations, primary data collection from various communities and political parties was not possible. Another limitation is that this study focused primarily on North India and did not include a comprehensive analysis of South Indian states where caste dynamics may differ significantly. Furthermore, the nature of caste-based politics is constantly evolving and may vary across different regions within India itself. Thus, a broader geographical scope would have provided more comprehensive insights. Additionally, this study did not delve into contemporary issues surrounding casteism in Indian politics such as reservation policies or affirmative action programs. These are important aspects to consider when examining how caste continues to shape political processes in modern-day India. Finally, it must be acknowledged that understanding casteism in Indian politics requires a multidisciplinary approach beyond history alone. Fields such as sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science all play crucial roles in comprehending this complex issue.

Further research:

Casteism is a complex and deeply rooted social issue that has had a significant impact on Indian politics throughout its history. The caste system, which divides society into rigid hierarchical groups based on birth, has been prevalent in India for centuries. However, it was during the colonial rule by the British that this system became more institutionalized and politicized. The idea of caste was initially used by British colonizers to control and govern their Indian subjects. They created elaborate categories to classify people based on their occupation, religion, and social status. This categorization made it easier for them to maintain power over the diverse population of India. As India fought for independence from British rule in the early 20th century, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and B.R Ambedkar recognized how entrenched casteism had become in Indian society. They saw it as a major obstacle to achieving social equality and justice. However, after gaining independence in 1947, instead of dismantling the caste system entirely or taking measures towards an egalitarian society, Indian political parties began using caste as a tool for electoral politics.

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