

Role of Caste in India

- o Critically evaluate the role of caste in Indian politics. Whether it has strengthened democracy or weakened it?
- o To what extent caste can be considered as a determinant of electoral behaviour?
- o Discuss the evolution of caste politics in India.

What is caste?

- Caste is treated as the fundamental building block of Indian society by colonial masters.
- The term caste is ^{taken from} Portuguese word 'Castu' which means pure breed.
It is supposed to be the translation of Sanskrit words 'varna' & 'Jati'.
- Whether & to what extent the term caste accurately represents Indian system of stratification based on varna or jati is not clear.
- Ambedkar rejected the theory of pure breed. Gandhi viewed it as functional specialisation. For Gandhi it was a division of labour but for Ambedkar it was a division of labourers.
- One of the earliest works on caste system is by Louis Dumont. He described it as a system of stratification based on purity & pollution.

- Brahmins topped the ladder, Kshatriyas are 2nd in hierarchy, followed by Vaishyas and then Shudras & the 5th varna or outcaste. They were untouchables. (आवर्ण)

- Views of MN Srinivas

- For him, Louis Dumont's view of caste is textual, does not correspond to the present reality. He talks about the new avatar of caste. Importance of caste in ritual ~~sphere~~ is decreasing. The role of caste in secular sphere is increasing.

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Concept of Dominant Caste

- For political analysis the category of upper caste or Brahmins is not helpful. Brahmins may be upper caste but they are not the dominant caste in most of the regions.
- Yogendra Singh gave 3 features of dominant caste.

How a caste be

- i) Caste should be in numerical majority
- ii) Must be holding a significant amount of land
- iii) Dominant caste is w.r.t. the geographical framework.

Evolution of caste politics in India

- Colonial historians have projected caste to be the tradition basis of political office in India.
- According to Pratap Bhanu Mehta, caste has been one of the reality but not the only reality.
- It can be said that Britishers promoted caste based politics to divide Indian national movement. Britishers made caste as a basis of social policy also.
- Nehru considered both casteism & communalism as a threat to national unity.

According to Andre Bete, it is surprising that person like Nehru preferred caste based public policy approach. Nehru only abolished untouchability in the constitution but not caste.

Nehru adopted patronage politics based on caste.

Nehru could manage the caste politics because of the favourable conditions.

- The legacy of national movement
- His own charisma
- Politics of accommodation

2nd phase of caste in politics in India (60's onwards)

Reason: Breakdown of Congress system.

- Breakdown of Congress system made politics competitive. It has increased the role of religion, caste, region, language, etc.

- Views of James Manor

- Caste politics primarily promoted by regional parties. But it is not that Congress did not play the caste card. But it was more clandestine use of caste.

- Two developments enhanced the role of caste

ii) Green Revolution

i) Linguistic reorganisation.

- Views of Christophe Jeffrelot

- The main reason behind linguistic reorganisation was the aspiration of certain castes to consolidate their political base.

After linguistic reorganisation, different dominant castes emerged in different states.

e.g. Marathas in Maharashtra, Reddys & Kammas in AP.

3rd phase (since 90s)

identity politics.

- exclusion of others
- emotion play

- Mandal Commission has strengthened the role of caste & in turn strengthened the role of religion. Mandal & Kamasdal became the idioms of Indian politics.

- Caste based politics is responsible for emergence of coalition politics also.

- Caste became the most important behavior determinant of electoral behaviour.

- Recent elections
 - Caste continues to be the determinant of electoral behaviour, but role of caste should not be overemphasised.
- Views of Milan Vaishnav
 - We may expect a big change in Indian Party system and electoral behaviour in future.

Short note: Caste as a determinant of electoral behaviour.

- Caste & religion have been the means of political mobilisation in India. Many scholars believe that democracy survived in India because of the caste. Democracy could not survive in other 3rd world countries because they lacked similar platform of mass mobilisation.
- Rajani Kothari has viewed caste as a positive force for Indian democracy.
 - It has resulted into the mobilisation of rural population & their integration with democratic politics.
 - It has given a new sense of confidence to the members belonging to lower castes.
- C.P. Bhambari,
 - Caste may be in ^{short} long term proved useful but in the long term it certainly threatens unity & integrity.

How caste has influenced politics?

- According to Rajni Kothari, both caste & politics have influenced each other. He talks about Casteisation of politics as well as politicisation of caste.

for secular benefits

- Views of Rudolphs & Rudolphs

Book

Pursuit of Laxmi

Mentions the phenomenon of modernisation (politicisation of caste) of tradition & traditionalisation of modernity. (democracy govern by caste, religion)

Present status of influence of caste

- James Manor

- Caste influences voting behaviour.
- However caste does not count as much as suggested by media.
- Caste's importance cannot be overstated.
- It does not mean ^{influence} importance of caste is declining.

- Views of Yogendra Yadav

- India is witnessing identity plus politics since last 2 elections

- Suhas Patashikar

Hindu article

- Caste continues to be the prime building block of political affiliation at micro level.

- Corbridge & Harris

- Caste matters in all elections from national to municipality, Even in society's elections.

- Christophe Jeffrelot

- Caste forms the mosaic of Indian politics.

- Kanchan Chandra

- Voters in India take it for granted that if person from their caste is standing, he/she will work in the interest of their caste.

- Dipankar Gupta

- Caste impacts but great deal of idiosyncrasy also impact. Personal liking, personal links, family tradition, business interest.

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Regionalism in Indian politics

What is regionalism?

Since Like other ideologies, regionalism is also a political ideology with the objective of gaining political power.

Regionalism in India

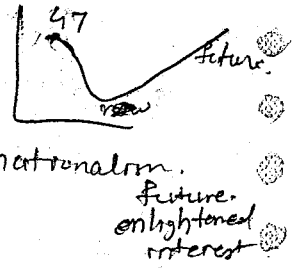
- Regionalism has shaped Indian politics from very beginning. According to Paul Brass, regionalism is a long term trend and nationalism is a short term trend of Indian politics. } nationalism crisis
- Regionalism is natural for a country of continental size, geographical variations & enormous diversity.
- Regionalism itself is not bad. Regionalism is natural. It is natural to have a preference for one's region and any other identity marker like language, caste, religion.
- Politics of regionalism is also a politics of identity. All forms of identity politics at some point of time threatened the national identity/integrity.
- Regionalism or other forms of identity politics are politics of exclusions.

Regionalism is actually sub-nationalism.

In post colonial societies subnational identities often compete & challenge national identity. It becomes significant if country has democracy. Democracy has

unique relation with identity politics. Democracy will increase identity politics & only democracy has a resolution for identity politics.

cultural
nationalism



Reasons for regionalism in India

- Size & diversity
- Breakdown of Congress system & rise of competitive politics.
- Introduction of democracy

There are different theories for regionalism in India.

- Modernisation Theory
It is linked to Rudolph & Rudolph.
- PUneven development model
by Robert Hardgrave (NE)
- Culture of scarcity
by Mark Marc Jurgensmear
- Culture of affluence
by Thomas Januzzi (Punjab).
- Son of soil theory
Myron Weiner (Shiv Sena, Azan Gan Pomahad).
- Politics of opposition
by Iqbal Narayan

According to Prof. Rashid-ud-din Khan it is inevitable in multicultural society that it is not necessarily responsible for balkanization. We require careful handling. The management

of regionalism by balanced growth, development planning, grass root democracy & culture of Human rights.

Constitution of India & Regionalism

= It provides democratic way of handling regionalism.

Features

- Federalism
- Special states
- 6th schedule
- 73rd & 74th C.A. Acts
- Cultural & educational rights of minorities
- Parliamentary democracy
- Independent judiciary
- Rule of Law

Record of Govt. of India in handling regional challenges

- Not an excellent but fairly good record, though problems like alienation in J & K, Nagaland are continuing.

Regional movements like movement for Gorkhaland, Bodoland, Vidarbha are still continuing, but we have been successful in handling some of the subnational challenges, sometimes by accommodation & sometimes by force. The best example of accommodation is w.r.t. Tamil subnationalism.

Once there was a call for separate Dravidstan but now it is completely integrated.

Punjab regionalism & secessionism was managed by use of force.

- Record is better than U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.

Approach of govt. of India. in handling regional challenges

- There is no declared policy.
- Govt. is ready to negotiate & dialogue
- Any negotiation will be within the framework of Constitution of India.
- No compromise with territorial integrity & sovereignty.
- No talk with arms.
- If force is used, govt. will use greater force.

Role of Ethnicity in Indian PoliticsWhat is ethnicity / ethnic factors ?

The term ethnicity comes from the term ethnic & the nearest meaning of ethnic is race. In contemporary times ethnic movements or ethnic politics is understood to include descriptive identity markers. It can be religion, language, tribe or caste.

What are ethnic movements ?

- Tamil nationalism, movement in Punjab & Kashmir can be cited as an example of ethnic movements. Ethnic movements have been self determination movements.
- Ethnic movements are also subnational movements & often challenge national identity. Ethnic movements are based on the concept of cultural nation, i.e., pure nation or homogenous nation. Whereas India is based on the concept of political nation, where different ethnic groups are in the process of getting converted into 1 nation. This process is still continuing.

Reason for ethnic politics in India

- Diversity & Size
- Multicultural approach in the Constitution

which allows different communities which to continue with their separate identity without necessity of assimilation.

- Indian nationhood is based on the concept of 'salad bowl' rather than U.S. concept of 'melting pot'.

- Democracy in India

• Democracy requires group mobilisation. Ethnic factors become the basis for this mobilisation.

Thus in short term democracy will promote ethnic politics where different ethnic groups will go for balancing against each others.

attempt for
Balance of
power

• Views of Atul Kohli

• In his article titled 'ethnicity & democracy', he mentions that democracy enhances ethnic conflict at the same time it also provides solution to ethnic politics. However whether democracy will be able to resolve ethnic political challenges will depend upon various factors. eg. nature of party system, nature of leadership. He has given 2 different examples

i) Nehru handling linguistic question &

ii) Tamil Nationalism.

Nehru could successfully handle the challenge of Tamil nationalism because he had democratic approach. During his time, his party was well established & he could talk from the position of confidence. On the other hand Indira Gandhi's handling of Sikh & Kashmiri nationalism had been impacted by

the status of Congress party. By this time, Congress system had been diluted. Thus Indira Gandhi was not as confident or in similar position of strength like that of Nehru.

Because of insecurity she preferred personalisation & Centralisation of powers, Ultimately proved counter productive.

He also compared the handling of Punjab crisis by Rajiv Gandhi. It appeared that he will be able to resolve the crisis democratically because of his strong position in Parliament. However very soon his party started showing dissensions/defections. Hence he could not continue with democratic politics.

Future of ethnic politics

dynamic
ethnic
identities
- Muni

- Views of S D Muni

- Ethnic movements do not challenge the existence of India as a nation to the extent they have challenged the existence of U.S.S.R. or Yugoslavia.

- Ethnicity in India is multilayered concept.

The pattern of conflict & cooperation keeps on changing.

- Views of James Manor

- Ethnicity does not pose threat to Indian society & democracy because there are cross cutting identities & no permanent fault lines.

- Views of Atul Kohli

- Ethnic conflicts are also power conflicts. True villains are those who do not take timely action & let it take such a proportion that it becomes difficult to handle.

Environmental Movement in India

- Nature of environmental movement in India
- Difference betn the environmental movement in India from that of West.
- Major environmental protests.
- Achievements & challenges.

Status of environmental movement in India

- It is a matter of academic debate whether there is environmentalism of the South. They believe that there can be an environmentalism only when society resolves the basic questions of bread & butter. & and only then society can move towards post-materialist values.

Some of the scholars in the North go to the extent of suggesting that environmental agenda of South is to extract funds & technology from North.

- According to Ramchandra Guha, above approach reflects ethnocentric attitude of North. We cannot say that there is no environmentalism in South. In fact the countries of South have always given importance to nature. Most of the countries in the East have been nature worshippers. However it is true that at present environmentalism of South is different from environmentalism of North. Environmentalism of North is full stomach environmentalism & of South is empty stomach. Environmentalism of North is environmentalism of rich & that of South is of poor. Environmental degradation is a bigger concern