**Topic: Role of Caste and Ideology in Indian Politics**

1. **Description of the Caste System**

Social scientists consider the caste-system as a social hierarchy that determines social status. Louis Dumont has highlighted the role of the purity-pollution complex. M.N. Srinivas has elaborated on the status-symbols pursued in the process of “Sanskritization” and “Westernization”. And Marxists see caste in the sense as a phenomenon belonging to the superstructure of feudal society. Feudal landlordism uses the religious notions and social practices associated with caste to justify and enhance their economic control over peasants and laborers.[[1]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) This caste system is classified based on common lineage, food habits, marriages, status, purity, occupations, etc.

1. **Caste and Ideology in Indian Politics**

In traditional Indian society, caste has shaped social relations in daily life which were internalized on the subconscious level. Dr. Ambedkar emerges as the foremost leader of the untouchables whose approach took the anti-brahminical protest to the level of a radical anti-caste protest. Gandhi acted as a Hindu leader when he refused to concede separate electorates for untouchables to keep them within the Hindu fold. Therefore, the caste identity is deeply rooted, as it is based on social ties, similar lifestyle, and similar economic status. Caste since long has been used as a basis for vote-catching. But the political-ideological thrust of redressing the social injustice of the caste system through the political mobilization of the underprivileged and implementation of compensatory has in recent years brought about important changes in Indian politics.[[2]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675)

The reservation policy for SC and ST dates back to pre-Independence times, but the question of preferential treatment for backward classes remained unsolved for a long time. The Nehru government gave up on it in 1961. The Janata government appointed in 1978 the Second Backward Classes Commission headed by B.P. Mandal. Its report was submitted in 1980 and it took another ten years till the V.P. Singh government, on 7th Aug. 1990, announced its implementation. The violent backlash including a wave of public suicides showed the depth of resentment of the advanced classes and caste and contributed to the fall of the government.[[3]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675)

Indian politics is a caste-ridden politics as caste is a notable foundation of social stratification in India because specific castes are given superior place with social and economic entitlements that were denied to the lower caste of people.[[4]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) Below are some few points which point to casteism in India:

* Caste plays a prominent role in elections and voting behavior whereas a usual phenomenon the political parties select their candidates on caste lines.
* Caste factor naturally becomes central contemplation in all the programs, policies, and manifestoes of the political parties and even different position within political parties is seen to get distributed in terms of various caste configurations.
* It also influences the genesis of the council of ministers and making an appointment to various political positions in the government.
* It also acts as a pressure group in politics where most political bargaining is done on these caste lines.
* The bureaucracy i.e., the administration also gets influenced by the caste consideration as mostly, the postings, transfers, and appointments of public officials get influenced by the caste considerations and even more importantly, the behavior of the public officials in carrying out the administrative duties eventually gets influenced by caste considerations.
* The political leadership in many political parties emerges and sustains in politics on the foundation of support of certain caste groups.[[5]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675)

Therefore, Norman D. Palmer writes “although caste seems to be declining in importance as a social factor, it is increasing in importance as a political factor.”[[6]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) The role of caste in politics is often referred to as casteism. Casteism may be defined as the tendency to mold the life of the nation based on caste. In electoral campaigns, party leaders make an open or disguised appeal to caste sentiments. In some cases casting one’s vote is thought to be like giving away one’s daughter in marriage. Prof. Srinivas postulates that the caste is so tactile and so completely accepted by all, including the most vocal in condemning it, that it is everywhere the unit of social action.[[7]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675)

Dubey writes no party has a clear-cut ideology or a definite socio-economic program. Every party swears by Gandhism, democracy, socialism, and secularism but none of them is sincere to any of these ideals. In practice, politics every party is guided only by one consideration, how to capture power. He states even the communist parties which profess secularism are no exception to it. The Indian political system is highly competitive and in their pursuit of powers parties and politicians leave no stone unturned to mobilize social groups to build up for themselves as wide a support base as possible. Rajani Kothari opines caste structure provides one of the most important organizational clusters in which the population is found to live and politics must strive to organize through such a structure. And hence, Dubey affirms the panchayat raj institutions' politics is exclusively dominated by the caste factor. In villages and small towns, illiteracy is widespread, caste prejudices are deep-seated and the general outlook of the people is very narrow. Naturally, it becomes easy for local politicians to mobilize voters on a caste basis.[[8]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675)

Sharma writes the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha has molded the thinking of certain sections of Hindus along aggressive communal lines. The RSS front organizations like the Bharatiya Janata Party, Bhartiya Majdoor Sabha, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Vishva Hindu Parishad are the confessed bearers of this ideology.[[9]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675)

**Evaluation**

Therefore, the existence of caste consciousness, caste prejudices, discontent based on caste inequalities all these have become impediments in the way of the development of the country as a whole, and therefore, of the development of ‘lower’ and ‘backward’ castes themselves. Caste separatism, therefore, hinders, rather than helps, the advancement of the lower castes. The concept of reservation for the backward tribes itself portrays the injustices and inequalities in India. Though the government tries to uplift the downtrodden and the outcast people, it is best known that the priority always goes to the upper castes. Hence, it is difficult to assume a fair and just politics whereby the people are naturally subjugated to their castes, tribes, and races. No matter how honest and dedicated a politician is, the human is biased by nature and there is always a tendency to behave in partiality. The brutal words such as ‘casteism’ ‘tribalism’ ‘racism’ may disappear after the long run but their notion and ideology would always stay on as long as one is just a human and not God.

At present India is a Hindu nation headed by the Hindus’ fanatics. These people are doing excellent but only for the Hindus. Being majority they also take advantage of harassing and discriminating the minorities. Most of the time, Christians and Muslims are the victims. Their ideology is to Hinduize the whole of India with a motive to eliminate the minorities. Therefore, if India wants to live in peace, equality, and tranquility, the ideology of ‘ism’ must be discredited. Ism is just a deadly weapon that would only hamper the growth of ‘commons politics’ or ‘common good’ in India. It tears apart every section of the society and the nation at large. So far it has contributed nothing good to the nation at large but just confusion and division. India being a secular country, the ruling government must not overlook the constitution and enforce citizens to embrace any ideology against one wish. Instead, the government must listen to the people by whom they are appointed. They must meet the need and cries of the people. Every policy-making and decision-taking should be transparent which is amiable to all the sections of the people. Therefore, caste is just a continuation of the ancient and limited worldview of the people and everyone must try to shove it off in all the possible ways.

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[[2]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) Ibid, 199-200.

[[3]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) Ibid, 200.

[[4]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) Rajni Kothari, *Politics and the People; in search of a Humane India* Vol.1, (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1989).

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[[7]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) Ibid, 260-261.

[[8]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) Ibid, 261.

[[9]](https://www.blogger.com/blog/post/edit/3536959396896794181/3233928276600499675) K.L. Sharma, *Caste and class in India* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2001), 414.