

## **Caste as a Divisive factor**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Principal Investigator	Dr.Gyanendra Kumar sahu	Asst.Professor Utkal University
Content Reviewer	Dr.Gyanendra Kumar sahu	Asst.Professor Utkal University

### Description of Module

<b>Items</b>	<b>Description of Module</b>
Subject Name	Law
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### **Caste as a Divisive Factor**

CASTE AS A DIVISIVE FACTOR: Supreme Court observed in M. Nagaraj, “Under the Indian Constitution, while basic liberties are guaranteed and individual initiative is encouraged. In the ancient times, the society was divided on the basis of caste. The high caste people used to discriminate with the low caste people. Untouchability was practiced on a large scale among the people. After the independence and the constitution coming into force, the situation has not undergone much change. Now there has begun a lot of caste-based politics in India.

The clever politicians are not willing to lose even a single opportunity to politicize the caste. The position has created a phase where the ruling government is ready to provide more and more reservation facilities to the SC, ST and OBC people, in order to attract their votes. But such reservation criterion has again divided the society to a great extent. Because the members from general category, who are deprived of any reservation facility, are of the view that this reservation provision has been an infringement of their right to equality for status and opportunity enshrined under the fundamental rights of the constitution. This has created a divide among the people of the society creating various clashes in the form of riots and protests against or in favor of reservation.

### **(1) Caste Factor in Political Socialisation and Leadership Recruitment:**

Different caste groups have their loyalties behind different political parties and their ideologies. Right from his birth, an Indian citizen inherits a caste and grows up as a member of a particular caste group.

He belongs either to one of the High Castes or to Scheduled Castes. In the process of picking up his political orientations, attitude and beliefs, he naturally comes under the influence of caste groups and casteism.

‘Caste values’ and caste interests influence his socialisation and consequently his political thinking, awareness and participation. He banks upon caste solidarity for occupying and performing a leadership role.

Caste influences the process of leadership recruitment. This is particularly true of highly ‘caste conscious’ people of some states like Haryana, Bihar, UP, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In Haryana, the leadership comes either from the Jats or from the Bishnois or Brahmins. In Andhra Pradesh, the Reddys, Kammas and Valamas provide state leaders.

### **(2) Caste and Party Politics:**

Caste factor is a constituent of the Indian party system. Some political parties have a direct caste basis while others indirectly bank upon particular caste groups. In particular, the regional political parties stand predominantly influenced by the caste factor. The DMK and AIADMK are non-Brahmin rather anti-Brahmin political parties of Tamil Nadu.

In Punjab, Akali Dal has a community panthic identity but stands influenced by the issue of Jats vs. non-Jats. All political parties in India use caste as a means for securing votes in elections.

While the BSP banks upon the support of the Scheduled Castes, the BJP largely banks upon its popularity among the high caste Hindus and the trading community. In fact, while formulating its policies and decisions each political party of India in India almost always keeps in vision the ‘Caste Angle’.

### **(3) Caste and Elections:**

The caste factor is an important factor of electoral politics in India. All political parties give great weightage to the caste factor in selecting their candidates, in

allocating constituencies to their candidates and in canvassing support for their nominees in the election.

In constituencies predominated by Muslims, Muslim candidates are fielded and in areas predominated by Jats, Jat candidates are fielded. Even avowedly secularist parties like the Congress, the Janata Dal, the CPI and the CPM take into consideration the caste factor in selecting their candidates.

In the election campaigns, votes are demanded in the name of caste. Caste groups are tapped for committed support. No one can disagree with N.D. Palmer when he observes that “Caste considerations are given great weight in the selection of candidates and in the appeals to voters during election campaigns.” In elections, caste acts as the most important political party.

#### **(4) Caste as a Divisive and Cohesive Factor of Indian Politics:**

Caste acts both as a divisive and cohesive force in Indian politics. It provides a basis for the emergence of several interest groups in the Indian system each of which competes with every other group in the struggle for power. At times it leads to unhealthy struggle for power and acts as a divisive force.

However, it is a source of unity among the members of various groups and acts as a cohesive force. In rural India, where the social universe of the rural power is limited to an area of 15 to 20 km, caste acts as a unifying force.

It is the only social group they understand. However, the existence of two or three big caste groups also leads to factionalism. Caste as such is a strong factor in Indian politics and it acts as a cohesive as well as a divisive factor.

#### **(5) Caste and the Exercise of Power by a Political party:**

Since caste is a major feature of the Indian society and acts as an important factor in various processes of politics, it also plays a big role in the decision-making process. Even the issue of re-organisation of states is handled with an eye upon the prevention of undue predominance of a caste group in a particular territory.

Caste factor influences the policies and decisions of the state governments. The party in power always tries to use its decision-making power to win the favour of major caste groups. The Congress has always tried to nurture people belonging to the Scheduled Castes as its vote bank.

Regional political parties, whenever they get the chance to rule their respective states, always use political power for furthering the interests of the caste groups which support or can support their regimes.

Recruitment to political offices is mostly done with due consideration to the caste of the persons. Caste factor influences the process of ministry making and the allocation of portfolios. Each big caste group always tries to secure ministerial berths for such elected representatives as belong to their caste.

#### **(6) Caste Factor and the Local Government:**

The role of caste in the working of the Panchayati Raj and other institutions of local self-government has been a recognised reality. We can go to the extent of recording that caste based factionalism in the rural areas of India has been one of the biggest hindering factors in the organisation and effective working of the Panchayati Raj.

In the Indian rural context, caste has been a plank of mobilisation, a channel of communication, representation and leadership and a linkage between the electorate and the political process.

#### **(7) Caste and Indian Constitution:**

Though the spirit of secularism stands clearly affirmed in the Constitution, yet in a limited and indirect way, it recognises the caste system in the form of providing for caste based reservations. Reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Union Parliament and the state legislative assemblies (Art. 330 and 332) as well as in public services reflects this feature.

Even the 'Other Backward Classes—OBC's—stand determined on caste basis. The Constitution of India also provides for the office of the commissioner of Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes with the responsibility to investigate matters relating to the various safeguards provided by the Constitution to these castes and tribes.

The provision for the appointment of a minister-in-charge for looking after the welfare of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes in the States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa also reflects indirect recognition of the caste factor.

The emergence of strong pro-reservation and anti-reservation groups in India has been the direct consequence of such provisions of the Constitution. The repeated tenures for the continuation of the policy of reservations (now the provision stands extended upto the year 2020) for the SCs, STs and OBCs, too has been a major controversial political issue.

The reservation policy clearly reflects the role of caste factor in politics even the other backward classes (OBCs) are basically caste based classes. Now, reservation in private sector has been getting implemented and the quantum of reservation is going to be quite high.

#### **(8) Caste Violence:**

Caste based violence very often finds its way into politics. The traditional differences between the higher and lower castes have acquired a new vigour and have turned, at times, into a violent and fierce struggle for power in society. The growing terrorisation of the lower castes by the higher or even intermediary castes has been becoming a sad part of India's political reality.

In states like Maharashtra, Bihar, and Gujarat and UP, caste violence has raised its head even in some urban areas. Existence of caste sena's in Bihar has been an unfortunate reality of state politics. Caste violence has been a source of big strain on social and political life of Bihar.

#### **(9) Caste and Political Leadership:**

Caste has been emerging as a factor in the process of leadership recruitment. The leadership of Sh. Kanshi Ram and Ms. Mayawati is caste based. So was the

leadership of Ch. Charan Singh in UP, Karpoori Thakur in Bihar and Dev Raj Urs in Karnataka. The leadership of Sh. Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar is again an example of caste based leadership.