

ROLE OF CASTE POLITICS IN INDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UTTARAKHAND

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Abstract

The word caste was originally associate with India's traditional system of hereditary and rigidly stratified classes; the root of caste is the Latin word "castus" which means "chaste" or "pure", "separated". The word arrived in English through the Portuguese "casta" which means "race" or "lineage". Caste has been a predominant aspect of social and political life in India. Its position as one of the most ancient and deeply rooted features of the Indian social system has been a major factor in the structures and functions of the Indian political system. Caste has emerged, as J.P Narayan once observed, "as the most major political party in India". It has been a determinant of political participation, electoral process, voting behavior and almost all other aspects of Indian politics. Despite several changes arising out of the emergence of a developing industrial society, caste continues to play a major role in Indian Politics.

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Keywords: caste, Politics, Social and political life, Political Participation

INTRODUCTION :

The word caste was originally associate with India's traditional system of hereditary and rigidly stratified classes; the root of caste is the Latin word "castus" which means "chaste" or "pure", "separated". The word arrived in English through the Portuguese "casta" which means "race" or "lineage". Caste has been a predominant aspect of social and political life in India. Its position as one of the most ancient and deeply rooted features of the Indian social system has been a major factor in the structures and functions of the Indian political system. Caste has emerged, as J.P Naryan once observed, "as the most major political party in India". It has¹ been a determinant of political participation, electoral process, voting behavior and almost all other aspects of Indian politics. Despite several changes arising out of the emergence of a developing industrial society, caste continues to play a major role in Indian Politics.

Under the constitution of India, there is provision for the reservation of caste in politics. Art. 330 and 332 of Indian constitution reflects the reservation of seats for the SC/ST in Union Parliament as well as state assemblies. The Indian constitution provided a clear-cut reservation for SC/ST, in which 15.47% seats are reserved for SC/ Dalits and 8.66% for ST/ Adiwasies in parliamentary elections. Many states provision for reservation for SC/ST in their respective assemblies elections. Caste play a vital role in Indian politics since independence caste has been emerged as the most political party in India. Policy of reservation has been impetus to the role of caste, particularly is the last few years. Besides voting, the caste acts as an most influencing factor in the selection of candidates in election, distribution of party tickets , appointments of ministers, transfer and position of politicians from any particular ministry etc. The programs, policies and declaration of political parties are made keeping in view the caste factor. Candidate are fielded are allocations of positions within the political party is done on the bases of caste configurations. Louis Dumont is even more specific when he says on one hand modern traditional values are trying to Secularise caste system, on the other hand traditional caste based system is trying to traditionalized the modern political system. Caste

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also functions, as pressure group in politicians. Political Bargaining is done on the caste lines. The political leadership in many political parties emerges and sources in politics on the basis of certain caste groups.

According to Iravati Karve “Caste is an extended kinship group in which every member is either an actual or potential kin of another.”

OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ Caste based allocation of tickets in Uttarakhand assembly elections.
- ❖ Reason of caste politics in Uttarakhand.
- ❖ Impact of caste based politics and policy making in Uttarakhand.

STUDY AREA:

In this paper it is intended to discuss the conceptual framework of caste politics in India, in general and to analyse the role of caste politics in Uttarakhand context in particular. We will discuss the prevailing reasons and impact of caste politics in Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is a state in the northern part of India, it often referred to as the Devbhumi due to many Hindus Temples. Uttarakhand is known for its natural beauty of the Himalayas, the Bhabhar and the Terai. We have identified some of the reasons and impact through a survey of large body of literature and official documents relating to the caste politics of Uttarakhand since its formation in year 2000. While the reason and impact of caste politics issues related to Uttarakhand are many we shall be dealing with only few of them like functions of caste is pressure group in political content, formation of government in state on caste lines, its reasons and impact on policy making, allocation of party tickets to the candidate etc.

The study is confined to the period after year 2000, the reason for this are two fold:

- ❖ First the impact of caste in politics of Uttarakhand is clearly visible in the recent years more than the initial years. When the state was carved out from U.P because earlier focus was more on formation of stable government.
- ❖ Second, rise of new dominant caste leadership is more clearly visible after the initial years formations of Uttarakhand when distribution of party tickets among candidates was started more on caste lines to 1000 voters of particular caste and the direct their attention from real development issues .

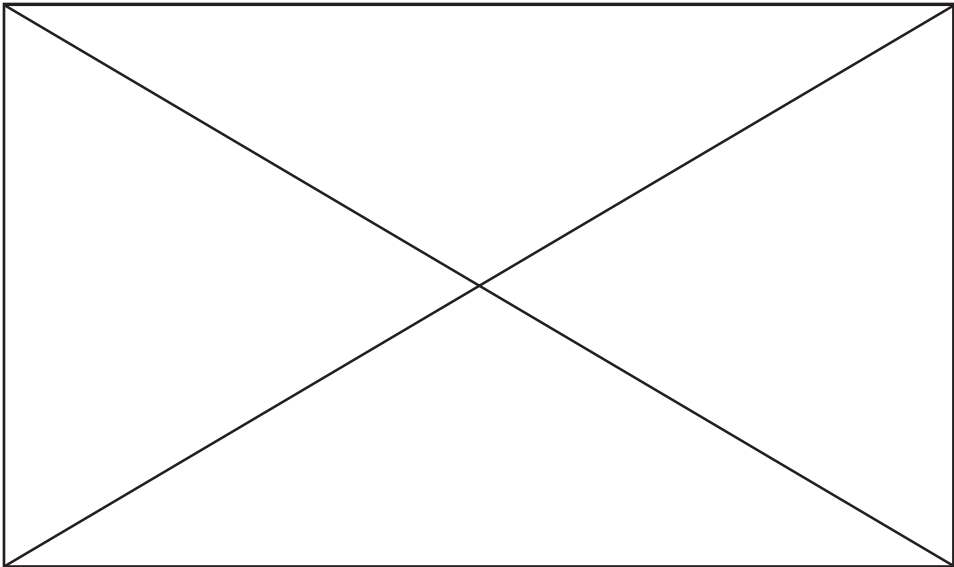
Uttarakhand people follow many religions. But the majority of the population follows Hinduism Other followed by Islam. The other religions adopted by the people of Uttarakhand are Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism, other religions are also practiced but their followers are too secretive to disclose. Approximately 83% of population of Uttarakhand, is consists of Hindus. The caste system has traditionally significant influence in Uttarakhand politics. The upper caste groups in Uttarakhand manipulate the economic and political system to transfer² economic strength to political power. In Uttarakhand the upper and middle ranking caste control over wealth into political dominant over the state elections. Political lines in Uttarakhand often been drawn along caste lines, this means for contesting the elections in the state assembly dominant caste affects the results of that area. In Uttarakhand different political parties represents the interest of the different caste groups. Many political parties in Uttarakhand have openly indulged in caste based vote bank in politics. The caste factor also influences the formation of the councils of ministers and making appointment to various political positions in the government of Uttarakhand.

Caste plays a very important role in the elections and voting. A political party in Uttarakhand selects the candidates on the bases of caste composition in the constituency. The voting in the election and

mobilization of political support from assembly election to Panchyat elections moves on the caste lines³ in Uttarakhand. In constituencies pre-dominated by Muslims, Muslims candidates fielded and, in Brahmin areas the Brahmins were fielded etc. even the secularist parties take into consideration the caste factoring selecting their candidates in assembly election in Uttarakhand. In the election campaigning, votes are demanding in the name of caste. Caste factor influence the policies and decision of⁴ the state government of Uttarakhand. People of Uttarakhand are mainly referred as “Phari” which means hill person. The people are called because of the location of Uttarakhand in foothills of Himalayas. Garhwal and Kumaun being two important regions, these parts of Uttarakhand people are also referred as Garhwal or Kumaun. Caste wise people in Uttarakhand can be divided into Kal-doms, Khasi, Rajput, Brahmin, Immigrant Rajput, Immigrant Brahmin and lastly people who don’t believe in caste system such as Bhotias etc.

Following the constitution of India the state of Uttarakhand, like all Indian States, has a parliamentary system of representative democracy for its government. Uttarakhand has a multiethnic population spread across two Geo-cultural regions: Garhwal and Kumaun. A large portion of the population is Rajput including members of the native Garhwali, Kumauni and Gujjar communities as well as members of immigrants.

According to 2007 study by the “centre for the study of Developing societies” Uttarakhand has the highest percentage of Brahmins of any state⁵ in India, with approximately 20% of the population being Brahmins , one sixth of the population belongs to SC, ST such as the “Raji” who live the border with Nepal, constitute less than 3% of the population. More than four-fifth of Uttarakhand residents are Hindus, Sikh, Christianity, Buddhists and Jains with Muslims being largest minority.

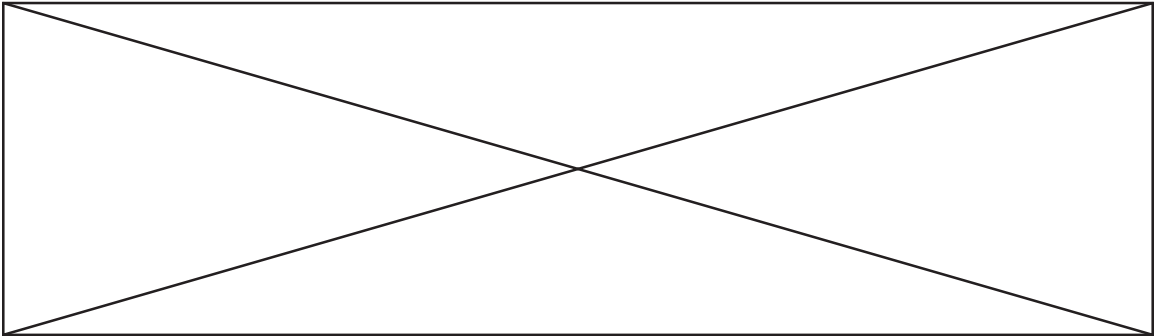


Source : “Centre for the study by the developing societies”:

This pie chart shows the composition of different religions in Uttarakhand. In this pie chart it is clear that the major community follows the Hindu religion. In second place, we see that the next religion is belongs to Islam. The rest of the religions were in minor but plays an important role in Uttarakhand politics.

In Uttarakhand there are 70 assembly seats in which some of seats are reserved for the SC/ST/OBC. In the Uttarakhand Vidhan Sabha there are 15 seats are reserved for the reserved category and other backwards

classes in Uttarakhand, in which 13 seats are reserved for the scheduled Caste and 2 Seats for the scheduled Tribe. Remaining 55 Seats, which are reserved for general category also affects voting trend for different caste i.e. Brahmins, Rajput etc. the selections of the candidates⁶ are also depends on caste based. The assembly election of Uttarakhand depends directly on caste factor because the trend of Uttarakhand shows a tremendous change of chief ministers due to caste politics. Only three assembly elections held in the state of Uttarakhand but the eight chief ministers are changed due to caste factor because the caste plays an important role in Uttarakhand politics and in policy making.



Source: “Centre for the Study of developing societies”:

Summary and conclusion:

The caste factor is an important factor of electoral in India as well as Uttarakhand. All political parties give great weightage to caste factor. In the elections time votes are demanded in the name of caste in Uttarakhand. Caste acts as the most important political party. In Uttarakhand the caste consciousness is increasing and caste is becoming an important instrument for political mobilization. Number of political parties are emerging on social clearances that are based on primordialties especially caste, now in Uttarakhand the competition between and within caste for power is increasingly become manifested. The caste based association emerged after 2000 in Uttarakhand and acted as the pressure groups and demanded⁷ political, economical representation although ritual dimension of caste is getting diluted but political dimension. Uttarakhand has turned out incumbent governments in two election held since its creation. The elections took place in Uttarakhand from 2000 to know in three times, but the chief ministers are changed from time to time. From 2000-2012 the total numbers of chief ministers in Uttarakhand was eight. Only one chief minister who completed his tenure of five years (2002-2007, N.D Tiwari) from 2000-2012. Caste in Indian society to a social group where membership is decided by birth. Members of such local group are endogamous, i.e. they tend to enter into marital relationship among themselves. They often have related political preference, similar to the racial preference for the Democratic and Republic parties in the U.S.A. In the case of the Uttarakhand there are several factor which encourage a more optimistic reading of the democratic and development potential in separate state. The removal of the boundaries between “civil society” and “political society” meant that caste now played a huge role in the political arena and also influenced other⁸ government – run institution such as police and judicial system. Though caste seemed to dictate one’s access to such institutions, the location of that pocket of concentration of its caste members into political power and then challenge the hegemony locally dominant upper caste. Gender also plays significant role in power of dynamics of caste women’s representation within the political system seems to also be tied to their caste. Lower, more conservative caste have less female participation in politics then upper, more socially liberal, caste. In Uttarakhand, the caste system has traditionally had significant influence over people’s access to power. The privileged upper caste groups benefits more by gaining substantially more economic and political power, while the lower caste

groups have limited access to those powers. The caste system distributes to difference caste different economic strength, the upper caste groups can then manipulate the economic and political system to transfer economic strength into political power. Politics in Uttarakhand is highly depended on patron-clienties along the caste lines. The caste that one belongs to serves as a strong determinant of his or her voting pattern. In Uttarakhand different political parties represents the interest of different caste groups. The upper and merchant's caste such as Brahmins, Rajput and Kayasth and the rich Muslims groups tend to express their interest trough the ruling party of the particular state. However, caste does not solely determine voting behavior. Discrepancies occur especially for the upper caste groups, this means that not everyone from the same caste would vote for only one particular party. The upper caste peoples have more freedom to vote by political behalf. The mandal Commissions covered more than 3000 other backward castes. It is this not clear which parties are associated with each caste. Loyal groups of voters usually back a certain candidates or party during elections with the expectation of receiving benefits once their candidates is in office. This practice called "vote bank" prolific throughout in Uttarakhand. In during time all the political parties in Uttarakhand are openly indulge in caste based vote bank in state politics in Uttarakhand.

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