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Master power of Indian democracy

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Abstract

After independence, India adopted democracy and has been characterized the largest democracy of the world. In the present scenario, we are bound to assess our long experience with the system of governance and implications of our democratic set-up. The suitability of one form of government or the other depends upon different factors like population, economy socio-cultural structure, religious and regional tensions or consensus etc. Every political system operates its particular environment and in certain characteristics which contribute both its forms of government and policy out-post.

Keywords: Democracy, power-politics, socio-cultural forces, governance, participation

1. Introduction

Democracy is a world -wide phenomena, a final form of political organization which seems to be the most suitable way of governance. It has been used in different sense. It is a form of government, a form of state and a way of life. In original sense, democracy means the people's power; a community in which masses are powerful and the powers are legally vested in the people as a whole ^[1]. As a way of life, it is a principle of free actions of human spirits in social and political areas of individual life guided themselves to freely determined ends. It is also a system of institution operative in a political community which enables the principle to be realised and serves as the means of its realisation. Both these things are essentially interconnected and both of them must be present in order to constitute democracy in the full and general sense of the word ^[2]. While there are a variety of forms and practices throughout the world, there are some common features.

- Representation of every section of population in the system of governance so that the needs, interests and priorities of each person shall be represented in the decision- making process.
- Free and fair election held at the regular intervals for the effectiveness of the popular control.
- Democracy implies the principles of accountability and transparency for elected representative, politicians and public officials. It is assumed that democratic governance by its very nature must have in-built-mechanism to be subjected to regular and comprehensive public scrutiny as a means of ensuring their accountability.
- Democracy is based on the principle of tolerance. It demands a relatively high degree of political conscience and readiness to accept and abide by the decision of the majority and majority should respect the opinion of minorities. All citizens have rights to be heard, opportunities to express their views and pay attention to their agreements and disagreements.

India which was liberated on 15th August 1947 incorporated all the above stated characteristics in a very appropriate way, the preamble vested ultimate authority in the people in whose name and to whom it has been enacted. In order to satisfy the divergent clashing interests and pacifying different communities it adopted federal-parliamentary democracy.

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When we examine our system of governance, it is a moot point whether our democracy serves and promote an equitable just order. Though democratic processes adopted but there are enormous distortions. Our system of governance has been captured by a section of vested interests there by denying voice of a large section of population. While the urban middle class feel cheated, entangled and excluded from the legitimate due process, the poor illiterate class for whom seeking redressal to their grievances invites only intimidation, harassment and violence. As regards accountability, open and fair process of decision making, obligations to provide answers for one's conduct and so on from a politician to public official, seems beyond the hopes and imaginations of ordinary citizens. A complete absence and distortions of transparency and accountability in India is making mockery of democracy itself^[3].

A surface view of working democracy in India shows widespread political honesty, corruption and a crisis of confidence which has gripped the society. Religion, region and caste determines the parameters of policy and every act and action. Thus, democracy instead of establishing meritocratic government has delivered a Kakistocracy- a government by worst people. An ordinary citizen entitlement to good governance is being compromised by power game of the ruling elites. The power- hungry politicians driven by money can go to any extent to pull down the system of governance.

In this context, it is essential to understand the character of Indian democracy at macro and micro levels. The system India inherited from colonial master was adopted without any appreciation of grass root realities and references to historical process. As a result, the macro level processes, structures and institutions of democracy failed to develop strong links with the existing micro level processes, structures and institutions of the society.

Political system is an open system amenable to the influence of social environmental forces. Likewise, Indian democratic set up has been dominated by three major forces- Caste, Religion and Region. If democracy means political participation of the people, by major forces, then the main motivating or organising devices for mass politics or the leading political idiom that mobilize the masses are these caste, religion and region. These forces represent the ways of putting together popular social coalitions so that political power won. These forces also determine how far the masses are involved in or excluded from the governing process that is the participation-exclusion dimension of politics. While all these forces are playing their parts in Indian politics but in this study an attempt is made to analyse the deep-rooted impact of caste in Indian democracy. It is true that traditional social system was organised around the caste structures and caste identities but the moot questions are what form caste has taken in the politics and what form politics has been taken in caste-oriented society.

After independence, Indian constitution pledge to establish egalitarian social order by abolishing hierarchical and unjust social order where upper castes have traditionally enjoyed ritualistic privileges and superior social rank while lower castes suffer disadvantages of an unclean status^[4]. Indian Constitution envisage reservation and special safeguards to certain castes – Scheduled Caste^[5], Scheduled tribes^[6], and other backward castes^[7], within this new context of social democracy castes remains a central element of Indian society ever-while adopting itself to the values and methods of

democratic politics.

In democracy, politics is a competitive enterprise and its purpose is the acquisition of power by manipulating existing and emerging allegiances. The important thing is organisation and articulation of support in order to mobilize and consolidate its position where politics is mass based. Caste structure in India is one of the principal organisational clusters along which the population is found to live and politics has been striving through. Therefore, both the form of caste and form of politics are brought nearer to each other and in due process changing each other. By drawing caste into its web of organisation, Politician find material for its articulation and manipulation and moulds it into its own design. In making politics their sphere of activity caste and kin groups get a chance to asserts their identities and strive for powers and positions.

In India, Caste is an essential part of political pattern, it has risen to national prominence now. Regionalisation of Jati (caste) was an established tendency but after independence, this process has been greatly quickened. In the beginning caste was successfully used to mobilize masses in the South India gradually it extended to the north and west. Such process was pioneered in the Madras Presidency by the Justice Party and in Kerala by Sri Narayan Guru who led the self-respected movement for Ezhavas^[8]. Laterally, caste in politics was articulated by all political parties whether it is Congress, Samajwadi party, Bahujan Samajwadi party in UP, DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, R J D in and Janata Dal United in Bihar and so on. V.P. Singh promoted castesim in the name of social justice.

The importance of caste is evident in almost all the political processes from selection, nomination of a candidate to the formation of the government and then securing support in favour of the running government. In India, Political parties are based on castes. Mynor Beiner in his book 'Party Politics in India' offered explanation that in many cases party has become a substitute for Jati and works as coherence of a unity in which there are no stranger or outsiders^[8]. One particular manifestation of this character is the resistance to unification which is often found in political groups with almost identical policies and readiness of many groups split and breakaway into factions. In fact, Indian political parties are weak in both organisational structure and ideological fabrics^[9], whether Congress and all its factions' branches of parties like NCP, SP, BSP, TMC, all Communist and Marxists named parties. The congress party which could boast of an all India organisational structure could no longer be identified with clear ideology. In every Political party, leaders stretch its wings to suit their political expediency. The need for success in election force the party to exploit caste whenever necessary. No party seems to be free from caste appeal to win election is regarded permissible.

In distribution of tickets and selection or nomination of the candidates for the contest of election, there is careful castes calculations. Behaviour of people is influenced by caste considerations. During the election campaigning, contesting candidates demand votes on the ground of castes as Yadav for Yadav and Dalit for Dalit. Therefore, castes constitute a "Vote Bank". Instead of creating new psychological and social norms to make people indifferent to caste, vote baiting politics adopted by almost all political parties make the people more and more caste conscious^[10]. This is continuous chain in which everyone in politics, however, loudly he may

declare that he is above the caste creed, is only a baiter. Elections laws forbids caste appeals for vote but in practice these have become the greatest planks of electioneering. Politicians create voting constituencies for themselves in the name of caste. Instead of fabricating a way to create a nation, Indian politicians have divided the country into hundreds of aggressive caste ethnicities making them so many sub-nations, each at the other's throat.

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Along with the political parties, various important pressure groups are also existed which exercised pressures on the government for acceptance of their demands like Kshatriya Mahasabha, Bhumihar Sangh, Kurmi Sabha, Rajput Mahasangh, Kayastha, Vaishya, Brahmin Mahasabhas etc. Each pressure group tries to influence the government in decision making in its own favour and adopt a strategy for that purpose suited to the situation and its own resources.

Caste continues to play a significant role at the Jati level, a more relevant unit of analysis than the large categories of upper castes, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Scheduled Castes. But some socio-economic differentiation is also taking place within jatis, and this process, along with other subdivisions, affects the voting pattern at that level too. Indians vote their caste while casting their vote. While that remains largely true, the 2014 general election reflected the growing importance of some class elements within caste, which is partly due to the socio-economic differentiation of caste groups.

The importance of caste is evident in the voting pattern of the General elections that shows a sharper and a different kind of polarisation along caste lines. The voting arithmetic give ways to caste identities and political alliances in every national and state elections. In UP state and recently held Lok Sabha in 2019, SP, BSP, RJD and Congress Maha Gathbandhan is an example. In 1991, the Caste and Communal appeal with Mandir and Mandal issues got overwhelming prominence that created a struggle between Dalits /Lower caste and Brahmin/ upper caste or between Ambedkarism v/s Brahminsism^[11]. The conflict among lower caste and upper caste are defined by a simple truth that lower caste politics and Hindu Nationalism are fundamentally opposed to each other where caste is intra-religious, the former emphasis mobilisation of lower caste on ground of social justice against the upper caste inevitably split the society. Dalit politics is now constituting the biggest ideological political agenda of Hindu nationalism.

Democracy has encouraged unprivileged castes to translate their numerical strength into a viable political force often allying with other caste groups. The histrionic rise of BSP is a case point. It won only one seat in 1989 and 1991 Lok Sabha elections in UP but in 1993, won 59 seats in state assembly election with almost 10% of the votes^[12]. The combinations of Yadav, Muslims and Dalits bought SP and BSP coalition in power. The upper caste votes polled in favour of BJP secured highest numbers of seats in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections succeeded in polarising the upper castes and fractured OBC votes. The Congress I vote bank of lower castes has considerably eroded and its secular character has shrunk all over India. The Congress I vote bank has declined as regional political parties succeeded in mobilising Dalits vote bank as BSP in UP, RJD and JDU in Bihar^[13]. The fact that even the historically mighty Congress

I party choose to be junior partner of regional lower castes parties. It is an indication that the castes forces are on rise in mass politics of today and likely to remain in future.

The existed caste structure in India are vertical as well as horizontal in nature. Vertically Indian society is divided into SC (15%) (7%) and OBC (44%)^[14]. There are lower castes of various kind but there is no aggregate lower castes community as such. Internal hierarchies are existing. For instance, the SC politicians have openly rebelled against the leading SC politicians as in Bihar Lalu Yadav, Nitish Kumar, Ram Vilas Paswan and Jiten Ram Manjhi. The power caste politicians are divided but there appears to be an upper threshold in their internal battles. The internal divisions have led to a whole hearted embrace of the BJP for the sake of power and BSP came together to form the government in UP in 1993. It indicates that ideology has become obsolete and non-ideological committed and purely power-based coalitions are making their way ahead.

As regards the Horizontal nature, caste exists all over India but as sociologists and anthropologists believes they are local and regional entity. There are upper and lower castes in all part of the country but the lower castes in one state are not much concern with the lower castes in other states. Their name, social roles, economic professions and status, languages and histories are regionally different. For example, Brahmins of South have different ways as the Brahmins of North India or vice-versa^[15]. Therefore, castes structures have a nation-wide resonance but they have not been able to achieve a nation-wide aggregation^[16].

Observations and Conclusion

Democracy is undoubtedly the best form of government but making it real is a great challenge for Indian people. None can deny this fact that caste has percolated in the veins of Indian politics to such an extent that it has great deleterious effects on smooth functioning of Democracy. The caste politics has got so intermeshed with electoral calculations that it has also acquired a seal of legitimacy. To capture state power in the name of caste is one thing and running it for the exclusive benefit of these caste is quite another. The state can not and must not act in a narrowly partisan manner if it is to retain any legitimacy at all. Power has to be transcended caste creed and community. Therefore, to improve the political functioning in terms of social objectives, a multi-directional strategy is required.

The first and most important task is to eradicate caste consciousness which has shrunk deep into our collective and individual soul over a period of time. It needs not only economic measures but also measures to remove their mental barrier. For this it is essential that the government should revise the policy of reservation because it is caste based. If we calculate over all reservations given under several categories SC, ST OBC, it much above the percentage envisage in our constitutions.

Secondly, reservation was a temporary measure to be phased out after the first ten years. If reservation has not made the desired changes in their conditions why to persist any longer? It needs a constructive approach for creating conditions which may improve their life. A time bound programme should be chalked out and reservation should be phased out slowly either by removing the creamy layer or by limiting the percentage to a vanishing point.

Social and economic justice have to be all embracing. A just order however, cannot be enforced without creating the

requisite infra structure to support it.

Political parties are working instrument of Democracy. If democracy is to be preserved, we need to regulate their functioning parties which have no faith in democracy and exploit it only to subvert, should be banned by the Election Commission. Steps should be taken to restrict the number of political parties which are growing like a weed. Political Parties which are ideologically sound should be promoted and their politics should be policy oriented so that they can be free from casteism and just like forces.

While we can still explain electoral behaviour of Indians on the basis of their caste background, new variables need to be factored in, including class. Secondly, caste does not make the same impact in a perfectly uniform manner: if OBCs are more influenced by class-related considerations, the savarnas and Dalits, because they occupy the two ends of the caste system, are more status-sensitive. As a result, their voting pattern continues to be more over determined by caste. Third, caste matters more significantly at the jati level, as large aggregates like OBCs or even Dalits have only been politically relevant in the context of a crisis like Mandal. Correlatively, as jatis are mostly meaningful at the state level, it is also at the state level that one must study the politics of caste.

Political organisation and institutions must learn to practice democratic values and ideals. Parliament is the greatest democratic institution and working of its is deteriorating day by day. Attitudes of parliamentarians, state legislators and local bodies members at urban level and at rural levels are now- a days below the dignity. Election commission has the most important role to play in this respect.

No government or party can ensure proper democratic functioning, if the people of the country are not aware of its responsibility. It is true that democracy has given power to the people but people are not able to understand price of it, then democracy cannot be successful in any country as in India. It is not democracy but a mobocracy. So long people will continue to vote on the basis of caste, India can never achieve a casteless society and democracy will be ruled by caste creed and religion.

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