

## CASTE IN INDIAN POLITICS, AND ROLE OF DR B.R. AMBEDKAR IN INDIAN POLITICS OF CASTEISM

**Mazar Ali Shah**

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*Politics is an ineluctable all-embracing activity through which we preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Indian democracy being the largest in the world, has survived from the major challenges posed by widespread illiteracy, poverty, secessionism and communalism with several problems that have felled the fledgling democratic institutions of so many post-colonial societies and since Indian society has being highly segmented along the lines of castes, religion, class etc., it eventually prevents the true working of Parliamentary democracy and puts a glaring feature of Indian politics which is largely shaped by the cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, known tradition of the countrywide movement with a unique contrasting approach of party,*

*Indian politics is caste ridden politics; caste is long in the tooth and notable foundation of social stratification in India and interestingly we see some specific castes to be given superior place with social and economic entitlements that were denied to the lower caste of people. The basic objective of this paper is to analysethe caste in Indian politics and role of B.R. Ambedkar as social reformer and leader of downtrodden classes, how it become a major cause of serious concern and become obstacle to the national integration. This paper concludes with suggestion to overcome these challenges.*

**Keywords:** *caste, role of caste in Indian politics, Dr B.R, Ambedkar and its role*

## INTRODUCTION

Politics is an ineluctable all-embracing activity through which we preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Politics has been seen as an uninterrupted, enduring, constantly changing and omnipresent activity having its key disclosure in the decision making to face and solve a mare's nest and flows from an outstanding activity, a form of human conduct. Indian democracy being the largest in the world, has survived from the major provocations posed by extensive illiteracy, poverty, secessionism and communalism with different critical problems that have cut down the emergent democratic institutions of so many post-colonial societies. Since Indian society has being highly sectioned along the lines of castes, religion, class etc, it eventually prevents the true functioning of Parliamentary democracy and puts an extremely bright feature of Indian politics which is largely shaped by its cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, known tradition of the countrywide movement with a unique contrasting approach of party supervision and grappling ideological outlook.

The study of Indian politics in this context stands as a climacteric and composite one, even though India is said to be a secular state. It is climacteric in the sense that Indian politics emerge from various social multifariousness and is largely shaped by the cultural varieties, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, known tradition of the countrywide movement with contrasting style of party leadership and unique contrasting ideological perspective. the basic features of Indian politics becomes the causes of threatening remark to national amalgamation which here simply means political, social and cultural binding or in another word it means a feeling of oneness by the people of a country. A critical study of the unique nature of Indian politics indicates that the national integration or simply amalgamation is under threatening remark due to several reasons which are none but the nature of Indian politics itself namely the role of caste, regionalism, communalism, linguistic, and politics of minorities, politics of backward classes, politics of agitation, rallies and violence, politics of secession, disintegration and terrorism.<sup>2</sup> The basic purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of caste in Indian politics and how it become a major cause of serious concern and become obstacle to the national amalgamation and lastly, this paper concludes with few propositions to overcome these hurdles. In the social history of identity formulation of the deprived castes, Ambedkar name is the most

prominent as he was the thinker who successfully formulated an assertive and separate Dalit identity.

### **CASTE IN INDIAN POLITICS**

The substance of Indian politics has been largely modelled by its social, economic, religious and geographical conditions and these special conditions have further provided a clear-cut shape to Indian politics that is dominantly marked by the caste politics. Various scholars<sup>2</sup> view that Indian politics is mainly caste ridden politics as caste is long in the tooth and is a notable foundation of social stratification in India and interestingly we see some of the specific castes to be given superior place with social and economic entitlements that were denied to the lower caste of people. During Vedic period, the system of Varna became the foundation of social stratification and according to this system there were namely four Varnas like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Baishya and Sudra where each were assigned with specific role. However, with the progress of time the caste system came to the in endowment status, which got resolved by birth and as a result it has now become a divisive factor in our Indian society today.<sup>3</sup> Even in the post-independence period also these remain same although different measures had been seen to be taken to reduce the differences among the various existing castes, but the conclusive outcome was not so much positive as the influencing nature of caste system was seen to strongly affect the political dynamics of India from all levels and thus given a prominent disposition to the Indian politics. Like now, every political party is observed to give an alert and commanding view to the caste consideration in every candidate selections and appointment of ministers in the governance. However, not only these but also its influence has strongly affected the bureaucracy also.<sup>4</sup> Within this backdrop, the most recent reservation policy has given a new impetus to the role of caste in Indian politics and the role of caste in the different aspects of politics can be viewed by the given points as it is seen to influence the entire policy making of the government; example is vivid like Reservation policy in favour of certain castes.

- ❖ Caste plays a prominent role in the elections and voting behaviour where as a usual phenomenon the political parties select their candidates on caste lines.
- ❖ Caste factor naturally becomes central contemplation in all the programmes, 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.

- ❖ As a result this caste factor also influences in the genesis of council of ministers and making appointment to various political positions in the government.
- ❖ Most interestingly, caste also acts as pressure group in politics where mostly 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 behaviour of the public officials in carrying out the administrative duties eventually gets influenced by caste considerations.
- ❖ The political leadership in many political parties as a matter of fact emerges and sustains in politics on the foundation of support of certain caste groups.<sup>5</sup>

However, taking all these into considerations the increasing role of caste in politics as many political experts view it as a tendency that seem to develop a negative role<sup>6</sup> for the overall system which is not at all helpful for the development of democracy as regarded by scholars namely D.R. Gadgil and the famous sociologist M.N. Srinivas. Again on the contrary, some experts in the area also hold an opposite view point by saying that the role of caste is absolutely essential as it gives momentum to the political process specially in Indian context.

American political experts I. Rudolf and S.H. Rudolf<sup>7</sup> in their book “Modernity of hold the view that caste politics in India has reduced the divergence among caste and has brought about political non-discrimination among the members of different castes and so it is worth to mention here that the former President of India K.R. Narayanan had rightly mentioned that, “What is obstructing the unity and emotional integration of India is not so much the large divisions into regions, languages and religions, but the atomization of our society into numerous castes, sub-castes and tribes”.

### **ROLE OF DR B.R. AMBEDKAR IN INDIAN POLITICS OF CASTESIM**

Dr. Ambedkar analysed Hindu society before starting his struggle against untouchability and the caste system. He was a scholar as much as a man of action – in any case before becoming one. In his writings, Ambedkar tried hard to show the mechanisms of the caste system and clarified the origin of untouchability in order to support his fight for equality. For him, if the lower castes were not in a position to overthrow their oppressors, it was because of two reasons: they had

partially internalised hierarchy; and because of the very characteristics of caste-based inequality. The internalisation of hierarchy was largely due to what M.N. Srinivas was to call the sanskritisation process that Ambedkar, in fact, had identified more than 20 years before. As early as in 1916, Ambedkar presented his first research paper at Columbia University and explained that the caste system could not have been imposed by the Brahmins over society, but that it took shape when they were able to persuade other groups that their values were universally superior and that they had to be emulated by others, including endogamy, a marital rule which closed the system upon itself.<sup>8</sup>

The kind of inequality inherent in the caste system is called “graded inequality” by Ambedkar in a very perceptive way. In *Untouchables or the Children of the India’s Ghetto*, he contrasts it with other varieties of inequality which were not so difficult to abolish or correct<sup>9</sup>. In a society of “graded inequality”, the Bahujan Samaj is divided into the lower castes (Shudras) and the Dalits and the Shudras and the Dalits themselves are divided into many jatis. One of the main objectives of Dr. Ambedkar was first to unite the Dalits and, then, the Bahujan Samaj and, second to endow them with a separate identity that would offer them an alternative route out of sanskritisation.

In August 1947, Nehru made Ambedkar, doubtless under Gandhi’s<sup>10</sup> pressure, his Law Minister in the first government of independent India. Ambedkar accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister because, as he said later, “in the first place the offer was not subject to any condition and secondly it was easier to serve the interests of the Scheduled Castes from inside of the government than from outside”<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar, however, was in a position to make a strong impact on the making of the Constitution after he was appointed president of the “Drafting Committee”. This Committee, while it was not responsible for drafting the primary texts, had the essential function to get these into shape on the basis of articles proposed by other, issue-based, Committees, before submitting them to the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly made several readings and, each time, Drafting Committee members – and most often its chairman, Dr. Ambedkar – guided and channelized the discussion. In addition, he was one of the few members of the Constituent assembly, who belonged, besides the Drafting Committee, at the same time, to more than one of the 15

Committees – including the “Minorities Committee” where safeguards for the Dalits were discussed. On this account he was able to follow closely all along the debates on articles as important as those concerning the rights of the minorities. Most importantly, as president of the Drafting Committee, it was to him that was sent the propositions of the various committees. Therefore, it was for him, and the secretary of the committee, S.N. Mukherjee, to whom he would pay later a warm homage, to reformulate the obscure articles –and most of them needed some clarification work. These editorial tasks also rested largely on his shoulders because of the chronic absenteeism from which the Drafting Committee suffered.

Dr. Ambedkar was, on the contrary, a supporter of a strong Centre, on grounds that too much federalism would hamper the uniform application of the Constitution on the entire territory of India. He argued, for example, that the article abolishing untouchability would not be evenly enforced if the states enjoyed too large an autonomy<sup>12</sup>.

After the promulgation of the Constitution, in which he inculcate many articles for abolished the untouchability like Article 14, 15, 17 etc. Dr. Ambedkar militated in favour of the reform of the Hindu personal law. He wanted to implement in a revised manner the Hindu Code Bill that the British had gradually evolved. After more than one century of legislation – ranging from the Abolition of Sati (1829) to the Hindu Women’s Right to Property Act (1937) – they had decided in the 1940s to consolidate in one code the reformed Hindu personal law. Among its main provisions were the facts that daughters were given a share of the inheritance along with sons after the demise of parents, the widows were granted absolute estate, monogamy was a rule of law and divorce was allowed under certain circumstances. The Code was introduced in the legislature in April 1947 but the political circumstances – Independence and Partition – did not allow this body to discuss the text.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The politics of casteism in India should be legally banned with strict operation. It has been observed that although the caste practice is legally banned through the constitution by Article 17 yet, these have been practiced the society and ultimately penetrate into politics. Eventually, advantages of these have been taken by the political parties and leaders. In the states like Uttar

Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal these have been more pronounced hence, the political leaders and parties easily take the chances of these. The ultimate solution lies to the traditional attitude. Dr Ambedkar has tried all kind of strategies during his life for eradicating caste and, more especially, for emancipating the Dalit from this oppressive social systems. In the political domain, he promoted separate electorate, party building and public policies like reservations – and did not hesitate to collaborate with the ruler of the time – be it the British or the Congress for having things done. In the social domain, he militated in favour of reforms at the grass root level – education being his first goal – and reforms by the state – as evident from the Hindu code bill. None of his strategies really succeeded during his life time: he could not have separate electorate introduced, he could not build a Dalit or a labour party, he could not have the Hindu code bill and he became a bitter man.

### References

1. Dutta, A.R. (ed. 2013). *Politics in India: Issues Institutions Processes* ArunPrakashan, Panbazar, Guwahati-1
2. Kothari, Rajni., (1989) *Politics and the People; in search of a Humane India Vol.1, Ajanta, New Delhi.*
3. Kothari, Rajni., (1961) *Form and Substance in Indian Politics* *The Economic Weekly*, June, 3.
4. Hasan, Zoya, (ed.2002) *Parties and Party Politics in India* *Oxford University Press, New Delhi.*
5. Brass, R. Paul., (1994) *The Politics of India since Independence* *Cambridge University Press.*
6. Rudolph, L. I., & Rudolph, S. H. (1967). *The modernity of tradition: political development in India* *Chicago: University of Chicago Press*
7. Ambedkar B.R. (1917) “Castes in India. Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development”, *Indian Antiquary*, vol. 61, reproduced in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.
8. Ambedkar B.R.(1989) “Untouchables or The Children of India’s Ghetto” in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol.5, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, p. 101-102

10. Gaikwad.M.S. (1998)Ambedkar and Indian nationalism *Economic and Political Weekly*, in March 7, p. 518). (M.S. Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology*, op. cit., p. 18).
11. Quoted in G. Austin, *The Indian Constitution*, op. cit., p. 19-20.
12. Ambedkar was a member of the two sub-committees of the Advisory Committee (the one on fundamental rights, the other one on rights of the minorities) and of the Union of the Powers Committee.
13. CAD, vol. 5, Speech of April 9, 1948