Chapter One

Interaction between Caste and Modern Indian Politics

This chapter discusses the outline and objectives of the dissertation. This is done on a broad theoretical canvass of caste-politics interaction in India. Initially, a review of various theoretical perspectives on the caste system is undertaken. This is followed by a discussion on caste-politics interaction in India. Finally, the exact focus of the study is delineated.

Ghurye (1993), in a book which was published for the first time in 1932 had enlisted some features of the caste system, which was “unaffected by the modern ideas of rights and duties” (2). In fact, according to Ghurye these were the “features of Hindu society when it was ruled by the social philosophy of caste” (ibid). These features were “Segmental division of society”, “Hierarchy”, “Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse”, “Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections”, “Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation”, and “Restriction on marriage” (Ghurye, 1993: 2-18). According to Ghurye, the central feature of the caste system during the pre-British period was harmony and interdependence between different castes in a self-sufficient village (ibid: 22-27). However, he also qualifies this observation by stating that this harmony was not between the units equal to each other but was regulated by subordination of one group to another (ibid: 28). Ghurye further maintained that during British rule, various forces of new legal system, urbanisation, census operation and movements by the non Brahmans and dalits changed the nature of caste system to a large extent. Thus, even though the endogamy feature still persists in the caste system, the restrictions on the jobs of the castes became loose to a large extent (ibid: 302). Moreover, the members of castes across the villages and regions started to organise themselves into caste organisations. This converted “caste-society” into the “self centered groups more or less in conflict with one another” (ibid: 303). In other words, the changes introduced by the British rule were responsible for the replacement of caste system based on a harmonious and interdependent village society by the one in which the regionally organised castes competed with each other.
Another significant contribution in developing a theory of caste system came from Louis Dumont in his book which has been considered to be a classic in the theory of caste, "Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications". In the words of Fuller, this book gave "a total theory of the caste system" (Fuller, 1971: 405). According to this theory, the principle of hierarchy has been at the heart of the caste system which Dumont contrasts with the principles of liberty and equality that have been central to the modern Western societies (ibid: 405-406). For Dumont, Hindu religion provides an ideology to the caste system. This ideology consists of two types of contradictions (Quigley, 2003: 33). The first is between the pure and the impure. It expresses itself in the opposition between the Brahmans and the so-called untouchables. The second contradiction is between the secular and ritual which expresses itself into the secular power of the King and ritual power of the Brahman. In this ideology the Brahman representing the pure and ritual power is considered to be superior over the untouchables and the Kshatriyas representing the impure and the secular power respectively. However, when dealing with the rest of the society, the Brahmans and Kshatriyas get united against the former. Dumont calls the ideology of caste as expressed in some of the ancient Hindu texts like Law of Manu, to be a caste system at the "primary level" and the actual working of the caste in concrete socio-political and economic context to be at the "secondary level" (Smith, 1981: 101). In this, according to Dumont, the former "encompasses" the latter (ibid: 102).

Quigley criticized Dumont's theory of caste due to its inconsistency with the working of caste system in concrete reality (Quigley, ibid: 34-35). Dumont himself was aware of this fact and hence he was reported to have written that his theory dealt with the idea of caste and not with something which happens in "particular territories" (ibid: 35). Quigley's own conception of caste system is that it is a social system based on two features opposing each other (ibid: 39-43). One of them is lineage and another is political authority. The institution of lineage or kinship allows the members to form groups for exchanges in the field of marriage, food, and rituals. The political authority requires fertile land and availability of water to develop. The political authority may be formed by the dominant castes or any other caste group which has resources and numbers to extract obligation from other caste groups. Caste system emerged as a result of delicate balancing and interaction between those two forces.
Rig Veda maintained that the castes had “divine origin” (Srinivas and Shah, 1968: 358). Thus the four varnas are believed to have come out of “the limbs of primeval man” (ibid). Thus, the Brahmans are believed to have come out of his mouth, the Kshatriyas out of his hands, the vaishyas out of his thighs and the Shudras out of his feet. The so-called untouchables don’t find any mention in this scheme. In practice, however, one finds countless castes known as jatis, everyone of which lays claim of belonging to one or the other of the four varnas. Nevertheless, the Hindu religious texts mostly refer to varnas rather than jatis.

Adrian Mayer has summarized a number of important theories of caste, many of which deal with the origin of caste system (Mayer, 1968: 341-42). According to one of these theories, the caste system was invented by Brahmans to meet their own interests. Another view says that castes emerged out of interaction amongst people belonging to various varnas. The next theory proposed that caste system was a result of differentiation in the jobs and professions in which the people belonging to similar occupations placed themselves into common castes. According to another theory, “physical” abhorrence of Aryas against Dasas created an endogamous social system. This social system was having quantifiable bodily differentiations between its constituent social sections, so much so that the social positions of castes were correlated with certain physical features of the members of the caste. A different theory assumed that the caste system had its roots in the fact that rituals and functions in the royal courts became hereditary and graded according to the status attached with them. Another theory maintained that caste system was developed by the Aryans in their efforts to adjust their own social system with the one that they found already existing in India.

The basic features of caste system, according to the above-mentioned theories, have been occupation based on heredity that led to “functional interdependence and lack of competition” in addition to contradiction between “purity and impurity” (ibid: 342). According to Mayer, the contradictions between “purity and impurity” and between “economic and political” forces appearing in ritual forms have been basic characteristics of caste system (ibid). This implies that in certain context the political and economic dominance of certain castes may override the purity-pollution dimension. Thus, the castes eating non-vegetarian food, considered to be impure, may be considered to be belonging to higher ritual status than the castes eating vegetarian
food in certain local context. However, these two axes of purity-pollution and economic and political dominance may work in connection with and independent of each other at the same time (ibid).

Subrata Mitra maintained that deviations in the status accorded to the lower castes occur due to interaction of the caste system with the wider socio-economic and political system (Mitra, 2003: 57). Hence the system has to continuously use physical and cultural force in order to counter these deviations and sustain the system. Thus, the demands of the lower castes for the higher status within the system have been one such type of demands where the normal logic of the caste system had been challenged. Therefore, though these demands have not been for destruction of the caste system, they have been contested, frequently violently, by the upper castes.

Most of the earlier studies dealing with the caste were more concerned with the social processes involved in and the traditional roots of the caste system. Since the later part of 19th and early 20th century, the caste system started to be seen as an asymmetrical distribution of socio-economic and political power. Various socio-political movements have unfolded around this issue since then. In a way, this was an expression of democratic politics during the British India and after. Our study deals with this issue of power relations in the caste system occurring within the democratic politics in India.

The interaction between caste and modern Indian politics has been seen from diverse perspectives. According to the modernists, like Pandit Nehru, Indian politics after Independence is essentially “modern” due to formal adoption of democracy, industrialization and modernist pattern of development. According to the modernists, the caste in India is a part of the traditional social structure. Hence, the impact of caste upon Indian politics is something backward in nature, which needs to be dispensed with. The caste was seen essentially in terms of hierarchy operating in Hindu social milieu. The caste was also related to the process of getting beyond the cycle of birth and death (Mitra, ibid: 52). The modernist intellectuals in India were inspired by the aim of building the nation based on secularism, democracy, social justice and economic development (ibid). This made them see caste as a part of retrograde tradition acting in conflict with their vision of creating modern India. This made modernists like Jawaharlal Nehru view caste as “the main source of India’s social political and even moral degeneration” (Bhiku Parekh quoted in ibid: 53). Thus, the
modernist understanding of caste-politics interaction emerged from their dichotomous understanding of modernity and tradition.

According to Rajni Kothari, caste and Indian politics interact with each other. In this interaction, caste shades away many of its traditional features and adopts certain modern features. He calls this process as “politicization of caste.” On the other hand, Indian politics is influenced by caste, which is a traditional social structure. Rajni Kothari sees this process as the interaction of modernity and tradition. Due to the interface with modern politics, the caste has undergone a certain change in India. This change takes place in the form of emergence of the caste associations and caste federations, which provide conduits through which political democracy works in India (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987).

D. L. Sheth describes the main features of caste as given by Duarte Barbosa, the 16th century Portuguese, as “the most perceptive, empirical account of caste” (Sheth, 1999: 2502). These features are:

a) Caste as a hierarchy with Brahmans at the top and ‘untouchables’ at the bottom.

b) Untouchability as linked to the idea of ‘pollution’.

c) Existence of plurality of ‘castes’ separated from each other by endogamy, occupation and commensality.

d) Application of sanctions by castes to maintain their own customs and rules.

e) Relationship of caste with political organisation.

Barbosa’s account of caste is “a matter of fact account of what he saw and was told about caste...”. He did not use religious scriptures as a source of information, and “there is no reference to the varna theory of caste in his narratives” (ibid.). Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the hierarchical distinctions of caste, at least among Hindus, were “acknowledged, upheld and reinforced by law, religion and morality”. This began to change thereafter because of British presence as well as the Indian response to it (Beteille, 2000: 161). It also needs to be kept in mind that at the empirical level, caste hierarchy has never been static. In terms of hierarchy and boundary for interaction among social groups, the caste structure can be more or less neat and identified without much difficulty, at the village level. However, it is not so neat at the regional level. To see an empirically
based macro structure of caste at the national level is even more difficult (Shah, 2005: 9).

**Caste under the Influence of Politics**

Caste and politics interacted in the pre-British India too. Only, this interaction was episodic then. And today caste-politics interaction takes place “in a very naked fashion, in all kinds of combinations, and on every day basis” (Gupta, 2005: 17). Though our focus in this chapter would be on the interaction between caste and Indian politics in the post Independence era, it is necessary to underline the effects of British rule upon caste system, for it laid down foundations of changes in the caste system in modern times. From 1901 Census, the colonial state began caste-wise enumeration of the entire Indian population. As D. L. Sheth has pointed out, the operation of this census gave a dual role to the British colonial state, namely that of a “superbrahmin” who located and relocated disputed status of castes in the traditional hierarchy and that “of a just and modern ruler who wished to “recognize” rights and aspirations of its weak and poor subjects” (Sheth, ibid: 2503). Apart from helping the state to protect its colonial political economy from the pressures of emerging nationalist movement, Census operations also induced people to organise and represent their interests in politics in terms of caste identities and participate in the economy on the terms and through mechanisms set by the colonial regime (ibid).

Apart from some specific policies of the colonial regime, aimed at delegitimising the power of the traditional social elites and creating support for its own rule, the larger historical forces of modernisation, secularisation and urbanisation unleashed by the British rule brought about some changes in the caste system. The most important among these changes was the formation of a new trans-local identity among the “lower castes” as belonging to the categories like “oppressed classes” and “depressed castes” with the consciousness of being “oppressed” by the traditional system of hierarchy. The discourse on rights, until then quite alien to the concepts governing ritual hierarchy, gave rise to the new ideological categories like “social justice”, which started to question the idea of ritual purity and impurity, according to which the traditional stratificatory system distributed entitlements and disprivileges to hereditary status (ibid). Thus, the modernisation introduced by British rulers gave rise to a paradoxical process as far as caste was concerned. On one hand, caste was delegitimised as an organising principle of social and political relations. On the other
hand however, caste had to be recognised by the rulers-colonial and post-colonial; and by the social movements as a form of social reality. The latter had to recognise caste while fighting against injustice and the former, for various purposes like census enumeration, reservations etc.

Movements of the lower castes for upward social mobility were taking place in the history of the caste system but they acquired a qualitatively new turn as they began to attack the very ideological foundations of the ritual hierarchy of castes, in terms not internal to the system (as was the case with the Buddhist and Bhakti movements), but in the modern ideological terms of justice and equality (ibid).

With India’s decolonization and formal acceptance of political democracy, these changes were intensified and acquired new dimensions. The caste provided “the bases for communication, representation, and leadership” to the political democracy in India in the form of structures called caste associations (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 64). Rudolphs call caste association as “paracommunity”. The basis of membership in caste association is not solely ascriptive. This implies that taking birth in a particular caste does not guarantee the membership of association of that caste. One has to ‘join’ consciously by attaching oneself to the association’s activities, supporting the candidate or party backed by the association and remaining present at the meetings of the association (ibid: 33). For Ghanshyam Shah, most caste associations do not directly get involved in electoral politics. “The caste associations of those jatis which can muster large numbers and cover a wide geographical area, are frequently active in electoral politics” (Shah, 2005: 19).

As far as marriage relations are concerned, the real unit of the caste system is subcaste. Each subcaste is endogamous, with the few exceptions to this rule in the form of the practice of hypergamy (Ghurye, 2005: 53). However, the caste associations sought to destroy these boundaries of endogamous subcastes “by calling for their expansion to other hitherto endogamous groups within the jati, similar jatis, or fellow varna members, rarely by calling for their destruction” (Rudolph and Rudolph, ibid: 111). As Michelutti observes, the idea of Krishnanshni kinship, consolidated by the Yadav Mahasabha is resulting into making the idea of intermarriages between the endogamous groups of Yadavs more and more popular amongst the Yadavs of Mathura. Krishna becoming the main God and ancestor of the
various endogamous Yadav subcastes is destroying the hierarchy and cultural differences existing within this community (Michelutti, 2004: 58).

According to Arnold, Jeffrey and Manor, the caste associations are a response of the concerned castes "(T)o combat occupational diversity and disparity of wealth within the community" (Arnold et al., 1976: 372). Stressing the unity, discovering and rediscovering a common heritage and exploiting the grievances shared by the community are the tools used by the caste associations to achieve this. The leadership of these caste associations comes not from the traditional caste authorities, but from the newly emerging western educated section amongst the caste. These leaders muster the support from their caste members in order to establish themselves more firmly in their non-traditional careers (ibid).

Another modification in the traditional caste system due to its interaction with the modern politics emerges in the form of a caste federation. It refers to coming together of endogamous caste groups for achieving common objectives, which are secular in nature. The difference between the caste association and caste federation is that the former consists of a group of jatis or subcastes located on the similar status position in a region in the traditional Indian society, while the latter are the organisations "of multicastes that have different social rankings in the traditional order" (Shah, 2005: 18). The Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha is an example of such a caste federation, consisting of Rajputs, who are upper caste and the Kolis, who belong to a lower caste. There were many reasons to bring these opposite extremes of the caste structure under one roof of the caste federation. The Patidars who grew economically and politically strong during the British rule challenged the traditional pre-eminence of the Rajput leaders. During the late 1940s, the Rajput leaders realized that in the competitive electoral system one needs numerical and organisational strength to acquire political power. Hence, they decided to include Kolis into their organisation (Shah, 1975: 47). Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Kolis were willing to acquire the Kshatriya status by making vigorous demands to the census, imitating Rajput customs, and changing their occupations. The Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha acknowledged their claim to the Kshatriya status (ibid: 32). The common economic position of the Rajputs and Kolis also cemented their political union. Both these groups were labourers and tenants. In Kutch and Saurashtra, where the Rajputs were landowning class, this union could not take place (Kothari and Maru, 2005:241). Thus, for the
upper castes the urge to maintain their traditional position in the new socio-political setup and the motivation of the lower castes to move upwards in the traditional social hierarchy fused together in the formation of such kind of caste federations in India. According to Kothari and Maru, "...Although the lower castes still grant the privilege of one or more upper castes to govern and rule, such deference is increasingly conditioned by norms of accountability and notions of interest and right" (ibid: 259).

Due to the interaction of castes with the Indian politics in the post-Independence era, the various features of the traditional caste system started to erode. Various castes, lower and higher getting into the competition for votes through their caste associations and federations, started to contest as equals of each other. This happened initially with the middle and lower castes of south India like Vanniyars in Tamil Nadu, Marathas and Mahars in Maharashtra; and during 1960s and 1970s with Yadavs, Kurmis and Chamars in North India. These lower castes confronted the upper castes in the arena of electoral politics, making vertical caste structure convert itself into horizontal structure to varying degrees. As noted above, the caste associations made various endogamous subcastes to destroy the marriage boundaries between them and created caste as a single endogamous unit. This helped to erase the endogamy feature of caste system to a certain extent.

This structural change in the caste system reflected itself into the change in consciousness of the caste members. Caste consciousness is now expressed in political consciousness of groups staking claims to power and resources. This consciousness is different from that of belonging to the high or low ritual status-group. According to D. L. Sheth,

"The rise of such consciousness of castes has led to disruption of hierarchical relations and to increase in competition and conflict among them. Far from strengthening the caste system, the emergent competitive character of 'caste consciousness' has contributed to its systemic disintegration" (Sheth, 1999: 2504).

Largely because of the fact that village level jajmani/balutedari system of economic interaction has been replaced by the contractual relations between the employer and employee, labourer and the capitalist, the social relations in the villages of India have become "de-ritualized". This does not mean that there is no relationship between the
caste and the profession of the individual. It only means that this relation is not regulated by the religion-based code of the caste system any more, but by the economic resources at one’s disposal. One may contend here that in India, ownership of economic resources is largely decided by one’s caste. Nevertheless, this may be partially true because again there are quite a few individuals who have managed to enter into the professions, prohibited to them by the traditional caste system. Moreover, there is increasing resistance from the lower castes to this caste-based division of labour. This process of secularisation after Independence has given rise to a small but vocal middle class from the lower castes. This upwardly mobile section amongst the lower castes, now does not want to register higher ritual status. Rather their pursuit is for obtaining modern education, wealth, political power and other means of modern status (Sheth, 2005: 224).

The interaction of the castes with the electoral politics resulted into fusion of the identity and interest aspects of castes and created new larger social collectives such as the Dalits, the backward classes, the upper castes etc. These new social identities were quite open and being formed not on the bases of ritual status and position of a caste, but by the politico-economic interests. Therefore, in reality, these are not caste identities but “political” identities. Hence, ritually non-dwija castes of rich farmers like Reddys in Andhra Pradesh and Patidars in Gujarat started to be viewed as forming parts of the larger collectivity called the upper castes. In the words of D. L. Sheth,

“These new collectivities did not resemble either the old varna categories or anything like the polarised class structure in politics...(these) can be described, for lack of a more appropriate term, as an ethno-political identity(ies)” (ibid: 221, brackets added)

The green revolution and the affirmative action policy implemented in many states of the Indian union gave birth to a small but significant section amongst many lower caste groups. This section was represented into the bureaucracy and other white collared jobs. This meant increasing economic stratification within the castes. This resulted in the prominence being given to the dominant section amongst the lower caste groups. Hence, the demands like reservations in education and government jobs, more places in the state or central cabinet got precedence over the demands like the land reforms and higher wages for labourers. This economic differentiation has led to
the tensions within the deprived castes. Hence, the poorer sections have been lukewarm in their support to the white-collar employees of their castes who fought against the upper castes on the issue of reservation in Gujarat during the 1980 anti-reservation agitation (Shah, 2005: 17).

**Politics under the Influence of Caste**

Modern Indian Politics involves confluence of the formal political democracy, industrialization and formal acceptance of the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Though this process of modern Indian politics was started by the British rule, it formally came to fruition with the acceptance of Democratic Constitution by Sovereign Indian nation state.

As the nature of the caste system has changed under the influence of modern political process in India, so has Indian politics taken its specific shape in interaction with the caste system. For Rajni Kothari, the interaction between the caste and modern Indian politics unfolded itself in three stages. In the first stage, the struggle for power and for benefits remained limited only “to the entrenched caste in the social hierarchy” (Kothari, 2001: 14). The members of the entrenched caste belonged to the individuals from the higher castes. This group “was united more by a common social and intellectual endowment and idiom than through any organisational and political mobilisation” (ibid). However, when this entrenched position is enjoyed by only one higher caste or sub-caste, it is soon challenged by the other higher castes. This group challenging the entrenched group is called as “ascendant caste” by Korhari (ibid: 15). However, such a polarization gets bypassed where the entrenched caste is at a great distance, ritually and socially, from the other “higher” castes or where the different higher castes are spread out to be entrenched at different power centers. During the second stage, competition within the entrenched and ascendant castes leads to factionalism and competition within these castes. In order to strengthen the factionalized support base, these castes seek to mobilise the other castes that were hitherto kept away from the process of politicization. This is nothing but a process of political mobilisation of the lower castes. In the due course of time, this politically mobilised group of the lower caste may create its own independent niche in the political universe by creating its own political support base strong enough to challenge the political domination of the “entrenched castes”. Whether this would happen or not depends upon a number of things. These pre-conditions relate to the
nature of leadership, numerical strength, economic independence, consciousness of relative deprivation in terms of political power amongst the lower castes (ibid: 16-17). During the third stage, “the weakening of older identities and the introduction of politicized values coincide with other changes taking place in society through the impact of education, technology, changing status symbols, and urbanization...Political, economic, educational, and communications functions, traditionally performed by the same social structure, are now differentiated and get established in terms of their own purposes, structures and dynamics” (ibid: 19).

This highly theoretical and condensed formulation about the caste-politics interaction put forward by Rajni Kothari was supplemented by historical analysis made by various scholars. For the first two decades after Independence, the Congress party ruled India, both at the national level as well as at the state level, barring the state of Kerala. Some scholars have called this rule as “Congress System” (Kothari, 1964). Partly due to its secular rhetoric, partly due its self-image as national party, Congress never made use of the language of caste while mobilizing its voters. The Congress used the discourse of “nation building” to mobilise the voters across the country. While doing so, the Brahman political leadership of the pre-Independence Congress in the south India ceded its leadership to the non-Brahman leaders who organised and asserted themselves in the colonial India. And in the north Indian states, the upper and middle castes continued to dominate the Congress leadership. This system of power sharing of the Congress created the patron-client relationship in the society through electoral mechanisms. This was a relationship of unequal but reliable exchanges between the patrons, consisting of the upper and dominant castes, and the clients, consisting of the SCs, STs, OBCs, and minorities, especially Muslims. In this system, the patrons, who were the ruling classes were supposed to distribute the spoils of the system to their clients in exchange of political support from the latter.

Thus, in the south Indian states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, one or two cohesive agricultural dominant castes in the countryside became the backbone of the Congress dominance in those states for nearly 30 years after Independence. Castes like Marathas in Maharashtra, Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka, and Reddys and Kammas in AP emerged as the largest castes statewide. Congress party managed to sustain its control over the politics of these states by giving political leadership to the leading members of those castes. However, this Congress strategy
could not work in the state of Tamil Nadu due to the absence of state-wide, or even regional forward non-Brahman castes, whose leading members could control the patronage network throughout the state (Frankel, 1991: 244). This numerical weakness of the larger landowner castes, allowed DMK to outsmart them in rural areas by mobilizing small farmers, most of whom belonged to the Backward Classes (ibid). In the north Indian states of UP and Bihar, on the other hand, the Congress party was dominated by the upper castes (ibid: 240) which went unchallenged till the late 1960s. In UP, the upper caste dominated Congress was supported by the upper castes, the Scheduled Castes and the Muslims, but could not obtain the support of the middle castes, notably Jats or the backward caste peasantry (Weiner, 2004: 197). This section of population was mobilised under the leadership of Charan Singh in UP and Rammanohar Lohia in Bihar. This political process is discussed below.

Caste, Politics and Region

The interaction between the caste and modern Indian politics is interspersed by many other elements like class, as discussed above. In this process of permutation and combination between many factors, “region” plays an important role. Whether the above-mentioned so-called ethno-political identities become regionally and politically viable or not depends largely upon its region-specific incarnation. Hence Dalit politics, for example became a politically viable category only in some regional pockets of India like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The radicalism of the anti-caste discourse by the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra was considerably weakened by the alliance of Brahmans and sections of Marathas for the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement. This ensured the continued dominance of Brahmans in culture, education, and media; while the former conceded the space for the dominance of formal politics to the Marathas under the benevolent cover of “Maharashtra Dharma” (Palshikar, 2006: 279). In Tamil Nadu, even the numerically dominant caste in any district does not account for more than one fourth of the population of that district. Hence, according to Palshikar, in spite of the very vocal non-Brahman movement in Tamil Nadu, the peculiar demographic nature of the state in terms of the caste composition has probably led to the sustained recourse to militant regional nationalism, in particular by the Dravidian parties (Palshikar, 2006).
The nature of relationship between caste and Indian politics also depends upon the regional variations of caste profiles in India. The difference between the north and south India is a case in point. In south India, the caste structure, being relatively steep meant that there was a wide ritual gap between the upper and the lower castes. This was because the castes performing social functions similar to the Kshatriya and Vaishya castes in north India were not granted the same ritual status in south India. These castes were relegated to the Shudra ritual status in south India. This, along with the Brahman dominance over the newly created power centers of the administrative and political structures of the British rule created strong resentment amongst the middle castes against the Brahmans of the erstwhile Bombay and Madras presidencies. This culminated in the non-Brahmans’ organised struggle against Brahman domination under the banner of Self Respect movement in Madras and Brahmanetar movement in Bombay presidencies. On the other hand, in the north India, relatively larger proportion of twice born castes, due to the existence of the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the caste hierarchy made the caste structure relatively flat. Hence, along with the Brahmans, the other twice born castes had their share in the access to the modern administrative and political structures. This made Rudolhs to conclude that non-Brahmanism and hence horizontal mobilisation of the subject castes seems to have flourished in the regions where the caste hierarchy is relatively steep than in the areas with the “gradual and continuous social landscapes” (Rudolphs, 1987: 77-79). Thus according to the 1931 census, the last to give a caste-wise breakup, upper castes represented 13.6% in Bihar and 24.2% in Rajasthan. And in Andhra Pradesh on the other hand, the Brahmans and Kshtriyas represented 3% and 1.2% respectively, in Maharashtra, they were accounting for 3.9% and 1% respectively, with Vaishyas representing 1.69 % (Jaffrelot, 2000: 757).

Rudolph and Rudolph explain the relationship between caste and politics with the help of three types of political mobilisation, viz, vertical, horizontal, and differential. According to Rudolph and Rudolph,

“Vertical mobilization is the marshalling of political support by traditional notables in local societies that are organized and integrated by rank, mutual dependence, and the legitimacy of traditional authority. Notables reach vertically into such social systems by attaching dependants and socially inferior groups to themselves
through their interests and deference” (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 24).

Indian politics till the 1970s could be called as the classic example of vertical mobilisation where the local “notables” or the dominant castes in each state used to marshal political support of the lower caste “vote banks” for the upper caste dominated Congress party at the national level and upper-middle caste dominated Congress party at the state level.

Horizontal mobilisation involves direct appeal by the community leader or the community organisation to the concerned community. For Rudolphs, “(H)orizontal mobilisation of solidarities among class or community equals introduces a new pattern of cleavage by challenging the vertical solidarities and structures of traditional societies” (ibid: 25). In this type of mobilisation, the plebian groups challenge the vertical relation of dependence and patronage and search for an independent political niche for themselves. In India, generally, the broad “ethno-political” caste identities, when they have only one political vehicle and single caste parties can be classified under this type of mobilisation.

Rudolphs define the differential mobilisation as “the marshalling of direct and indirect political support by political parties (and other integrative structures) from viable, but internally differentiated, communities through parallel appeals to ideology, sentiment and interest” (ibid). Though Rudolphs mention that the agent of this kind of mobilisation is “the political party rather than the local notable and community association,” they mention at other place that these three types are ideal types and the concrete cases may take the form of combination between these three. Moreover, they also mention the case of non-Brahman political mobilisation by the Justice Party in the erstwhile Madras state as the example of the horizontal mobilisation (ibid: 85). The competition for the votes of OBC communities by the SP, the BSP and the BJP is the case in point. Here the rival political parties competing for support of the community exploit the internal differentiation within it. Generally, this type of mobilisation emerges for the communities in which the internal differentiation is strong enough to create factions and different political parties vying for the support of the community seek after these factions.
Again, due to the interaction between caste, class, and politics in India, one may find different types of mobilisational patterns in the same state or in the case of same caste. Thus, the Jats of Rajasthan organised horizontally to counter Rajput dominance and at the same time vertically mobilised their dependants in localities where they were dominant (ibid).

“Mandalisation” of Indian Politics

The lower caste mobilisation in south India was endowed with the alternative ideology to Brahmanic Hinduism in the form of “pre-Aryan pedigree” (Shudr- atishudra) by Phule, Buddhism by Ambedkar, Dravid by Periyar; while the north Indian lower caste mobilisation was entangled either in the framework of Sanskritization or Bhakti Movement. Hence, the north Indian lower castes could not build the “alternative, egalitarian sub-culture” as the lower caste movements in the south India created it. Hence, the development of these multi caste alliances like non- Brahman and Dalit could not take place in north India, and remained confined to south India before Independence (Jaffrelot, 2000: 765-66).

In fact, the genesis of the OBC politics in south India lied in the non-Brahman movement if the OBC politics is understood as the political assertion of the intermediate and lower castes. In 1990, the central government decided to partially implement Mandal Commission report. This decision involved keeping reservations for OBCs in government jobs and professional education. After this decision, the lower and intermediate castes asserted themselves politically. This assertion was ridiculed contemptuously as “Mandalisation of Politics” by the English educated elite of this country. (Sheth, 1999: 2507).

The roots of this OBC politics lie in the post-Independence politics of north India, specifically in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In UP, this happened under the kisan politics under the leadership of Charan Singh. Charan Singh organised the peasants’ interests against the dominant industrial interests. He did this by projecting the rural vs urban dichotomy of interests in India. In fact, Charan Singh was championing the cause of the middle class peasant proprietors in the western UP. This section had emerged as a result of land reforms, which, in spite of being incomplete, enabled many tenants to emerge as peasant proprietors and Green Revolution, which benefited those land owners who had some investment capacity (Jaffrelot, 2000a: 91).
This kisan politics was likely to reinforce the hegemony of the Jat landowners over the other lower castes. Nevertheless, it forged a broad coalition of the cultivating castes known as AJGAR (Ahirs, Jats, Gujars, and Rajputs) consisting of status from OBC to intermediate and upper castes, excluding the untouchables who were often landless laborers (Jaffrelot, ibid: 91, 93).

Another route of the political mobilisation of the lower castes in north India took place in Bihar under the leadership of Rammanohar Lohia and his socialist followers under the rubric of what Jaffrelot calls as “quota politics” (Jaffrelot, 2005: 270). Lohia, who was one of the founder members of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), in the course of time came to realize that “… economic inequality and caste inequality as twin demons, which have both to be killed” (Lohia, 1979 as quoted in Jaffrelot, 2005: 261). His Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) resolved in 1966 that inter-Varna marriage should be made a qualification for government employment and government servants must be compelled to attend inter-dining among themselves twice a year. Prior to that, in 1957, one of the divided factions of the All India Backward Classes Federation, under the leadership of R. L. Chandapuri, merged with Lohia’s Socialist Party, a fusion based on ideological affinities between the two leaders. Though, Lohia was for positive discrimination in favour of Backward Castes in the government administration and elected bodies, he was against it in the education system. Nevertheless, his SSP recommended a quota of 60% for the backward section of society consisting of the SCs, STs, the OBCs and women to be extended not only to the government administration and elected bodies but also to the education system.

In 1967, Karpoori Thakur, one of Lohia’s lieutenants popularized the slogan: “Socialist ne bandhi ganth/ Pichara pave saume sath” (now Socialists are determined to get 60% reservations for the backwards). The decline of Congress during the 1967 assembly elections in Bihar from 41.35% to 33% of the valid votes was partly due to the erosion of the OBC support to the Congress. This growing assertion of the backward castes resulted in the increasing share of ministerial positions being allotted to the backward caste representatives in the state. Thus, Socialist mobilisation and ideology under Lohia’s leadership helped the lower castes to forge political alliances and exert their influence on the politics of Bihar (ibid: 256-271).

These two routes of political assertion of the lower castes—the kisan politics and quota politics—were consolidated at the level of the state politics of the UP and Bihar.
respectively, after late 1960s. They could not make their mark on the national politics, barring the brief spell of the Janata government during the late 1970s. During this brief spell the Second Backward Classes Commission, under the chairmanship of Mr. B. P. Mandal (also known as Mandal Commission) came to be constituted by the Janata government. The report of this Commission was shelved by the Congress government at the centre nearly for a decade. It was only in August 1990, when V. P. Singh the then Prime Minister of National Front government declared the implementation of the Mandal Commission report by providing 27% reservations for the OBCs in the government jobs. This government had to face its own internal contradictions in the form of the groups representing kisan politics, under the leadership of Devi Lal and quota politics under the leadership of V. P. Singh (Jaffrelot, 2000a: 96). Though Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal resigned only a few days before the announcement to implement the Mandal report, his departure signaled a major rupture between the kisan politics and quota politics. This was so, because V. P. Singh’s policies were seen to be posing threat to the Jat interests and the former was seen to be encouraging assertiveness amongst the lower caste tenants and agriculture laborers. Devi Lal’s resignation was seen as the breakdown of Charan Singh’s kisan coalition. For the partisans of “quota politics”, this breakdown was desirable as kisan politics for them was serving the interests of peasant proprietors, who were interested in keeping the rural plebeians under their control (ibid: 97). Nevertheless, the decision to implement the Mandal report, at least for a time being, made a broad range of castes to come under the OBC label. The stiff opposition made by the upper castes to the decision of implementing the Mandal Commission report reinforced this process. The students from the upper caste- lower middle class demonstrated against the new quota that would, they feared, deprive them of the few seats in the government administration. They further demanded that all reservations, including reservations for the Schedule Castes must be abolished. This demand made Dalit and OBC leaders come closer (ibid).

This political assertion of the OBCs was evident by growing proportion of OBC MPs in the states of the Hindi belt—Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Chandigarh—throughout the 1990s. Indeed this became possible for the OBCs because they decided to come out of the vertical, patron-client relations shaped by the Congress local notables and “became more
aware of their common interests and decided no longer to vote for upper caste candidates” (ibid.: 98). This phase of post-Mandal era is significant also because after 1996 no government at the national level was possible without inducting the political parties standing for quota politics for the OBCs.

**Post-Mandal Pangs**

Though the decision to implement the Mandal Commission report made the diverse castes to unite politically under the OBC label, and this process was reinforced by the opposition made by the upper caste-lower middle class students, soon some fissures started to appear in this broad based political unity. This happened due to many reasons. First, the OBC is purely an administrative-legal category. It does conceal the large-scale socio-economic diversity of the caste groups coming under this category. These people were united as a response to the opposition mounted to the reservations by the upper castes. Nevertheless, as soon as the upper castes gave up their opposition, largely due to the new opportunities opened up in the private sector in the new liberalized economy after 1991, the cracks in the socio-economic status of OBC caste groups laid bare. Second, there was a growing feeling amongst the OBC caste groups that the benefits of the reservation and political empowerment of the OBCs were disproportionately consumed by the Yadavs, the politically and numerically strong OBC caste in UP and Bihar. This resulted in the political resentment amongst the non-Yadav castes, who either created single caste parties like Apna Dal in UP or diverted to the other state-level political parties like the BSP in UP or Samata Party in Bihar. Third, the BJP sought to compete for the OBC votes, thereby mobilizing at least some OBC castes under the Hindutva ideology (Jaffrelot, 2000a:106). This blunted the ideological edge of the OBC politics. All these factors combined together, corroded the political effectivity of the OBCs by the start of this millennium.

During the late 1990s the OBC reservation was accepted as the state policy, various parties incorporated OBCs into their organisations; at the level of the local government bodies SCs, STs and OBCs got reserved seats. This, according to Suhas Palshikar, has ensured that no effective mobilisation of OBCs would take place. These factors made Palshikar to conclude that the caste issue itself appears to have reached its limits in terms of its capacity of political mobilisation and it has to search for the new mobilisational catalyst to reinvent its political potency (Palshikar, 2006: 294-95).
Aims of the Study

Different caste blocs have appeared in the history of Indian politics. Dalits, non-Brahmans, Bahujan Samaj and OBCs are some of the instances. The basic aim of this study is to explain and analyse the process by which a collection of castes develops into caste blocs. The study aims at investigating how these caste blocs get formed and operationalised in Indian politics. This study also looks at the process by which these caste blocs influence the democratic politics in India and get influenced by the latter. Moreover, a process by which these caste blocs get disintegrated has been analyzed. This process has been studied by taking the case of the OBCs as a caste bloc operating in Indian politics during the post-Mandal era. The period covered in the post-Mandal era would be from 1990 to 2004. Further, this study of OBC politics has been done by focusing on its manifestations at the state level. This has been done, especially because during the post-Mandal era, the centre of politics in India was said to have shifted to the state level. Thus, OBC politics in the states of Maharashtra, UP and Tamil Nadu had been analysed in this dissertation. This will illuminate different patterns of OBC politics in India. Moreover, an attempt has been made to compare the OBC political assertion in these three states. There are mainly two reasons behind choosing the above three states. First, these three states are from the western (Maharashtra), northern (Uttar Pradesh) and southern (Tamil Nadu) India. Hence, it would emerge from the study whether one gets different patterns of OBC politics in these different parts of India. Second, these three states have peculiar historical patterns of development of OBC politics, with two of them, namely Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu more or less sharing similar historical background in the form of non Brahman movement. In the background of this complicated history of OBC mobilisation, it would be interesting to see whether different patterns of OBC politics emerge from these states in the post-Mandal era.

In the post-Mandal era, the caste started to play a more direct role in the politics of various states. Before this, during the politics of Congress dominance, caste did play a role in Indian politics but more often than not it was subtle. Openly, the language of development, national integration, secularism and so on was used. During the post-Mandal era, the issue of caste started to be expressed in politics more openly, directly using the language of exploitation by the upper castes, social justice, and demand for representation. Amongst the social scientists too a lot of debate around
democratisation of Indian politics due to OBC and dalit politics started to take shape. These processes make it interesting for a student of political science to try and understand the process of OBC politics in the post-Mandal era.

In the second chapter of this thesis, historical roots of the OBC politics have been analysed. This chapter seeks to deal with the emergence and development of the coalition of castes known as OBC. In fact, this conglomeration of different castes developed under different nomenclatures in these three states. Thus, in Maharashtra, they were known as non-Brahmans and Bahujan Samaj; in Tamil Nadu, they were referred to as non-Brahmans and Dravidians and in Uttar Pradesh as the Other Backward Castes. In this chapter, the underlying process contributing to the creation of this cluster of castes has been analysed. This has been done by describing the socio-economic and political conditions of these castes, the ideological support provided for their mobilisation and the role of leaders and mobilisers of these castes. Also, the role of different political and social movements in organising this group of castes has been elaborated upon. The beginnings of the mobilisation of these castes happened in these states at two different periods of Indian politics. The larger political context of these developments has also been analysed. One witnesses a process of fusion and fission amongst these castes during this formative stage itself. Thus, when the non-Brahman identity was being shaped in Maharashtra, Maratha vs Non-Maratha conflict arose; in Tamil Nadu, various single non-Brahman castes asserted their independent existence when the Justice Party was demanding separate communal electorates for the non-Brahmans in the Madras Province. These complex processes are underlined in the discussion in this chapter.

Chapter three deals with the interaction between the OBC politics and the political party system in those three states during the post-Mandal era. The political party system in India changed during the post-Mandal era. This change found expression in a number of ways. Not only did the number of political players increase, but new social forces also started to get active in and influence the political process. Though this process had its effects on the national level politics, it unfolded itself mainly at the state level. In all the three states under our study, the OBCs were instrumental in giving rise to the political forces which destabilised the established political party system. Thus, in Maharashtra, OBCs played a crucial role in strengthening the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance in state politics. In Tamil Nadu, single caste OBC political parties
emerged during this period. This put a question mark before the political consolidation of various OBC groups achieved by Dravidian parties in this state. During 1990s, even though the Dravidian parties alternated into the office, they had to rely increasingly on alliance with the single caste parties to win elections. In UP, for the first time since Independence, parties claiming to represent OBCs and dalits emerged in the post-Mandal era. These OBC and dalit political parties not only contended the claim of the Congress party to represent all the sections of society, but they also uprooted the Congress party from the state politics for at least two decades. Thus during the decade of Mandal politics, when the category of OBC was coming of age and influencing the politics in the north Indian states like UP and Bihar, the OBC political front started to disintegrate in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

This chapter also analyses the nature of political party system in these three states since Independence. In the light of this experience of party system, the transformation taking place therein during the post-Mandal era has been analysed. An attempt has been made to understand not only the impact of the OBC politics on the party system, but also the changes brought about in the OBC politics by the larger political environment. Thus, uncertainty and instability created in UP politics in the post-Mandal era compelled the OBC political parties there to adjust their political strategy to include even various upper castes into their political appeal. In Maharashtra, political fragmentation of OBCs and Maratha caste group impelled Shiv Sena to rely increasingly on the support of Marathas in addition to OBCs.

Chapter four deals with the interaction between the OBC politics on one hand, and another meta-narrative of the Indian politics during 1990s- Hindutva politics, on the other. Initially, it appeared as if the OBC politics carrying the mantle of social justice and secular ideology would act as a counter to the Hindutva politics. However, at the ground level, both countered as well as coalesced each other. This process was sharply evident again at the state level. Thus in UP, the social engineering project of the BJP meant that the OBCs were given various important positions in the party. In Maharashtra, an effort was made to organise OBCs under a non-Congress, non-BJP Shiv Sena political formation. This political experiment of the Bahujan Mahasangha was also an attempt to build a social and political coalition between OBCs and dalits. However, this experiment proved to be short-lived. Ultimately, in Maharashtra, the OBCs organised themselves under the Hindutva political forces.
In TN, during 1990s the Hindutva social and political forces tried to mobilise the support of OBCs and other social sections. However, the Hindutva political forces could not establish their foothold in the state. The main Dravidian parties themselves adopted soft Hindutva stance on many occasions, in this decade. Also, the Hindutva organisations introduced public celebration of some Hindu religious festivals in the state. These public celebrations were unheard of till the early 1990s in the state. In the course of time, celebration of these Hindu festivals developed their own dynamics and went out of the influence of the Hindutva organisations. In other words, “normalisation of Hindutva” took place in the lives of the people in the state. So, without winning the battle for political power in the state, the Hindutva ideology was able to establish itself in the public arena and public mind in TN during 1990s. One of the important reasons behind this entrenchment of Hindutva ideology was blunting of the radical edges in Dravidian ideology. Thus, even though Dravidian parties were able to establish themselves at the helm of affairs in the state since 1960s, the radicalism in Periyar’s Dravidian ideology was compromised. Thus, a rational critique of caste, class, and gender was replaced by the reiteration of pride in so called Dravidian history. A multi-dimensional vision of looking at the social contradiction gave way to one-dimensional perspective of division between Hindi and Tamil language. The decision of DMK to participate in elections since late 1950s was also held responsible for this ideological regression.

The nature of OBC politics also shaped the Hindutva politics in these states. Thus, the conflict between the leaders belonging to the upper castes and OBCs within the BJP in UP proved to be decisive in weakening the party in the state. In Maharashtra, since late 1990s, all the major political parties including Congress started giving space to the leaders belonging to the OBCs. This blunted the edge of dissatisfaction amongst the OBCs of being politically sidelined. Moreover, this ensured that different OBC castes started to vote for various political parties. This meant that OBC politics became dispersed in the state. This ensured that the OBC politics in the state would never come of age. In Tamil Nadu, despite various efforts by the Hindutva organisations, the political space was occupied by the Dravidian and single caste parties. This meant that Hindutva political parties electorally could not establish themselves in the state.
The final chapter of dissertation has been divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter compares OBC politics in those three states. In the second part, the impact of OBC politics on democratisation of Indian politics has been discussed. The comparison has been undertaken by discussing various patterns discernible in the formation of OBC identity, and its actual operationalisation in the politics during the post Mandal era. In doing this, the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra and Madras; and Charan Singh’s politics in UP have been discussed while comparing the process of formation of OBC identity. The comparison of OBC politics in those three states during post-Mandal era had been undertaken by discussing the interaction between the political party system and OBC politics; and the Hindutva politics and OBC politics in those states.

While discussing the democratisation of Indian politics that occurred due to the OBC politics, initially, the concept of democratisation has been analysed and discussed. Thereafter, an attempt has been made to analyse the data regarding social bases of the legislative assemblies in the three states under our investigation. An attempt has been made to compare the participation of OBC groups in the political process of these three states. This chapter further discusses the limitations to the democratic upsurge caused by the OBC politics. These limitations have been of political, ideological as well as structural nature. Thus, the single caste political formations amongst the OBC and dalit castes posed a challenge before the political viability of OBC politics. On the other hand, the attempts at successful accommodation of OBCs by Hindutva political force indicated the ideological as well as political challenge before OBC politics. The structural challenge to OBC politics emerged due to a number of forces. Thus, emergence of dominant families in various political parties, including those carrying the OBC politics, the economic agendas of the political parties becoming common when their number was on the increase, the decoupling of economic policy- making from the political contestation, the lack of any economic agendas by the OBC political parties—all these forces have been discussed as the structural factors limiting the democratic impact of OBC politics.

**Methodology and Significance of the Study**

This study seeks to compare the political assertion of the OBCs in three states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh after 1990. This comparison has been done mainly by using the secondary data and published material on the political
process in these three states. The data has been accessed from the National Election Studies (NES) prepared by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). The published material includes various books and research articles published on the state politics of the above mentioned states. Both the types of material focus mainly on analysing the politics of the particular state. This study would make use of this material to make a comparative analysis of the OBC politics in these three states. Along with these two sources an effort had been made to undertake limited field-work in these three states. This has been mainly in the form of open-ended interviews with the main OBC leaders and activists in those three states. These interviews have served the purpose of giving the researcher a first-hand experience of the situation on the ground as well as enabled him to crosscheck the secondary sources that have been studied and referred.

The main research question of this study is to analyse the process of formation as well as the disintegration of caste blocs in Indian politics and its impact on democratic politics in India. This is done by focusing on the case of the caste bloc called Other Backward Castes (OBCs), taking shape at the state level. The secondary material published on the politics of the above-mentioned three states, the NES data of CSDS and interviews of the main leaders and activists in the OBC political mobilisation have been used for this. This study also seeks to view this process in a comparative perspective. Hence, the processes of the OBC politics during the post-Mandal era unleashed in those three states have been compared. This has been done by first delineating the historical roots of OBC identity formation and then the OBC mobilisation that took place in these three states. Thus, non-Brahman movement in Madras province and Maharashtra; and Charan Singh's politics in UP has been analysed. The politics of OBCs in the post-Mandal era is dealt with by focusing on interaction between the OBC politics on the one hand and the changing political party system and Hindutva politics on the other. The process of change in the political party system in these three states due to OBC politics and modification in OBC politics due to changing political party system in the same states is analysed. Further, the conflicting and convergent relationship between the OBC politics and Hindutva politics is underlined. Moreover, the process of modification which both of them underwent due to each other is pointed out.
Further, this dissertation tries to relate these processes in Indian politics with the democratisation of Indian politics and a debate that has been shaped around the latter theme. This is sought to be done by using the NES data on political participation of various caste groups after 1990s. This data on various caste groups have been compared with each other. Moreover, the political participation of OBCs that is found in those three states is compared to assess democratisation in a comparative perspective. The results derived from these data are then related with the debate on democratisation of Indian politics and an effort has been made to underline the strengths and weaknesses of the so called democratisation of Indian politics.

This study will enable the reader to know as to how the formation and disintegration of the politically relevant category of OBC has happened differently in different socio-political setting within India and how this process has contributed to the deepening of democracy in India. Moreover, this study underlines the limitations of the enrichment of democratisation in India. Thus this study hopes to contribute in the field of interaction between caste and modern Indian politics; comparative state politics in India; and process of democratic politics in India.