CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION
There are quite a large number of works on the Indian caste system and there are as many theories about caste as there are authors who have written on the subject. The recent tendency is to study caste in terms of relations, tensions and integration and its social dynamics. Moreover, castes and their organisations are no longer confined to a local base but have spread out horizontally with urbanisation and the franchise so that the sentiments of caste affiliations are used in an ever increasing range of civil, social and political activities.

Democratic system of Government, adult franchise and Panchayati Raj have brought political consciousness to all the castes. The castes which were lowly and had in the near past no advantages or had in the past never enjoyed political power are now contending for it. They have the advantages of numbers through which they can make their influence felt. These factors have sought to strengthen the castes as politico-economic pressure groups. In some places certain castes have perpetuated their power to the extent that other castes remain in a state of subordination and constant fear.

Of all the Indian social institutions caste has attracted the widest attention. And it is not only the social scientists who have dealt with it, but novelists, dramatists and short story writers have also made caste and caste dynamics their dominant themes. The chief reasons for this are two fold: in the first place, the agelessness and indestructibility of the caste system and secondly, the impact it has on practically every aspect of Indian life.

A caste association emerges when a number of people of a caste ally together to form an organisational system to pursue certain common ends. It constitutes a system in itself uniting different sub-castes of a caste together. Membership to these associations is not ascriptive as in caste, but is voluntary for the caste members. These associations have offices, membership, publications, and institutions like organised interest groups. These are based on caste sentiments and want to preserve the caste. Their interests do not clash with each other. There are not the attempts for over throwing the caste system but to maintain that. Functions of caste associations depended upon the level at which these are organised. If a caste association is organised at the Nation or state level then it’s functions are largely political. But at the city or town level their functions are social and
for the welfare of the caste. Some of the common goals of the caste associations are as follows:

- To eradicate social evils.
- To help the down-trodden members of the caste.
- To raise the status of caste socially, economically and educationally.
- To achieve caste solidarity and integration.
- To preserve the cultural heritage of the caste.

'Caste' is employed to connote different structural orders such as the smallest endogamous sub-caste for which local words like 'Jati' 'quom', 'dudh', and 'biradari' are used, a higher order consisting of several sub-castes and a still higher level of varna order. The term 'caste' is also used to refer to a category of cognate sub-castes as a unit of association across different regions of India. It is used to refer to a category of different sub-caste groups at the pan-India level. Finally it is used to refer to ideology as in caste ideology.¹ In order to avoid confusion, we reserve the general term 'caste' only when we want to refer to it as a phenomenon, ideology or identity. These specifications help us to understand caste as a process of social formation and the nature of the new formations as distinguished of the traditional structures.

It is also pointed out that castes are enduring groups the membership of which is determined by birth, whereas class is a category the membership of which is determined by ownership or non-ownership of property or means of production. By implication, class status is achieved whereas caste status is ascribed. However, this proposition is true only in a limited sense. The next point of contrast that is pointed out between caste and class is that the former is a community and the later is a category. This is again not a structural distinction. A sub-caste in a particular locality may, but not necessarily, constitute a group with commensal and the affinal ties. But several sub-castes of similar caste status constitute only a category and not a group.²

It is necessary to understand the forces behind routinisation in pre-British India. The economy was mostly agricultural and production relations were organised on the basis of differential positions of ownership, control and cultivation of land. Reciprocity

and exchange under the Jajmani system formed the basic principles of distribution of the agricultural produce within the village. Outside linkages to the political system operated mainly through extraction of surplus food grains as revenue. In some cases, Kings built irrigation systems to increase agricultural production. In this situation, the caste system provided the social framework for the operation of the traditional political economy, but allocating resources differentially according to the status value of the caste system. The legitimising principles - the kings (Political authority), the priest (ritual authority), and the caste councils and village panchayats were effective in upholding the values behind the caste system.  

Economic and Political Dimensions of Caste:

The caste system in the context of relations of production and the exercise of power, incorporates economic and political dimensions, and has the system of inter-caste relations rather than caste category gains primary importance. Economic aspects are manifest at two interrelated levels (Varna and Jati) of the caste system. At the varna level broad categories of calling or work are associated with each of the four varnas, in the post-vedic period (about 600 B.C. to 300 AD). Priesthood and learned callings were associated with Brahmins, military prowess and kingship with Kshatriyas, trade, banking and mercantile occupations with vysyas and cultivation of lands with Sudras. Over the years, flexibility developed in the calling or occupation that the varnas followed. Except for the first category of occupations which remained more or less closed, the other three categories were relatively open. For instance, those who were not born as Kshatriyas but were endowed with military prowess, could acquire a piece of territory, expand and graduate into Kshatriyahood, through a process of legitimization by Brahmin priests. G.S. Ghurye notes that “the Chera, Chola and Pandya kings belonged to the Vellalas. The Nayak Kings of Madura and Tanjore were Balijas (Traders)”. At the Jati level, specific jobs and occupations were associated with sub-castes or sub-sub castes. Specialisations in occupations lead to the split and formation of other sub-castes.

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2Ibid., p.24.  
3Ibid., p.29.  
It should be noted that kin-based caste dominance was not a monolithic entity against other castes. There were factors within the dominant-caste which promoted vertical ties across the different castes in a village and thus weakened the dominance of the caste as a whole within a region.  

In the Indian context, caste is unique in the sense that both economic and status situations co-exist. Status in the caste situation is determined by economic criteria, (occupation and property or its absence) as well as by ritual, social and educational considerations.

For instance, caste associations have become a part of the modern political process. In some cases, they form part of broader caste movements with a defined ideology engaged in collective mobilisation. Under such circumstances caste clusters (including cognate jatis and sub-jatis) tend to develop into large ethnic blocks competing for ritual, ethnic and educational advantages and struggling against a position of subordination in a bid to gain position of dominance.

Caste Consciousness:

Consciousness of one’s caste status is an important factor which may explain the differential fertility of various caste groups. Though consciousness about one’s status in society always exists in the individual, but it is only when a large number of individuals had similar status and are made conscious of their status to certain disabilities or privileges that they tried to behave in a particular way. It is in this context that a consciousness of one’s status affects behaviour patterns. When even this consciousness is sanctioned by an ethical or political institution, it always leads to an effervescent situation coupled with an enhanced consciousness of one’s status.

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Castes and sub-castes:

Unlike the four-fold varna system, Indian castes and sub-castes (Jatis) are counted in thousands. However, each Jati is a name, relatively small endogamous group that is traditionally ranked in a regional system of relative social prestige and wealth. In other words, unlike the varna system, the jati system is localised. Consequently, knowing the common name of the jati will not necessarily reveal their relative social standing in their localities given the great regional variation that characterised the jati system. In this respect, person’s names and sur-names are no strong guides to a person’s caste and sub-caste affiliations. It is a consciousness of complementary of self and ascribed attributions generated in cognitive and social interactional contexts. Caste consciousness is reinforced dialectically by the egalitarian ideology. Just as the ideologies Nationalism and Secularism have failed to wither away communal identities, it is doubtful that caste identities, which are paying in material terms, will be shaken off totally; it is possible that caste relations may improve but caste identities will not erode easily.9

Gladstone explains

“People do have a longing for progress. Many people see this progress in terms of the progress of a particular caste. There has always been a tendency to compare the position and gains of one caste with those of the other castes. The existence of strong caste organisations encouraged the idea of progress in terms of caste or community.”10

Harbans Mukhia writes

“The silent manifestation of communalism inheres in the very use of community as the category of social analysis and political operation. Community or Caste or Linguistic group is the most tried unit of mobilisation of votes ..... On the one hand, such mobilisation has helped a very large mass of people to participate in this modern political process; on the other, the very success of such participation has tended to reinforce, rather than erode, their community or caste identity. It is thus the very process of economic and political modernisation that has lent vitality to a traditional feature.”11

8Ibid., p.39.


Showing how caste continues to be an important factor for marriage, Hardgrave noted that the Christian Nadars prefer to marry Hindu Nadars rather than Christians of other lower caste origins, if suitable spouses are not found within their own fold. The next preference is for inter-marriages among converts from homologous caste groups. Caste as we have seen is not an immutable identity but a variable and varying category whose contours and meanings undergo periodic redefinition.

On the one hand, it is getting increasingly embedded in the politico-economical and socio-economical matrices of the society. Caste consciousness is an essence an enduring product of life events and experiences, current props and perceptions of its instrumental value and the material rewards and gratifications it currently brings. Bougie eloquently affirms that “the caste system is an amorphous collection of anomalies and anachronisms, calculated to embarrass the most expert enquirer and discourage the most enthusiastic researcher”. Writing about its vitality Bougie observes that:

“the caste system allows all regimes to pass over its head, it alone remains. And like the tenacious jungle, its vegetation rapidly swallows up once more the few cleared patches, it is as though Hindu soil belongs to it from all eternity and for ever.”

Caste is one of the most important aspects of social and political life in India. As a social institution, it is strongly entrenched and inspite of the modernisation trends in India (as a result of urbanisation, improved means of communication and development of secular education) the caste factor persists. Although caste has undergone many changes it has become a factor to be reckoned within politics. No political party ignores it. To a limited extent the caste system is recognised by the Constitution as it reserves seats for S.C.’s; S.T’s and O.B.C.’s.

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14Ibid., p.65.

Caste is one of the various sub-national forces playing a very important role in the politics of the nation. "Politicisation of caste system", became the new trend in Indian politics. In the process not only Hindus of upper classes but Dalits also came to play an important role. New conditions of independent India have given a fresh vigour to the politicisation of caste as a result of which it has begun to manifest itself as a regional, rather than a local force increasingly independent of competitiveness in relation to other castes. "The central discovery is that politics is more important to caste and castes are more important to politics than before. It is also commented that top political leaders may proclaim the goal of the casteless society, but the newly enfranchised rural masses know only the language of traditional politics which so largely turns about caste..... Behind the formal list of party candidates nominated for the contexts, there is probably an inside story of careful calculation in terms of caste appeal". This change is further strengthened by the fact that all the parties and their leaders speak from house tops against caste, casteism and casteist politics. But surprising enough with all this verbal attack caste remains a powerful factor in politics. The reasons are not far too seek. No party seems to be free from the sly of caste appeal. "Caste has very deep roots in the Hindu social structure and it is wrong to expect that the mere institutionalisation of western political ideals and techniques would automatically do away with this social system of ancient standing." "And it has been marked that the caste system in India over the years has acted in stratifying the society socially, corrupting it politically and weakening it economically."

The basis of understanding of caste system is an emperical reality is to locate caste groups as Jatis in a specific rural/urban context. Caste is seen as a status group in these contexts. It is a source of placement in the social set up. But at a macro level caste is also a means of identity. Is caste an interest group? Can common interests bring together men of different castes from various regions and states more smoothly than

19R.B. Jain, Political System and Nation Building: The Indian Political Experience in Democracy, Pluralism and Nation Building. 1984, p.42.
those of the same caste? Caste is certainly a resource, but its resource-ability varies from caste to caste depending on the status of a given caste in a given area. Caste identity/membership has become a liability for the members of a high and middle castes in recent years as a certain percentage of jobs, seats in parliament and state legislatures and admissions in institutions of higher learning have been reserved for the weaker sections of Indian society.

Caste is a very complex system precisely because caste is not simply a ritualistic system of power relations and economic activities. If it gets weakened in one aspect, then it also gets strengthened in the other with certain alterations, additions and accretions. Therefore, what we need is to study the dynamics of this complexity of the system. We all know that there is no uniform pattern of caste structure in actual terms throughout India. There are thousands of castes in India with different names and nomenclatures, but there are only about five or six dominant castes throughout the country.

Since we are probing the role and position of caste in our society as a whole, we should bear in mind that the caste structure has not developed uniformly in all the regions of the sub-continent. The number of castes also varies from region to region. Different historical experiences of different regions has contributed to the shaping of present day socio-political processes. Moreover, there is uneven economic development in the country and also within the states, providing uneven economic opportunities to different social groups. And, all castes do not have uniform numerical strength and concentration. Some are scattered throughout the state and some are heavily concentrated in some regions only. Hence the role and the composition of caste varies from area to area and from caste to caste. What is attempted here is to present a broad pattern regarding caste, the role it plays and the position it occupies in society today.

**Caste as a Means of Social and Political Power:**

The Indian social system is organised around caste structures and caste identities. With the passage of time, new social values have grown and many from higher castes are indifferent towards caste if not actively opposed. The eminent Indian social scientist M.N. Srinivas says:
“Caste is undoubtedly an all Indian Phenomenon in the sense that every where there are hereditary and different groups within a caste, which have a traditional association with one or more occupations.”

It is true that caste in India is one of the major determinants of occupation. Occupational superiority determines social hierarchy and economic status. A feature of rural life in many parts of the country is the existence of dominant land-owning castes and for a caste to be dominant, it should have a sizeable amount of arable land, have numerical strength and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. Land ownership is a crucial factor in establishing dominance in Indian village life. It is the land, which confers power and prestige. Dominant castes are generally land owners, land ownership determines social status which leads to economic and political power.

**Dominant Castes as Vote Banks:**

It has been the land owning, socially superior, economically sound, caste oriented dominant section of the rural life which has been the centre of attention, for state and national politics. These dominant castes have been functioning as vote banks for the political parties in India. These castes, because of their economic superiority in specific regions, functions as donors to the political parties at the time of elections and in turn they aspire for gains and facilities from the ruling leadership after elections. Political leadership of the country outwardly denies utilisation of caste as a factor of winning elections and almost every political party denounces caste system as such, but does not hesitate to identify dominant castes in a particular constituency and put up a candidate of such dominant caste for winning elections. Caste appeals are made in private. Caste for the purpose of achieving political power is very much alive in India, particularly in rural areas. Gunnar Myrdal in his Asian Drama writes “politicians of all parties in their election campaigns patently cater to caste sensitivities.”

The caste composition of our society has been broadly exploited by the political parties and the caste has become the centre around which politics in India moves. The

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20 M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Longmen, New Delhi, 1972, p.3..

21 Ibid., p.10.

22 Ibid., p.11.
various caste and caste groups have become the source of political power and now it is
difficult to conceive of politics without caste. The Indian society, in spite of multiple
caste composition was homogenous in its nature but it has not became heterogeneous due
to exploitation of caste in politics.

Almost all the societies of the world are characterised by stratification. The
Indian society, in particular, is regarded as the most stratified of all the known societies.
The caste system represents one form of social stratification that is unique to the Indian
society. The caste system as a complex social phenomenon with its myriad forms of
working has been a subject of curiosity for a number of Anthropologists and Sociologists
both in India and abroad. An enormous amount of literature has been produced on the
subject. Many theories regarding the origin of caste system have been proposed further
complicating our understanding of the phenomenon. For instance, Gail Omvedt writes:

"the endogamous principles and practices that constitute the jatis, the
purity-pollution behaviour rules and occupational tasks governing the
relations of hierarchy and exploitation existing among them are the
practices and rules that constitute the caste system" 24.

While proceeding to discuss the phenomenon of caste, it is important to
understand the related concepts like 'varna' and 'jati' as also the different connotations of
the use of the term 'caste' itself.

Varna:

The layman’s understanding of the term varna as the division of Hindu society
into four orders, viz., Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vysya and Sudra. Varna which literally
means colour, originally referred to the distinction between the Arya and the Dasa.
Ghurye writes, “varna means ‘colour’ and it was in this sense that the word seems to have
been employed in contrasting the Arya and Dasa. The colour connotation of the word
was so strong that later on when the classes came to be regularly described as varnas,

four different colours were supposed to be distinguished"\(^{25}\) The fourfold varna system does not operate on the ground. The varna scheme is primarily a fiction since it does not in fact regulate the social order. Emperically the caste system is constituted by numerous Jatis or Kulas which are specific to a region. Marriage rules, commercial taboos, occupational rigidity and village politics in particular operate at the level of jati. In Ghurye's opinion the relevant level at which caste system should be analysed is that of Jati. The term Jati which in sanskrit means caste, is used to refer often to a category or identity rather than an actually existing group. But in fact, sub-castes are real units of endogamy and interaction.\(^{26}\) The Jati, however, is a better term than the term varna to refer to social order. There are various social connotations for the term caste.

**Segmental Division of Society:**

The social system in India is organised around caste structures and identities. Caste is one form of social grouping, the membership of which is determined not by selection, but by birth. The social status of the person depends on the caste in which he or she happens to be born. The caste gives a specific social status to every individual thereby separating his/her caste identity from a larger community identity of which he/she may be a part. The principles of endogamy and commansality divide the entire society into caste groups. But this separation is maintained importantly by organising caste panchayats or councils. The caste councils deal with every aspect of the member’s life such as eating, drinking, concubinage, marriage, defiance of caste custom etc. This implies that in the caste bound society, the importance of community identity is restricted and individuals owe their moral loyalty to their caste first, rather than community as a whole. The caste councils are thus important instruments by which caste, as closed ‘status groups’, restrict and formalise the social relationships between members of different castes.

No social structure has ever been static in the world. The caste structure has undergone various changes from time to time. The process of change has been very complex and defies precise assessment. Many lower castes went up in religious

\(^{25}\)G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p.46.

hierarchy by acquiring economic and political power. In the 20th century the economic and political changes along with the development of productive forces has radically changed the social relationship between traditional twice-born who were at the top of the social ladder and the sudra peasant castes. Since these peasant castes have acquired higher economic and political power than the twice-born, the religious hierarchy could accommodate them as social superiors. The tremendous manoeuverability of the caste system could make this possible. The more the economic and political power of particular caste, it tries to defend the caste system as the caste legitimises the economic and political power that caste is enjoying.

A recurrent problem in India in the years since independence has been the integration of social and political structures at all levels of society, but especially the state and region. Hence, an important area for an analytical study is the extent to which units larger than districts exhibit significant degrees of social and political integration. The present study suggests that where such integration exists political participation is enhanced.

The institution of caste has received a great deal of attention from scholars both within and outside India. The more evidence that becomes available, the clearer it becomes that caste is an extremely complex phenomenon representing different structures at different levels of analysis. In this study an attempt is made to examine the literature on social and political organisation of castes in Andhra Pradesh. This review will help to clarify the currently prevalent conflicting views on the subject and it will allow us to derive hypothesis about the influence of regional contexts on political participation.

All observers of Indian politics, recognise the importance of the caste factor. The last 15 or 20 years, in particular, have seen a major change in the role of caste. Earlier it was important in the politics of South India. Did developments in the South differ from those of the North? why did the middle class in the South remain caste ridden and why was the social mobility which was the leading feature of the North Indian society in the 19th century not extended to the South of the Vindhyas? According to Bhatia:

"I do not intended to convey the impression that North India is free from caste prejudices in all matters. In fact various investigations in the pattern of voting during the 2nd and 3rd general elections of free India have
shown that caste is a potent force in political alignments and that instead of disappearing from the Indian social scene, it is becoming an increasingly important factor in the politics of the country.  

Similarly, the introduction of Panchayat Raj has led to the polarisation of political groupings on caste basis. But while accepting all that one might still argue that even before the British conquest, the Indian society in the North was more fluid occupationally than in the south, and that the fluidity increased greatly as a result of the new forces released by the British conquest so that the relation between the caste and occupation of an individual were snapped.

In the south, on the other hand, occupations continued to be patterned along the caste lines. According to M.N. Srinivas: "caste is a hereditary endogamous, usually localised group, having a traditional association with an occupation". It is in this sense that caste ceased to be less important in the North in the 19th century while it continued to be so in the South. In the answer to these questions we may find a clue not only to the present day strong anti-Brahmin movement in the South, but also to the comparatively slow pace of industrialisation and economic development in that part of the country. But now it has gained very strong foot-hold in the politics of North India. Particularly, in the last two decades or so a new focus of caste politics has emerged; the politics of quotas for backward classes. Together with its attendant spin-offs- the emergence of new caste-based organisations, growing polarisation along caste lines, violence and reservation conflicts-the caste has embedded itself firmly in socio-economic and political fabric of the country. To understand and analyse this increased role we have first to see what the caste system is and how it has developed as a politically significant variable.

27B.M. Bhatia, "Some aspects of economic Development of Southern India in the 19th Century and their effect on the growth of middle class in the Deccan" in V.K. Bawa Aspects of Indian History, Institute of Asian Studies, Hyderabad, 1975, p.57.


29Ibid., p.3.

30M.N. Srinivas attributed this to the absence of powerful Brahmin groups in the North. Further he told "that it is not unlikely that the absence of powerful Brahmin groups in the North has prevented the emergence of an anti-Brahmin Movement and this has probably led to the popular impression that caste is more powerful south of Vindhyas than to the North. There are signs, however, that caste is becoming stronger in the North. Ibid., p.36.
Any analysis of contemporary caste requires a minimum understanding of the institutions as it was in the past. We shall take an oft-cited passage to refer to the features of caste. Caste is “a hereditary endogamous, usually localised group, having a traditional association with an occupation” 31 and a particular position in the hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed among other things by the concepts of pollution and purity and generally, maximum commensality occurs within the caste. The following features became evident from this definition. Firstly, membership in the caste is by birth, secondly, a caste is an endogamous unit, thirdly members of each caste traditionally had an occupation or trade to pursue. Fourthly, castes are graded in a local hierarchy, fifthly, notions of pollution and purity govern the nature and extent of the relationships between castes.

From the above passage it can be inferred that Indian caste is derived through birth alone. It cannot be transferred from one class to another; cannot be gained as a reward for the highest merit or bestowed as an honorary title by the most powerful monarch. 32 All the members of the same caste are alike that they have the same levels of ritual, socio-economic and political positions.

Since our concern here is not to discuss the caste system itself, suffice it is to keep in mind that there are a large number of castes. Theoretically, each caste has a definite place in the social hierarchy. Its place in the hierarchy is determined by its ritual status based on the observance of religious values and its hereditary occupation. However, the caste hierarchy has never been static throughout history. Though the upper castes try to maintain their higher status, the middle and low castes have successfully tried to improve their status.

First caste or jati is essentially a localised social group where members share common socio-cultural bonds. Second, caste does not just form a social group. The caste based social system originated with the development of economic surplus. Production and distribution systems have remained caste based for centuries. With the

31 M.N. Srinivas, Ibid., p.3.
introduction of the capitalist system and the consequent penetration of capital as well as
the competitive political system, certain changes have taken place in the features
characterising the caste system. Production is no longer based on caste thereby
weakening the hierarchy of the system.

Caste is one of the basic institutions of Hindu society and has engaged the
attention of scholars, activists and politicians. There is voluminous literature on the
nature and character of caste in its various aspects. Its typical structure with regional
variations and the processes of change and continuity have been vividly described and
cogently analysed. Scholars have tried to explore the fundamental principles that
underlie the caste system and the study of caste has given rise to endless controversies
and debates.

At the same time, it can not be contended that the caste system has not changed at
all. It can hardly be said that even from the times when written accounts of its practices
are available, caste has undergone considerable change. In any case, it is nowhere
practised as rigidly as it was prescribed in the ancient Hindu law texts. What is
important to note however, is that the caste system has been the most flexible of the
primordial institutional arrangements anywhere in the world, and it has shown on
extraordinary capacity to adopt itself to a variety of changing and often apparently
contradictory socio-economic conditions.

According to Kolenda, the traditional caste system consisted of a set of
occupationally specialised castes integrated into local hierarchical ritualised politico-
economic systems of cooperation and interdependence. This ‘cooperative caste system’
and "the hierarchical organic solidarity" has been disappearing due to a variety of
economic and political factors. In its place a new system of competitive solidarity has
been emerging as "fused combinations of castes compete with one another". Thus
"despite the gradual demise of the occupational aspect of the caste system (a demise now
taking place at a more rapid tempo) the solidarity of the jati is intact".33

At the very outset it has to be conceded that the concept of caste is itself problematic. Castes could be viewed either as being functionally inter-related in a system contributing to the vertical integration of a rigidly stratified society or as autonomous groups serving common purposes and striving for common ends. Viewed as the former, caste constitutes, a structural principle of society and viewed as the latter, it acts as a dynamic force in interest articulation, collective mobilisation and social movement. While changes in the institution of caste can be comprehended fairly from either of these analytical perspectives, the relationship between the realities subsumed by them as complex and eludes easy analytical grasp.

The decline of caste as a system should theoretically have resulted in castes becoming mere social categories encompassing descent groups, whose boundaries across local areas would have at best been only notional and that too only in kinship terms. But the 'politics of scarcity' and the exegencies of democratic politics have made the people belonging to these categories more and more caste-conscious and given currency to the idea of caste unity. The backward classes movements and 'Mandalism' have obviously abetted caste-consciousness, Caste mobilisation and caste aggrandizement.

Caste and Politics in Colonial Period:

Caste has always been a powerful weapon in keeping the people divided and weak in the face of any challenge. More than 145 years back Marx remarked, "How came it that English supremacy was established in India? A country not only divided between the Mohammedan and Hindu, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste, a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium, resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness between all its members. Such a country and such a society, were they not the predestined prey of conquest"? Nevertheless, during the colonial period itself the existential realities of caste system began to be different from its typical ideal form.

A number of changes brought by the British rulers in Indian economy and administration significantly affected the ‘essence’ of caste system. While on the one hand, the traditional aspects of the caste were getting changed, on the other hand caste
was acquiring new dimension and political functions. For administrative purposes, the British Government had brought a good deal of improvement in communication. The immediate effect of this according to Srinivas was that it increased caste consciousness and inter-caste competition. This happened because now it was possible for the caste relations to outgrow its regional constraints and develop caste associations so as to bargain for some concessions from the British Government, on the plea of backwardness in order to catch up with the advanced castes. At the same time the caste associations worked for elevation of social status. This backwardness was claimed in the secular context and a high status in a ritual context. This was a new dimension and function of caste, unknown before.

Thus, we find that the caste system began to acquire new functions and dimensions in the changing socio-economic and political ambience of the pre-independence period. However, changes in the caste system notwithstanding the grip of this institution on the social matrix did not loosen to any appreciable extent. Caste continues to persist, albeit in a different form from its feudal 'embodiment'. After achievement of Independence and introduction of electoral politics in a traditional society, caste gained a new role for itself.

After independence many changes were introduced in the political system. Democratic polity based on the principles of adult-franchise was perhaps the most crucial factor which reinforced caste with a lot of vigour. According to Moin Sahkir there is dual role of caste in the post-independence era. The type of mass politics operating after Independence is radically different from that of British India. The compulsions of the democratic system, to mobilise the illiterate people who cannot understand politics in terms of class interests, make it imperative appeal to the caste sentiment, because it pays dividends. In the absence of clear-cut class based parties or because of weak Communist and Socialist movements in the country, factors other than ideology and class are bound to be more effective. It activises primordial institutions. Thus caste, religion etc., become relevant inputs in the mass politics in the country.

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35 Quoted by A.B. Bardan, "Caste, Clas Situation in India", (Memo) n.d.
To what extent caste has become a means to level the old order, is highly
debatable issue. But there cannot be gainsaying the fact that caste has provided substance
to politics. It will be proper to recall here that even the communists in India used caste
idioms for mobilising the class of agricultural labourers in Andhra elections in 1950’s
and elsewhere also on the ground of caste-class correspondence. In 1955 elections,
when the congress was fighting back, after the communists had scored on the language
issue, it was decided that the caste game must be played with even greater finesse. The
coastal delta region was Kamma territory, the uplands were held largely by Reddis. The
congress held off until the C.P.I. had filled its list and then, candidate for candidate, it
matched the C.P.I. list with a list of Congress supporters belonging to identical castes.
That way, with superior organisation and funds, the congress could successfully trade
upon caste loyalties every where.

In 1961 June, E.M.S.Namboodiripad wrote in the monthly New Age that whereas
caste as a social bar had weakened, it has increased in the political sphere and has in many
cases decided the fate of elections and even selection of Ministries. In 1964 at the
Vijayawada Conference of the communist party of India, its General Secretary Ajay
Ghosh reported that caste sentiments instead of loosening have grown tremendously.
There was a greater tendency to use caste in all elections.

Several scholars, India as well as foreign, consider Kerala as being so caste ridden
that every political party is based on some caste or the other. To quote
E.M.S.Namboodiripad:

"it could be totally unrealistic to close one's eyes to the fact that even
those political parties which claim to be secular and above all
considerations of caste and community, have to take into consideration the

36 Caste as a political factor in free India was first used by the congress strategist S.K. Patel in 1957 elections
in A.P. He matched the communist 'caste by caste' and succeeded. See Sharif K. Bhomik 'Caste and Class
in India' Economic and Political Weekly (hereafter E.P.W.), Vol. xxvii. Nos. 24 & 25, June, 13-


caste or communal composition of particular constituencies when they select their candidates for elections."40

The style of functioning of the various political parties proves the validity of the caste factor in the selection of the candidates. They are realistic to accept that the stress on caste should be more at the Gram Panchayat level and less on the state level and negligible at the national level.41 Because castes are ordinarily bounded by language, they have affected Indian political life more at state level and local levels than at the national level. Again we would like to point out that it has acquired a markedly ideological tone since 1990. The ideological tone was given a new articulation, when the left parties decided to join hands with the Mr. V.P. Singh’s Janata Dal in pressing for the extension of caste quotas in the cause of social justice. This made it in effect impossible for any party openly to oppose caste quotas, so that caste has at least for the time being strengthened its grip over politics. In fact the strongest supporters of caste quotas are, paradoxically, also the strongest opponents of caste as a hierarchical system.42

In South, where efforts have been made to draw linguistic and state boundaries congruently, castes do not usually reach beyond the state. In the North, along with Hindi, castes can be found in more than one and some times in all the four Hindi speaking states.43

It is true that the most stable states in the Union like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka derive their strength from powerfully organised caste groups, while the most unstable states are those where power alliances are not supported by strong caste-bases or

40 E.M.S.Namboodiri Pad, Selected Writings Vol.I. National Book Agency, 1982, p.152. It might be expected in Indian conditions, that caste could form the ideal base for a political party (but in fact very few parties with exclusive caste affiliations have appeared) Although formerly the C.P.I. was virtually the political machine of the Kamma caste, and the P.S.P. in Kerala that of the Nair Service Society, the only major party that now remains clearly related to the traditional divisions of Hindu society is the Republican party, the successor of the Scheduled Caste Federation created to represent the interests of the untouchables or Harijans. Also see A.H. Hanson & J.Douglass India’s Democracy, vikas publishing house, New Delhi, 1972, pp 85-86.


transformation of castes as interest groups is intrinsically related to the introduction and spread of democratic politics.

The Introduction of democracy, which has been effective in India since Independence, while dismantling the traditional authority structure, at least theoretically, has contributed to the growth and consolidation of castes as interested groups. In view of the fragmentation and factionalism within caste groups and alignments and realignments among them, political parties no doubt cut across caste groups. But because of the compulsions of electoral politics, no party can ignore the caste factor except at its own peril. At every stage in politics, the leaders of political parties, have to engage in 'Caste-rope walking'. The importance of caste increases as we go down the political hierarchy from the parliamentary constituency to the village panchayat. Religious and sectarian leaders and the Mathadhi Patis (Monastic leaders) also play a crucial, though covert, role in the mobilisation of the caste factor for political purposes.

Considering the political potential of mobilisation on caste lines, caste associations have come to thrive. It is for this, that caste associations first emerged as early as in the 20th century. But in their numbers, spread, organisation, resources and power, contemporary caste associations are certainly distinct from their humbler counterparts of yester years. Today “through the association the urban politically literate elite (are) linked with the less literate villagers belonging to the same caste”. 48

Whither Castes and Caste System:

The extent and nature of changes in the institution of castes are certainly different between the urban and rural areas. The decline of caste as a system is more perceptible in cities than in rural areas, whereas the growth of castes as articulated interest groups is more noticeable in urban areas. This should not be construed to mean that there is no semblance of a caste system in cities, and that the mobilisation of people on caste lines is absent in villages. Rather it only means that the systematic dimension of caste is expectedly less significant in cities than in villages, whereas the locus of caste consciousness and caste mobilisation at the broader level is to be found in the cities and towns rather than in the villages.
Notwithstanding, the above variations in the nature and significance of change in the institution of caste, one question which still remains to be answered is about the future of this institution. This question has been raised and answered several times for over a century and a half. The general thrust of the answers based on careful scrutiny of evidence seems to be categorical and it is summarised by Gould:

"it is appears very unlikely that so admirable and adaptive structure as caste is in any serious danger of ever disappearing completely; its religious basis may wane, its systematic rigour may weaken, but its social (kinship) basis will persist and its group connotation will gain strength".49

Caste thus has a definite role in the society as well as in politics. Caste is a fundamental aspect of the Indian social structure and also the economic foundation upon which the society rests in India. The relationship between the caste and politics reveals the politicised nature of the caste. Caste has its own importance and caste associations constitute para communities that enable members of respective castes for social mobility, political power and economic advancement. In fact, every caste in India is a well knit social group and no explanation of Indian politics is possible without a reference to the caste. Whatever may be the history and origin of the caste system, the institution of the caste has been one of the specific features of the Indian social life. In the process of its growth it was sustained by peculiar social, economic and political conditions that existed in a particular society. The present study is an attempt to know the nature of caste and its links with the society and its role in politics. This is one part of the caste studies that is overlooked by the world of scholars. This is evident from the review of literature.


Review of Literature:

Before discussing the role of caste in politics, it is proper to examine in some what general terms the relationship between caste and the political system. Most recent studies by social anthropologists have emphasised the role of caste in local politics and political scientists too, have become increasingly sensitive to the part it plays in wider political systems. Some kind of inter relationship between these two sets of factors is also often assumed by journalists both in this country and abroad. Enough material now exists for the formulation of a common strategy for the analytical study of the relationship between caste and politics in different parts of the country. It is also a fact that the relations between castes and politics are not static but change continuously over time.

Caste is a deeply embedded feature of Indian society. It haunts us everywhere - North, South, East and West and it pervades practically all groups-Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Sikhs. Despite its ubiquitous character, it has been differently translated as an operational entity in different parts of the subcontinent. With considerable regional difference both in its manifestations and adaptations, it is not easy for a conscientious scholar to hazard a universal generalisation about it. Social scientists have addressed themselves to the task of studying the structural aspects of caste in depth in various regional settings. The interplay between caste and politics remained, however, a neglected territory. Those studying caste at a micro-level, the village did not pay sufficient attention to the macro dimensions of caste in the emerging political culture of India. Neglect of this dimension resulted in a curious cognitive hiatus between society and polity; the former representing tradition and the later, modernity-the two ends of a false dichotomy.

The publication of *Caste in Indian Politics*, a collection of essays edited by one of India’s leading political scientists, Rajni Kothari can be considered as the first systematic attempt in the field. The book was published by Orient Longman in 1970. The scholarly introduction very competently provides a social scientific perspective and discusses of the problematics involved in the caste analysis relative to politics. The book thus gives us an account of politics in terms of caste about seven regions namely Maharasstra,
Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. We get detailed information about the following castes. Mahar, Kshatriya, Patidar, Nadar, Maratha, Brahmin, Reddis, Kamma, Pushkarna, Oswal, Jat, Jatav, Bhumihar, Agarwal and a few others.

The book brings home the point that the idiom of caste is a part of the grammar of Indian politics. Politicization of caste, however is a phenomenon much older than the political independence the country attained in 1947. Pre-independence politics of caste was characterised more by its inner direction. Efforts to foster unity, to organise the membership for social and religious reform and to improve economic well-being were the key forte of caste politics of the period. Inter-caste rivalries however did figure in the wake of self-enhancement exercises on the part of the lowly placed castes. The granting of franchise by the British emphasised the arithmetic of votes and resulted in demand for separate electorates as if to retort the high caste Hindus.

In the post-Independence era, with the enlargement of the scope of political participation, several new patterns have emerged. Earlier caste organisations became broader both in terms of inclusion of more castes of identical rank and in terms of larger territorial coverage. The various political parties also engaged themselves in the process of mass mobilisation and thus utilised local caste demography to get more or to divide votes. Need for intercaste support is increasingly felt and intra-caste factions are now getting linked with intra-party factions, as also with different political parties. Use of caste idiom in politics is in a way becoming an instrument to reduce its monopolistic influence.

Kothari considers the more useful point of departure for his studies to be: "what form is caste taking under the impact of modern politics, and what form is politics taking in a caste-oriented society"? Anchoring his arguments further in the power dimensions of the status communities of India, he makes the following shrewed observation. "The alleged 'casteism in politics' is .... no more and no less than politicisation of caste. It is something in which both the forms of caste and the forms of

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50Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics*, Op.Cit., p.5.
politics are brought nearer each other in the process changing both. According to Kothari, it is a sterile controversy, "where caste itself becomes political category it is futile to argue as to whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste".

Coming back to Kothari’s view of interaction between caste and politics, “the most important achievements in this area are the case studies of the formation of caste associations and caste federations, the role of caste associations in mobilising mass support for political movements and the participation of caste groups into politics for purposes of social mobility, economic well-being and political articulation” one can do no better than quote Kothari.

Having come closer to each other modern political institutions and caste structures enter into a process of interaction in the course of which both change. By drawing castes into its competitive structures politics finds its bases in society, and by subjecting itself to the rules of competitive politics, caste acquires political characteristics.

Kothari in his work, *Caste in Indian Politics* observed that by drawing the caste system into the needs of organisation, politics finds material for its articulation and moulds it into its own design. In making politics their sphere of activity caste and kin groups secure change to assert their identity and strive for positions. Politicians mobilise caste groupings and identities in order to organise their power. They find in it an extremely well articulated and flexible basis for organisation, something that has been structured in terms of a status hierarchy but something that is also available for political manipulation.

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51 Ibid., pp.4-5.
52 Ibid., p.5.
54 Ibid., p.34.
55 Rajani Kothari, *Caste In Indian Politics*, 1970.
Kothari observes that caste role in politics has gradually been increasing compared to the previous decades. Without caste influence, politics cannot survive. Caste provides an extensive basis for organisation of democratic politics. In India caste remains the principal base for social organisation. So caste obviously is used for mobilisational purposes in electoral and other political activities. Kothari puts it, “it is not politics that gets caste ridden; it is caste that gets politicised.”

Kothari adds that usually in rural areas caste is used as a mobilising factor by the political parties. It is easy for various political parties to mobilise support directly on caste lines. The present system itself encourages or inhibits the use of caste as a means for breaching followers. He mentions that caste enables the illiterates and politically ignorant masses of India to participate in the modern democratic process.

Further, Kothari in his book examined the relationship between caste and politics in different parts of the country. He also dealt with the changes that have taken place in the political system as a result of involvement of different caste organisations at different points of time and at different levels of the polity. For instance how different parties or even different groups within a single party, mobilise different social strata as resources for their political objectives was studied. It is from this perspective, that this study is relevant for this thesis.

Babulal Fadia made a study on caste politics in India entitled State Politics in India. In his study he discussed that adult franchise and panchayati raj have provided new opportunities for castes. Through this rapid developments, the caste system has undergone some changes. Automatically upper peasant castes have become important pressure groups in politics at the district and state level. He mentioned about various state politics in India. In Rajasthan one has to take into account the rivalry between Jats and Rajputs; in Karnataka between Okkaligas and Lingayats; in Andhra Pradesh between Reddis and Kammas; in Kerala between Nayars, Izhavas and Syrian Christians; in Maharashtra between Marathas, Brahmins and Mahars, in Gujarat between Banias, Patidars.


and Kolis and in Bihar between Bhumihars, Kayastas and Rajputs. This explains the Universality of the problem of caste.

Further, Fadia writes about the caste organisations which are oriented to secure jobs, economic benefits and more so a political purpose. They unite for the purpose of fighting the hegemony of upper caste or the ruling castes. For any specific purpose they strike links with government and political party. Thus organisations seek to maximise representation in the cabinets. The main function of these caste associations is to promote social material and general welfare of that particular caste. And there are organisations which try to protect and promote the interests and rights of the community. These caste organisations play a predominant role in electoral politics. He concludes that caste associations have, thus, contributed significantly to the success of political democracy by providing basis for communication, representation and leadership.\footnote{Ibid.}

According to Rudolph and Rudolph,

"caste has significantly affected political life in contemporary India and it has helped in realizing political mobilisation in a variety of ways.\footnote{\textit{Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, Op. Cit., p.24.}}"

In this sense political development in India experiences, through caste, a sort of modernity of tradition.

In view of emerging caste consciousness and its organisations and functions in Gujarat, Orissa, Madras, Andhra, Mysore, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Srinivas has concluded that the forces of caste instead of weakening with modernisation are being further strengthened.

Describing caste associations as para communities Rudolph and Rudolph maintain that they enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power and economic advantage. The characteristics of the para communities resemble in many ways those of the voluntary association.\footnote{Ibid.} on the other hand, the para community is distinguishable in a number of important
respects not only from the voluntary association but also from the natural association such as caste out of which it has developed.\textsuperscript{60}

There are some studies which analyse politicisation of caste. These studies take note of the mutual influence of caste and politics on each other and determines the extent to which political power is generated and distributed in society. Studies of I.P. Desai, Hebsur and Arkey find out how and to what extent caste influences politics and is in turn influenced by it. The study of J.C. Johari examines the inter relation between caste associations or federations and the political parties.\textsuperscript{61} Thus these studies conclude with the political mobilisations and shows how the caste plays an important role in building the political infrastructure.

Studies conducted by M.N. Srinivas, S.C. Dubey and Makim Marriott, deal with the caste system in India as traditional social structure and concluded that Indian traditional social structure has continued \textsuperscript{62} and maintained its basic characteristics and as even expanded in spite of the influences brought about as a result of introduction of adult franchise and political parties after independence.

States:

Kothari has analysed role of caste in state politics. State politics in India has been particularly the hot bed of political casteism. Politics in Bihar has been mostly organised on the basis of caste. If the parties based on caste lines it does not mean that the members entirely are motivated on only caste considerations. There may be other caste people in the organisations. So basically the general interest of caste comes into consideration. Caste gets politicised and becomes a means in the elite politics of securing or retaining power. Almost all the top leaders in Bihar congress party are associated with their respective caste associations. The main castes which dominate politics of Bihar includes Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Kayasthas and Backward castes. In the pursuit of

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., p.29.

\textsuperscript{61}J.C. Johari, “Caste Politicisation in India” \textit{Indian Political Science Review}, 7 (2) April-Sept, 1973.

power, various caste groups strike alliance between themselves, not with enduring support but with temporary and transient alliances.

**Emergence of B.S.P.**

What is not realised by many analysts is that caste is much more emotional issue than religion in Indian context. For example Kanshi Ram’s Jat Thodo, Samaj Jhodo (break the caste and unite the society) is a more emotional slogan than that “all Indians must be Hinduised”. Further, Hinduism for - caste - divided Indians is an abstract issue where as caste is a concrete issue. The theory that caste is disintegrating as an institution in the modern market system and modernised civil society is nothing but a myth.63

“If the Hindutva school is trying to appeal to the sense of ‘religious community’, the Dalit-Bahujan school is trying to appeal to the sense of ‘caste Community’”64

There is no dearth of scholars, commentators and journalists who prefer to see Indian society and U.P. society and politics in particular in terms of caste. The 1993 election results has only reinforced that idea. To many scholars observes and to many progressive political organisations, the results came as a shock in the sense that they indicated a ‘casteist’ reflex. The gratifying disenthronment of the B.J.P. was marred by the emergence of a new sphynx, namely, casteism as represented by the Bahujan Samaj Party (hereafter BSP) and its helmsman, Kanshi Ram.65

Casteism in politics requires people to stand for elections on the basis of articulated appeals to caste as a way of gaining votes. In the definitional sense, elections in U.P. may have gone the casteist way. The public utterances of Kanshi Ram do suggests that he is bent on organising particular castes in order to wrench power from parties which in his public view are dominated by other castes.66

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64Ibid., p.669.


66Ibid., p.777.
brought in as a bludgeon against political adversaries. In the reading of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, caste suppression is the work of all other political parties.\textsuperscript{67}

Political casteism in addition, however, also requires the voters to collect behind parties and symbols on the basis caste identification and in the belief that they have to ally themselves as members of castes against other castes. It requires the electorates to symbolise and to comprehend the divisions in society in terms of the caste order. This apparently is not yet the case.\textsuperscript{68}

In short the leadership, accordingly, has to draw on caste solidarity rather than class solidarity. While covering the run up to the assembly elections in the Northern states i.e., Bihar, U.P. and M.P. in Nov. 1993 most of the commentators harped on the heightened role of caste appeal in the electoral mobilisation of the leading parties, which was obviously true as well as being an old and established mode in Indian electoral politics, particularly since the 1970’s. What, however, was mostly missed by these commentators was the new thrust of the caste mobilisation this time - that the alliance of the Dalits and backward caste of Yadavas is an offensive in the heart of the Hindi heart land.\textsuperscript{69} In other words, while the overall caste complexion of North Indian politics have remained apparently unchanged, its inner impulse has undergone a significant change. Earlier, the caste appeal worked in the final analysis for mobilising the most depressed masses behind the united front of upper-caste interests. This time while the Dalits in U.P. have effectively consolidated themselves in some areas as an Independent factor. For the Brahmins, Rajputs and Jats form not only the upper reaches of the caste structure, they also constitute the most advanced and well to do segments in terms of economic and political power.

The emergence of B.S.P. as a force in Indian electoral politics, after the 1993 Assembly elections, more particularly in U.P. has introduced a new discourse among political pundits and sociologists. The BSP leader Kanshi Ram put caste in the national

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., pp.777-778.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., p.778.

agenda of political discourse in an altogether different form from the one that has been existing among political parties. Earlier caste was a factor in ticket distribution. But this is an increased feeling that caste is becoming an ideology undercutting the traditional notions of left wing and right wing politics in India. Though there is disagreement among analysts on whether caste in itself can become an ideology and whether caste and class are continuous in the Indian context as caste points to a definite economic indicator of the poverty line of people, the classical theory of caste negates such a formulation and puts caste more as an analytical category of sociological position of people but not an economic category to determine economic status of people. Such a traditional understanding of caste is undergoing a change and the language of discourse is also changing. Kanshi Ram, thus, has emerged as an harbinger of a new paradigm in social science discourse.70

Gujarat

The analysis of Kshatriya Sabha in Gujarat brings out clearly the functional relevance of indigenous patterns of communication and differentiation. The Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha brought under one banner castes ranging from Rajputs to tribal Bhils, spread in Gujarat and Saurashtra. The caste leadership realised that without politicising their association they will not be in a position to ameliorate the conditions of their people. The study, however, reminds that federation for secular and political purpose does not ensure abolition of traditional distinctions. It is common economic interest and a growing secular identity born partly out of folklore but more out of common resentment against the well-to-do castes that have brought these different castes together in a broader organisation. On the other hand, barring a few exceptions, the more aristocratic Kshatriyas for the former ruling families have in the past generally kept away from the Sabha.71 That a caste federation has political significance is clearly evidenced by the Gujarati case. Having failed to influence the congress, some of the leaders wanted to depoliticise the Sabha. But the politically ambitious caste leaders felt a strong need to enlist cooperation of the caste, and the ‘depoliticisation enthusiasts’ experienced handicaps in the absence of an inspiring leadership. The newly formed Swantantra party


71Rajni Kothari, *Caste in Indian Politics*, p.73.
cashed the opportunity and won the support of Kashatriya Sabha. The Swatantra party already having support of the Patidar, got divided into two caste, based factions. “Both caste groups and political group were divided, resulting in caste factions within parties and party factions within castes, providing the cross cutting nature of loyalties which politicisation brings in its wake”.72 politics both divides and unites castes.

Haryana:

Next to Bihar, caste exercises the single most important influence on politics in Haryana. Some of the classes and castes have more or less set pattern of political behaviour. In a population of a little over about 10 million in the state of Haryana, Hindus are 89%, Muslims less than 4% and Sikhs 6.5%. The four major caste groups among the Hindus are Brahmins; 12%, Jats: 23%, Ahirs; 8%, and Scs; .22%, others are Gujars; 8%, Rajputs; 5% and Banias; 8%. Caste wise the jats are the toughest and constitutes the single largest group with the SCs coming next. The latter are sharply subdivided between the Chamars, the Weavers and the Sweepers. Of these, the Chamars are the more numerous as 18% and the more privileged much as they always obtained a greater share of political spoils.73

Thus, Jats as a community had been a political force in Haryana, with 23% of the total population they have a commanding position. As a community, the Brahmins have tried to challenge their leadership. About Brahmins, it should be noted that their representation in the legislature is not very large but at the same time in the elections they have a substantial influence because in the first instance they are found practically in every village and as such they can exercise some influence. This is all the more because as a community they are more united than others and vote more or less en bloc. They also try to organise other non-agricultural communities at the village level and in every constituency. About the Jats, it should be noted that as a dominant community, they do not mind the leadership of other agricultural communities coming up except that of Brahmins. One of the reasons why they are not prepared to tolerate Brahmin leadership is that there is a basic conflict between these two communities at the village level. In the

72 Ibid., p.90.
Jat majority areas, the Brahmins try to organise the other communities against them in the elections which neither the Jats nor other agricultural communities would like them to do.\textsuperscript{74}

Iravati Karve and Y.B. Damle, in their study, \textit{Group Relations in Village Community} states that in Haryana, caste is the most important single factor that influences politics. The caste distribution includes 12% Brahmins, 23% Jats, 8% Ahirs, and 22% scheduled castes.\textsuperscript{75} Among them, Jats are the dominant followed by the Scheduled Castes. Initially, Brahmins occupied influential position and power in the society. Jats developed anti-congress feeling due to unionist party. Some times sub-caste politics became important. Results of 1967 elections clearly shows the influence of caste on voting behaviour. Thus the reasons for political instability and re-elections in 1968, in which voters did not vote for various candidates on the basis of policies and programmes of the political parties. The candidates who contested in elections did not campaign on the basis of manifesto but appealed on caste and sub-caste lines.

**Tamil Nadu:**

Robert Hardgrave jr examined the solidarity and cohesion among Nadars (a caste in Tamil Nadu) and its integrated political culture. He upholds that the breakdown of economic dependence in other castes and the extension of caste ties over a wide geographic area gives the caste a new solidarity. The integrated culture of the caste gives rise to the emergence of associations for the social, economic and political uplift of the community. The same thing was found in the case of degraded and defiled castes of Nadars of Tamil Nadu. The Nadars were forbidden to enter into Hindu Temples upto the middle of the 19th century. They were also not permitted to use public wells, wear shoes and gold ornaments, milk cows, carry umbrellas and walk in certain streets. But in the middle of the 19th century a mass movement brought majority of rural Nadars of the Southern regions into the Christian fold. The Nadars thus sought escape from the hierarchy of ritual purity in Christianity. Many Nadars secured small land holdings and improved their economic position. A good number went for the higher education and got...

\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Ibid.}, pp.453-454.

\textsuperscript{75}Iravati Karve and Y.B. Damle, \textit{Group Relations in Village Community}. Deccan College of Post-graduate and Research Institute, Pune, 1963, p.45.
good jobs. As the wealth of the community grew, the common funds called ‘Mahimai’, were used for the welfare of the community as a whole. The newly advanced Nadars claimed the high Kshatriya status. New books and articles were written creating a historical myth as to the origin and greatness of the Nadar community. The Nadar leaders challenged the ban on temple entry. This led to the conflict among Nadars and other communities. Jealous of the rise of Nadars to great wealth and outraged at their pretentious to high status, the high caste Hindus nursed a bitterness. The Nadar Mahajana Sangam was formed in 1917 for promoting the welfare of the Nadars. In 1921 census enumeration, all Nadars declared themselves as ‘Nadar Kshatriyas’. In 1935, in 1940 and again in 1952, the Nadar community requested the government to list it among the “Backward classes”. Since a sizeable portion of the community was among the most advanced communities educationally and economically in Tamil Nadu, the Backward Classes Commission (1952) designated only Shanars as backward class. Today, the Nadars have become one of the most economically and politically successful community in the South.76

In his work ‘Social Change in India’ Kuppu Swamy studied the tensions between higher and lower castes in Madras state. He holds that oppression and discrimination of higher castes on lower castes are the basic causes for inter caste tensions. He classified these caste tensions into two types, i.e., Brahmins and non-brahmins, and caste Hindus and Harijans.77 Basically the non-Brahmin movement was based on two demands. This is in respect to reservation in admissions to colleges and in the recruitment to government jobs. They demanded that the seats be reserved on the basis of population. Due to the low population percentage of the Brahmins, the situation did not turn violent. He had also analysed the caste tensions between the Scheduled Castes and caste Hindus. The main reason being that untouchables putting forth their claims to right to walk in the streets, to draw water for the common wells, to enter into the temples for offering prayers and soon. These demands led to conflict which in turn took the form of violence, rioting and arson. He cites an example of the Ramnand district in Madras state in 1930, where the Kallars wanted to prohibit Harijans wearing gold and silver ornaments, good clothes

77V. Kuppu Swamy, Social Change in India, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, p.120.
and women using flowers. They wanted to prohibit the Harijans from cooking their food in metal vessels. On the other hand Harijans with a new awareness of their rights refused to put up with these pressures of the caste Hindus.

**Andhra Pradesh:**

Caste politics in Andhra Pradesh seems like a game of Cock-fighting between the Kamma and Reddis. The two castes cultivated feelings of jealousy and rivalry as a result of which while the Reddis joined the Congress Party the Kammas lent their support to the Communists. It is owing to this that Andhra Communists struggled heavily to stage Telangana rebellion in 1948. Support of the Kammas to the local Communist leaders in the first general elections became alarmingly noticeable and the congress had to take note of this fact on the eve of second general elections of 1957 when the official high command nominee S.K. Patil tactfully requisitioned the support of Kamma leader N.G. Ranga and “matched caste with caste in the choice of candidates”.78

In Andhra Pradesh the landed castes and particularly the Reddy rural gentry constituted the backbone of the Congress Party. Both the national and the state leadership of the Congress Party tried to reach the voters not directly but through local influentials belonging to the dominant castes. This arrangement worked extremely well given the social status and economic power of the dominant castes and the low political consciousness of the other castes. The composition of the cabinet has reflected the same phenomenon. The Reddis, the Velama and the Kammas held between them 45 to 58% of the seats in the state cabinet with the Reddis being the single largest group (28 to 38%) till 1971.79

After the formation of the Janata Party, the bulk of the prosperous agriculturists drawn from different peasant castes were attracted towards it. Its support came overwhelmingly from the Reddy Community.80

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"If caste politics in the states of Indian union is examined from a comparative stand point, it appears that Andhra Pradesh occupies the most conspicuous place. Harrison Comments:

"As an example of Hindu caste discipline in political motion, the post war decade in Andhra merits special attention. Caste has played so fundamental a role during this period that this examination becomes in effect a case history in the impact of caste on India's representative institutions". 81

A very notable feature of caste politics in Andhra Pradesh finds place in its blending with the forces of regional politics. It has added much height to the politics of the Telangana agitation. The people of a particular caste living predominantly in a particular region have given a caste-cum-regional complexion to an issue in question. Obviously, this kind of relationship between a caste and a region is widespread in Andhra Pradesh as a result of which original claims, are often only a disguise for caste claims. 82

Ranjani Reddy in her work The Role of Dominant Caste in Indian Politics, made a study of role of dominant caste in the two villages of Andhra Pradesh. The main findings in her study emphasise that the economic structure is the most important factor which determines political dominance, political process at large is understood in terms of personalities and not in terms of parties. She says that the very people who occupy the top berths both in the social and economic hierarchies and who in real life are the same people who really control, guide and supervise the local political systems. She mentions that dominant castes in the area co-operate with each other cutting across the caste lines. They have common class interests and are differentiated by the villagers in material and class terms. Caste interaction and dynamics also have their own role to play. She observes that though the impact of modernisation in agriculture sector made some positive results, this made considerable difference to consumption pattern and daily life of village people. But the general economic importance was shared equally. Brahmins due to the economical drawbacks, searched for other alternatives and shifted to urban areas. The non-brahmin castes improved their economic position. The dominant castes


82M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India......, Chapter-1.
like Reddis, Kammas, and Velamas have improved their economic position compared to the other castes like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes.\(^{83}\)

N. Innaiah in his book *State Government and Politics: A Study of Andhra Pradesh Politics 1885-1985* held that the politics in the state is influenced by caste more than any other factor.\(^4\) Brahmins dominated the region till 1955 and they were replaced by Reddis and Kammas. In the words of Selig Harrison "The Kammas and Reddis, their strength diffused in the Welter of Madras castes, became vigorous advocates of an Andhra State, in which their place in the power structure was sure to enlarge"\(^{85}\) Representation of Reddis and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh politics is higher than their proportion in the population. Velamas are fewer in population, but politically significant in certain parts of Telangana and Circar regions.

Caste politics also play a major role in Andhra Pradesh. The dominant castes Kammas and Reddis play a key role from the local politics to that of state politics. These castes acquired power due to their hold on land. In the allotment of seats also these castes dominate. The Janata Party attracted a section of Reddis to join. Notable features of caste politics in Andhra Pradesh is its blending with the forces of regional politics. Not only the feeling of caste but also regional feelings were evoked in Andhra Pradesh politics. The separate *Telangana Movement and Jai Andhra Movement* had their origins in the caste politics.\(^{86}\) In fact after independence caste had come to play a fundamental role in the working and making of representative institutions of India.

Atul Kohli in his book *Democracy and Discontent: India’s Growing Crisis of Governability* opines that the roots of India’s growing problem of governability are more political than socio-economic, that is, they are located mainly in India’s political structure. The opportunities provided by democracy have in turn, helped to transform


what was once a heterogeneous social structure into many groups of mobilised activities. Failure of leaders to make timely concessions has only intensified political demands and activity. For researchers it will provide detailed empirical analysis of local, regional and national trends. The discussion in Kohli’s book revolves around alignments between castes and parties. The interactions between the castes and parties are now mutual, where as the existing caste cleavages shape the decisions of political parties, the nature of the parties and the party system itself mould caste political behaviour.

A recurring theme in Kohli’s book was the growing challenge to the domination of the established elite in local communities. According to Kohli, in the case of Guntur, the earlier conflict involving the two dominant castes (Kammas and Reddis) has now broadened. In recent years, the backward classes are emerging as a significant political force in their own right all over India. Here the role of Kapus who are now demanding the status of backward class, has to be probed thoroughly with reference to Andhra Pradesh.

The review of above studies show that the studies done by various scholars throw light on the role of caste in politics in different regions of the country as well as the nature of caste conflicts in a few regions of different states. In India caste remains the principal base for social organisation. So caste obviously is used for mobilisational purposes in electoral and other political activities. State politics in India has been particularly the hot bed of political casteism. All the parties which happen to have a multi caste membership. If the parties based on caste lines (not only parties but also organisations) it does not mean that the members entirely are motivated only on caste considerations. There may be other caste people in the organisations. So basically the general interest of caste comes into consideration, caste gets politicised and becomes a means in the elite politics of securing or retaining power. In fact, after independence caste had come to play a fundamental role in the working and making of representative


88 Ibid., p.192.
institutions of India. Thus, these studies conclude with the political mobilisations and shows how the caste plays an important role in building the political infrastructure.

The caste system began to acquire new functions and dimensions in the changing socio-economic and political ambience of the pre-independence period. However, changes in the caste system notwithstanding the grip of this institution on the social matrix did not loosen to any appreciable extent. Caste continues to persist, albeit in a different form from its feudal ‘embodiment’. After the achievement of Independence and introduction of electoral politics in a traditional society, caste gained a new role for itself.

Changes in the institution of caste cannot be fully comprehended in isolation from the changes in economy and politics, especially since Independence. Changes in caste as a system are closely related to the changes in the economic sphere, while the transformation of castes as interest groups is intrinsically related to the introduction and spread of democratic politics.

The introduction of democracy, which has been effective in India since Independence, while dismantling the traditional authority structure, at least theoretically, has contributed to the growth and consolidation of castes as interested groups. In view of the fragmentation and factionalism within caste groups and alignments and realignments among them, political parties no doubt cut across caste groups. But because of the compulsions of electoral politics, no party can ignore the caste factor except at its own peril. At every stage in politics, the leaders of political parties, have to engage in ‘Caste-rope walking’. The importance of caste increases as we go down the political hierarchy from the parliamentary constituency to the village panchayat. Religious and sectarian leaders and the Mathadhi Patis (Monastic leaders) also play a crucial, though covert, role in the mobilisation of the caste factor for political purposes.