POLITICAL AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION OF BACKWARD CLASSES IN A. P.: A CASE STUDY OF MUNNURUKAPU IN TELANGANA REGION

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By

P. VENKATESHWAR

Under the Supervision of

Prof. D.SATYANARAYANA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
OSMANIA UNIVERSITY
HYDERABAD 500 007

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ABSTRACT

The study is intended to examine the implications of caste system which continues to survive as a significant aspect of our society over the centuries. In Indian politics caste plays a vital role as the political behavior of the masses is often influenced by caste consideration.

In India, the British India period was indeed the darkest phase but, it was also the period when reformers dawned on the scene and gave a new sense of direction to society. These reformers gave India a new thought process and helped it re-discover its soul. No country could boast of such a wide array of reformers like India. These social reformers instilled a sense of pride in things Indian and helped in India stand up to the British supremacists. They also strove to rid Indian society of the evils and outmoded practices. Many of them kept aloof from politics and struggle against the British. But, they helped the cause of freedom in an indirect manner. Leaders and reformers like Mahatma Joti Rao Phule, Sahu Maharaj E.V.Ramsami Naicker, Narayana Guru, B.R.Ambedkar have left their historical mark in the fight for an equal society and self-respect.

India has been identified with thousands of such Backward Castes mostly found in the middle and lower rungs of caste hierarchy but above the SCs and STs. In every village there used to be ‘community feeling’ for a long and every BC/SC is involved in one or the other ‘productive operation or exclusive service’ to society and everyone needs such service to maintain their life. The nature of deprivation in respect of broadly signified caste disabilities they suffered over centuries. Caste disabilities could broadly be in the nature of social discrimination, economic exploitation and political marginalization.
The term backward class was first used in the 1870s by the Madras administration in the framework of an affirmative action policy favoring under-educated. The colonial sense undereducated means not from the historical marginalization, deprivation, and exclusion from the basic rights such as education, property and power, but it was to serve the needs of the colonial administration in the light of education system which was advocated by Lord Macaulay.

**Objectives of the study**

Some of the main objectives of present study have been given below:

- To study the political behavior and levels of political participation of Munnuru Kapu Community.
- To identify the processes and networks through which the association carries out its activities including politics and development.
- To analyze the impact of political participation on the living conditions of Munnuru Kapus.
- To assesses the role of the Munnuru Kapus leadership in the electoral process.
- To explain the impact of specific socio-economic and political development on Munnuru Kapus.
- To examine the interaction between caste and politics as well as significance of caste association in contemporary politics.
- To understand how the caste associations became platforms for political leadership.
Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are broadly identified and the researcher’s attempt is to examine their validity by empirical means:

- Caste is at the roots of Indian politics. However, the concept of caste is highly politicized and each caste association attempts to articulate its interests.
- Impact of socio-economic conditions has a logical correlation with the levels of political participation and shaping up of the forms of awareness among the Munnurukapu community.
- The Munnurukapu community associations have influenced both the government as well as political parties in the formulation of public policies and programmes.
- The initiation of government welfare policies has positive effect on the levels of awareness among the Munnuru Kapus.
- Political participation of the Munnurukapu people as reflected in the electoral process has improved the political awareness and position of this community.
- Higher the land holding higher the political participation.
- Higher the exposure to media higher the level of political participation.

Methodology

This research study takes into account the experimental and empirical method of research in investigating the Munnurukapu community awareness and participation in Telangana. In this regard, the data was collected from the library as well as observation and interview schedule methods. For the purpose of collecting the data, different methods of social inquiry were adopted.
A structured questionnaire exclusively for the rural political leaders and community persons of Munnurukapu Community hailing from Nizamabad and Nalgonda districts of Telangana was formulated, administered and information elicited. Besides, the researcher also contacted a few political representatives, community leaders as well as political elite and ascertained their views on the various dimensions of caste associations and their impact.

**Data Analysis**

The data has been analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). It had been transformed into computer code and analyzed with the help of single variable or multi-variable tables. Statistical tools such as averages had also been used to analyze the data.

**The study is divided into seven chapters.**

The **first chapter** deals with ‘Introduction’ the historical perspective with genesis of caste system in India. English education, urbanisation, Freedom movement and Vishalandhra movement gave early leadership advantage to Brahmins in Andhra region. However the formation of Kamma, Reddy, Velama caste associations around 1910 and participation in Non-Brahmin movement led to the rise of caste power. Kisan movement (1930s) produced the leadership from dominant landed castes. The growth of left movement (1934-47) promoted the leadership of peasantry from Reddy and Kamma castes. Abolition of Zamindari system (1948) accentuated the process of Brahmin migration and that led to land transfer to Kamma and Kapu castes. Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act (1950) protected six lakh tenants, largely belonging to landed castes.
The second chapter deals with historical perspective of other backward classes movement in India. A changing caste politics and participation from Independence to present day and awareness of Backward Community in the political era of Andhra Pradesh has also been described and Backward Classes in Constitutional Perspective The genesis of the Constitutional identity of OBCs can be traced back to the rise of caste associations and social movements in 19th century protests against the then existing oppressive, suppressive, iniquitous social order of chaturvarna system.

The chapter also analyses Non–Brahmin movement and particularly Jyothi Rao Phule’s contribution to such movements in Maharashtra. The movement in Andhra Pradesh is studied and the findings indicate that the backward class community being heterogeneous in character has striking inequalities and thereby preventing the community to act as a politically cohesive group. It also brings out a fact that the social, educational and economic distance among the elite of these castes also encourages factionalism and infighting. At this point, the ruling elite tend to play politics of accommodation. The study pinpoints that there was a tremendous upsurge of political consciousness above the Munnurukapu community to forge the available, community force to share political power structure. It is found that the backward classes’ movement, however modest it may appear, it has succeeded in socializing the masses.

Indian Constitution has provided us with a way of life that is in consonance with the ideals of democracy. These ideals can only be established by providing social, economic and political justice to the people. India is a heterogeneous society having
disparities of economic, social and cultural nature. The framers of our Constitution were aware of a fact that in a caste-ridden society like ours, certain castes and classes were socially oppressed, economically condemned to live the life penury, and educationally coerced to learn the family trade or occupation and to take the education set out for each caste and class by society, for centuries.

The Constituent Assembly thought it necessary to include provisions in the Constitution which would serve as an exception to the general provisions guaranteeing equality so as to enable the government in helping the "Backward Classes" to catch up with rest of the society. These provisions were included in Article 15 (4) that reads Nothing in this Article or in clause 2 of Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any ‘socially and educationally backward Classes of citizens’ through Article 340, which later, through the Constitution by the First Amendment Act, 1951, came to be incorporated as Clause (4) under Article 15 of the Constitution that governs provision of reservation in educational institutions thus India created the right atmosphere for this mobilization.

The third chapter examines ‘Backward Classes and Socio-economic profile of Munnurukapu Community and deals with the Backward Classes in the context of Constitutional Perspective. Besides, it presents an historical and socio-economic profile of Munnurukapu Community. In Andhra Pradesh, nomenclature of castes varies from region to region, as in Telangana the Kapus are treated as a backward class under the name ‘Munnurukapu’. In Vishakapatnam, Vizayanagaram, and Srikakulam, they are treated as backward class under the name ‘Turupu Kapu’. In
other parts of Costal Andhra however, they are considered as a Forward caste. An attempt is also made in this chapter to analyse the attitudes of the Munnurukapu Community elites, political leadership, ideologies, caste marriages, customs, conscious and nature of the community. The Munnurukapu means ‘guardian’ which is interpreted in the sense of ‘food producer’ in as much as members of this caste cultivate land and grow corn, thus contributing to the maintenance of animal life. They rear milk cattle and bullocks, which are employed in agricultural operations.

The congregation of community members is spread over the entire Telangana and Maharashtra. Mostly engaged in menial and low jobs and this community is unreasonably kept in group D – 20 of BCs list. The vast majority of Munnurukapu community people (above 75%) reside in the villages. These villagers don’t have primary education both men and women are illiterates engaged as agricultural coolies / household servant’s labours, factory labourers living in most pitiable conditions.

Social status of women in Munnurukapu community is encouraging. Most of them are getting educated and settling in jobs. However, a majority of the women are illiterate and engaged in household and agricultural work. Participation of women in social, cultural and political fields is very little or negligible. The women who were in the age group of 30-60 years were illiterate. Even those who were younger, they claimed to have gone to school for a couple of years. Agriculture is said to be the original occupation of the caste and the bulk of them still cling to this. A few are village patels and have risen to high status as landlords and zamindars, but the majority is ordinary cultivators, holding lands on permanent tenure. A considerable portion of the Munnurukapus has given up their original occupation and has either entered Government service or become traders. Munnurukapu belong to both the
Shaiva and Vaishnava sects and under the titles of Vibhutidharis and Tirmanidharis, who are followers of Aradhi (Aradhyulu – Shankaracharyulu) and Shri-Vaishnava Brahmanas.

The first Munnurukapu conference held on 31st May-1st June 1935 at Hyderabad, that conference concerned itself with social, educational backwardness, economic deprivation and social evils like dowry system, child marriages, and indiscriminate pomp in spending money, drinking, enforced widowhood besides addressing itself to the spread of literary and improvement of economic position. The community Association emphasised on the need of the establishment of co-operative banks to provide loans to poor agriculturists of the community. Due to the efforts of Munnurukapu association in social reform, education facilities, training campus, spreading ideas through campaign, media and continuous motivation, a large section of them entered politics, business, real-estate, finance, bureaucracy and academic fields in the post independent period. In politics, Munnurukapus occupied fair positions among the backward castes in Telangana region.

This chapter reveals socio-economic factors of Munnurukapu members responsible for their political participation. These factors are similar to various political leaders of other communities we have dealt with variables such as area, education, occupation, land holding and income of political respondents. It is established that higher the educational level, higher the political participation. All secondary educated respondents are active in local politics. Respondents with higher education play active role in state politics. When we take the occupation of political respondents more participation is from agriculture profession followed by business groups. Land constituted very important factor in Indian economy, land continuous to be the status
symbol in rural area. This finding establishes the fact that more the land holding more the participation in politics, similar is with income groups.

The fourth chapter deals the Political Power Structure in Munnurukapu Community in Telangana. The Political System in Telangana contextualises the Munnurukapu Community in the backdrop of Political Power Structures in Andhra Pradesh with special reference to Telangana. The population of BCs constitutes nearly 50 percent of total population. But, they have never been represented in the Assembly proportionate to their population. In these elections, however on average, 15 percent of BC communities are elected. Each political party is dominated by upper caste shows that the BCs are divided in their loyalty to different parties. Thus the strategy of dominant caste, heterogeneous nature and culture of BCs are resulting in inadequate representation of BCs.

Further, different political parties have become synonymous with dominant communities such as Congress for Reddys and TDP for Kammas. These communities never allowed other BCs to emerge independently. Within the various backward communities around 100 who are numerically less, economically unsound are never represented in assembly. Only 13 BCs (communities) are represented in Assembly so far in Telangana region, whereas around 100 communities are never represented. There is division among BCs because some communities alienated are from the masses. Dominant communities never allowed emergence of any BCs leader as powerful within the party. There is no chief minister from BCs in AP so far. It is interesting to note that 22 members of Munnurukapu community members are elected from the congress party in eight elections, whereas 12 members are elected
from TDP. TRS is established in 2001 and contested in three elections. TRS was created for the achievement of separate Telangana state.

The Telangana movement continued for 14 years. Munnurukapu leaders actively participated in the movement and were part of JAC’s. But they had inadequate share in two Assembly elections together 2009 and 2014 with 12 members. Their political share in Assembly increased with the emergence of TRS. Munnurukapu caste representations in 2009 constitute 4 members are elected from TRS. In 2014 elections fair number of representatives i.e. 8 members elected from this community to the Assembly.

The fifth chapter deals with the Political Awareness of Munnurukapu community in power politics and analysis leadership of Munnurukapu community in democratic set up. In this chapter an attempt is made to quantify the impact of all media agencies on the Munnurukapu community members in Telangana. The discussion on political awareness among Munnuru Kapus community members or leaders in Nalgonda and Nizamabad districts depends on their exposure to mass media. It has contributed to the overall development of an individual in a given political system. The finding of the study bring out clearly that mass media is a significant source of political information. Newspaper reading, television watching and radio listening are playing the most important role in communication. Majority of respondents watch television, the data reveals that out of all agencies of media, TV constitutes an important communicator followed by news papers. Most of the respondents watch TV and listen to radio for entertainment and the overall analysis shows that TV acts more as entertainment than informing political events.
Newspapers are quite helpful for developing awareness of local, national and international events and understanding the economic, political and cultural events in the society. People having trust in the written material especially about the socio-political activities, Trade and commerce, governmental and non-governmental and other information published in the newspapers. They play an important role in moulding and crystallizing the opinion of the people. The influence of Newspapers is substantial. Inspite of the fact that TV is widespread among various vernacular newspapers, Eenadu is preferred by most of the respondents followed Andhra jyothi. Other newspapers like Sakshi, Vartha are preferred by a few respondents. It is interesting to note that most of the Munnurukapu people are aware of their caste association. They justify the existence of this association since they render services to them. This fact reveals the necessity of caste association leading to the role of caste in state politics. The political parties also consider caste factor in selecting the candidates for elections. Majority of the respondents have membership in caste association. And they justify their membership on the ground that the associations help them. Land holding in rural Andhra Pradesh constitutes the basic factor in political behavior. The data in this chapter reveals that people with higher holding of lands are identified with Congress followed by TDP. The survey reveals that significant percentage of respondents is beneficiaries of government policies. The finding also reveals that Munnurukapus are in a better political status because of caste associations and their profession like agriculture and trade.

In the sixth Chapter main focus has been to find out the degree of political participation of Munnurukapu community leaders in Telangana. The role of caste association in elections and political reservations of BCs. Welfare policies which
empower the community were discussed with respondents. Who are politically active in various parties. The other aspects covered in this chapter are political parties giving representation to the Munnurukapu community and also other B.C communities like Gouda, Yadava and Padmashalies in elections. Here the research also assessed the role of political parties that claimed social justice. For the last three decades there is demand for B.C’s reservations in Assembly and Parliament. B.C’s are raising their voice through many forms such as protest, Dharnas, processions and Chalo Hyderabad and Challo Delhi programs by B.C s community.

Munnurukapu Community respondents who participated in voting is very high. At the same time their participation in election campaigns contesting and other political activities is on average. Certain factors like political charisma of leaders like N.T.Ramarao and K.C.R had influence on political participation of Munnurukapu community. These were the main factors for the concrete political participation that could change their economic conditions. As far as reservations in elections are concerned majority of Munnurukapu respondents including community leaders supported. There is also movement by OBCs for 50 percent reservations in Assembly and Parliament elections, since BCs constitute about 50 percent of the state electorate. In Andhra Pradesh, various BC communities are coming together on one platform raising their voice for reservations in the form of protest, dharnas, and processions and holding public meetings. It is interesting to find that representatives of different political parties, coming together to protect the interest of their community this shows the role of caste in Indian political system. Therefore, analyses have to think whether the phenomena of Indian politics are castesied or castes politicized are true. Majority of Munnurukapu leaders are of the opinion that
Congress leads in accommodating their communities’ (members) followed by TDP and TRS respectively. It is a fact that most of the community people are associated with Congress party since independence. There is a shift in Munnurukapus after the emergence of TDP in 1980s and TRS in 2001.

The final chapter presents brief findings and conclusions of the study. An historical perspective to analyze the genesis of the caste system in India is necessary. Also, prime importance of caste in Indian politics, changing attitude of caste associations, and participation in politics from independence to present day, is essential to explain the status of backward communities in democratic contemporary Indian politics. The practice and influence of the caste system still exists in India. Thus people are divided into classes, races and religious groups besides being divided on caste lines. Munnurukapus majority of them still depend upon agriculture as their main occupation is with limited land at their disposal. Land re-distribution, improved use of modern methods and provision for subsidies and marketing facilities need to be strengthened. Education plays an important role in political behavior and participation. Most of the political leaders of the Munnurukapu are from educational category, especially majority of them belong to secondary education. Munnurukapus occupied various political positions from Panchayatraj to state level politics.

Similar is the case with OBC who are actively participating in political process like Yadavas, Gouds etc. Therefore higher the education higher the participation of Munnurukapus in the political system, It is also interesting to note that those who are already in the political system are interested in penetrating into the system and preventing the entry of new members resulting in the elite system within
Munnurukapus. This is evident when one observe four decades electoral process in Andhra Pradesh. We find only 15 to 20 same members emerging into political system through various political parties. These elite groups develop vested interest and hold stakes in the system itself by their economic power. It is very interesting to observe the role of BCs in state politics. All BC communities together constitute around 50 percent of electorate but they never had decisive role in the state politics and government. There are 138 BC communities in Andhra Pradesh that are heterogeneous. Each community feels different from other BCs. It is a complex problem for all BC communities to come to one platform the recherché establishes the fact that Munnurukapus, Yadavas, Gouds, Mudiraj and padmashalis are represented in the Assembly. Because of their economic power and existence of their organisation with considerable numerical strength unlike Battraj, Rajaka, Vamsharaj and Nai-Brahaman etc. They are not represented since they lack economic resources and organising capabilities.

The research is on Munnurukapu community and their political participation. When we look in to the members of this community elected to state Assembly from Telangana region. In eight elections during 1983-2014, reveals the position of this community continuously in all these elections, on the whole 48 members are elected that is in the period of 24 years. The data reveals that most of the MLAs so far 22 are elected from Congress followed by 12 each from TDP and TRS. In this elected leadership most of them are repeatedly elected to Assembly not giving scope for new members from the community. This has led to concentration of power in the hands of a few political leaders to establish this fact. They include D. Srinvas, P. Laximaiah, D. Nagender, K. Sureka and B. Govardhan from Congress and
K. Laxman and Laxminarayana from BJP, Yellareddy, S. Rajeswar and G. Kamalaker from TDP. Still there is a continuous struggle and movement from community to have more share. They claim that they are not given adequate space in proportionate to their population. Political observers have been saying that dominant communities of all the states play significant role in politics. It is also true with the state of Andhra Pradesh. The research establishes that a few dominant castes play significant role. The data reveals that Reddy, Kammas and Velmas play this significant role in almost all elections held to Assembly. The data reveals 387 Reddy community members elected to assembly from 1962-2009, elections followed by Velmas with 79, Kammas with 55 and Brahmans 49. When one observes the data from the angle of BC community its only 4 communities that have some place such as Munnurukapus, Gouds, Mudiraj, Yadavas and Padmashalis. Around 100 communities from the BCs have not been represented in Assembly. Only 13 BC communities are represented in Assembly so far in Telangana region. Whereas, around 100 communities are never represented there is division among BCs because some communities alienated from the masses of the people. Dominant communities never allowed emergence of any BC leader as powerful within the party. There is no chief minister from BCs, in AP so far, who are numerically less and not well organised. It may take very long period these communities to enter in to the political process. The fundamental question is whether these communities come on their own or with the patronage of dominant communities. It needs further research on this question.

Munnurukapus are fairly represented in Assembly when compared to OBCs as per the facts revealed in the study. Yet Munnurukapu organisation claim that their
representation in policy making bodes are not in proportion to their existing population. They claim that they deserve a minimum of 25 seats in Telangana region according to their population. Interesting fact is that they had to depend on the dominant communities to have their due share.

The fundamental question here is whether Munnurukapu are still in receiving position in the political system, if yes is it possible for their community to have due share in the political cake? It is a million dollar question. Here also further comprehensive research is to be done to find out whether they can raise their position in political process being dominated by dominant communities.

Further, data also reveals perspectives of respondents about the role of caste in elections. A majority of respondents (76.2 percent) agreed that caste play significant role in elections. The research also reveals the fact that caste association help its members to enter into the politics these facts are opinion of BC caste leading to form their own caste association to consolidate their strength and they claim to share the political and economic benefits. But this is not possible for all backward classes (communities) in the state to influence the system because they are numerically less and lack economic resources. For Munnurukapus, Gouds, Yadavas, and Padmashalies are in advantageous in positions due to their organisational skills and financial resources. Still, these communities claim that they are not given political share in proportionate to their population. In spite of these factors no one became chief minister from the BC communities. Thus, the political leadership and governmental power is totally vested in the hands of upper castes and despite having more than 50 percent of population. BCs could not ‘get power’ in proportion to
their population. Since political parties are under the control of upper castes, they invariably allot party tickets to upper castes and tend to ignore the interests of BCs and other depressed castes, while monopolizing the entire political power. Inspite of these factors no one became Chief Minister from Backward classes communities. Thus, the BCs in India have been demanding 50% reservations for them in Assemblies and Parliament. This movement has surfaced significantly after Mandal commission. This commission recommended reservations in the education and employment in the Union government. Most of the Munnurukapu members that is 90% supported political reservations whereas only 10% did not (table 6.3) as far as quantum of reservations are concerned. Most of the respondents opted for 50 percent followed by 40 percent in reservation in the elections.

Further, the research reveals that Congress party gave more space to Munnurukapu leaders. Most of the respondents identified themselves with the Congress party (table.6.6 and 6.11). The source of inspiration to enter electoral politics is influence of community leaders and family members that is entry into politics is confined to families who are already in politics and those who are active in caste associations. This study reveals that politics are confined to a few families of Munnurukapus in Telangana region.

Empowerment of the broad category of other backward classes in India refers to the process of emancipation from a historically stratified state of multi-dimensional caste disabilities traceable to socio political and economic opportunities in the pre and post independence régimes. It also refers to the interaction and interplay of efforts and struggles of the differently disabled deprived categories, strategies and techniques of
the privileged segment to continue their privileged hold and decisive role in society as long and as much as possible, in the journey from an unequal caste society to the goal of equality and equal society, as defined in our democratic Constitution.

To conclude the study it was possible to examine the electoral participation that got a very positive response presenting a rosy picture with percentage of voters and their turn out to the polling stations being encouraging phenomena in the state. The real political participation can be expected, which is a primary condition for transformation of the socio-economic conditions of the community towards a better system, if the community as such emerges active in the state politics in the state.

**Further, certain suggestions that emerge from the research are as follows.**

Comprehensive census of all BCs have to be conducted which gives a clear picture of the socio-economic status of 138 communities. This also helps to assess status of individual communities and further re-grouping. Political power is a key, foundation and fountain for every social opportunity. The OBCs have been all these decades denied this key role. The population proportion of BCs and their sub-caste categories justify that there should be political reservations to BCs in Parliament and state Assemblies elections since their movement by federation of BCs communities. The BCs in rural areas must be given agriculture land and encourage modern cultivation since land is an important variable of social-economic status. Instead of frequent appointing National commission for backward classes with powers and functions similar to those accorded to National commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under Article 338 with similar objectives is essential. There must be policies which encourage the BC students with financial help in their studies
and research. In the case of Munnurukapu community there is also criticism from the other BCs that they were getting larger share in education and politics. But, the study reveals that the benefits are not in proportion to their population as large sections of Munnurukapus are still below poverty line as data reveals. The research establishes the fact that Munnurukapu association played a significant role in sharing many political leaders from the community, as caste became significant in elections.