

Caste, Politics and Political Parties in Uttrakhand

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The relationship between caste and politics may be analyzed at two levels: (1) how caste affects politics? And (ii) how politics influence caste? As the caste and politics both are interrelated therefore both influence each other. As at one hand all political parties calculate caste support at the time of distribution of tickets and the political behaviour influences the caste people the other side caste reserves its votes for its own members, people prefer to vote for a candidate of their own caste irrespective of the merits/demerits of the candidates and the leader of a particular caste prefers to select his own caste people in different posts. As caste provides leadership to the political structure, politics provides prestige and power, economic benefits and administrative patronage to the caste people. Consequently the leaders mobilise politics and its principles through their caste ideologies and they are bound to give importance to the caste opinion. Caste and politics were always related, but the relationship was manifested differently at different periods of time. This research paper discusses some aspects of relationship between caste and politics in India particularly in Uttrakhand.

Rajni Kothari (1970) examined the relationship between caste and politics by analyzing the issue as to what happens to political system because of the vote of castes. He found that three factors- education, government patronage, and slowly expanding franchise (including 18-21 year old young persons in electorate)- have penetrated the caste system because of which it (caste system) has come to affect democratic politics in country. According to him due to factionalism and fragmentation within the competing castes, multi-caste and multi-factional alignments develop. The lower castes also are brought in to support high caste leaders and to strengthen a faction. This creates the problem of rival caste leaders in politics. These leaders come to involve masses too because they (leaders) want to appeal to wider identities. There is also change in leadership in this stage. According to Rajni Kothari besides the competition between entrenched and ascendant castes (for power and benefit) the competition within these castes also exists. Conclusively from the present relationship between caste and politics Rajni Kothari says that, new elite structure has emerged in politics which is drawn from different castes but shares a common secular outlook and is homogenous in terms of some values. Castes have started functioning on factional basis. These factions divide not only political groups but also social groups. The caste identifications have given a new relevance to the electorate system. It is not only the large castes which affect politics but also the smaller castes which have become important in seeking votes. Many studies have shown that political parties mobilise castes for their functioning and seek their support in winning elections. The study of Anil Bhatt (in Rajni Kothari) shows the political mobilization of castes in Gujrat, study of Richard Sission (1960) shows the development of congress party in 'Na-gaur' district in Rajasthan due to the caste support, a study of Andre Beteille shows the shift in the power of political parties through the caste system in Tamil Nadu in the 1970s (in Rajni Kothari). According to Kothari there is always mutual effect of caste and politics on each other. A. R. Desai, G.S. Ghurye, K.M. Kapadiya and Rajni Kothari have the view that there never was a complete polarisation between the caste system and the political system. Politics has used caste and will continue to use it for socio-political purposes. According to Ahuja Ram (2015) voting provides an opportunity to castes to assert their influence. In Britain, voting is class-determinant, in United States it is race determinant, in India it is caste-determinant. For those castes which are at the bottom of the hierarchy, voting rights serves as a powerful activity. It is seen that the lower the social and economic status of a caste, the higher the importance of the vote.

Now the political parties are experimenting on bringing all the castes into their camps. These days a new elite structure is emerging in the politics in which the leaders are drawn from varied caste groups. In the 1990s many parties bahujan samajwadi party (BSP), the Samajwadi Party and the Janta Dal started claiming

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that they were representing the backward castes. Many such parties, relying primarily on backward classes' support, often in alliance with dalits and muslims, rose to power in Indian states. At the same time, many dalit leaders and intellectuals started realising that the main dalit oppressors were the so-called other backward classes, and formed their own parties, such as the Indian Justice Party. The congress (I) in Maharashtra long relied on OBCs backing for its political success. Bhartiya Janta party has also showcased its dalit and OBC leaders to prove that it is not an upper caste party. Bangaru laxman, the former BJP president (2001-2002) was a dalit. Sanyasin Uma Bharti, former CM of Madhya Pradesh, who belongs to OBC caste, was a former BJP leader. In Tamil Nadu, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party rose to power promising representation of all castes in all important sectors of society. In many scholarly works it is uncritically assumed that the political fortunes of party depend primarily upon the caste composition of constituencies (Frankel 1989, pp. 823-101). According to BSP zonal coordinator Sunil Kumar Chittod (India Today, Siraj Qureshi, August 2016) their party believes in giving tickets on the basis of vote gathering capacity of a candidate instead of the candidate's caste. At the University of Chicago Professor Suhas Palshikar argues that a process has begun where caste might be losing its salience in Indian politics (alaphia.blogspot.com>2008/05>role of caste in contemporary politics, Accessed on 31 August 2016). Further he says, "There are changes taking place in the experimental nature of caste due to urbanization." He also draws attention to the changing dalit image of the Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP)." He says, "The BSP these days talks about being a 'sarvojan samaj' party, which means a party for the whole society. They are no longer a party just for dalits."

For the political elite status caste has become a determinant factor. Scholars like Sachchidananda, Sirsikar, Ram Ahuja, S.K. Lal, etc in their studies on political elite have pointed out that in the emergence of elite; higher castes have an extraordinary advantage over the middle and the lower castes. Before independence, in the congress party generally the upper caste groups occupied the centre of the political stage who was engaged in the freedom struggle but after independence, individuals from the middle and the lower castes also entered political power field (Ahuja Ram, 2015). The reservation policy enabled individuals from the lower castes to emerge as leaders, while elite from the middle castes emerged due to their improved educational and socio-economic status. According to Ram Ahuja (2015, 70-71) caste system which had only ritualistic function (including determining occupation and social status) assumed the new role of regulating political behaviour of the people. Further he says, "Political parties also mobilise caste support. In fact the problems of mobilisation of masses today are the same as they were four decades ago. Just as in the 1930s and the 1940s social reformers believed that without the enlightenment of masses, their organization for political activity was not possible, similarly today also politicians try to get support from the caste leaders and at the same time drive home to them the utility of political means in achieving their goals".

Political party is an organized group of people which believe in common principles and common goals. Its objectives revolve around seeking political power through collective efforts. Political party employs constitutional and peaceful methods in seeking control over the government through elections. While in power it translates its declared objectives into governmental policies (<http://www.nios.lesson-21.pdf>). India has a multi-party system with a large number of political parties competing to attain power at the centre as well as in the state. Political parties in India are classified by the election commission for the allocation of symbols. The national political parties have areas of influence extending over the entire country. National political parties are: the Indian National Congress (INC), the nationalist congress party (NCP), the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), the communist party of India (CPI), the communist party of India Marxist (CPI-M), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD). The religious policies of the congress party have been secular. The BJP was originally the Hindu Maha Sabha which advocated Hindu nation. It is associated with Sangh Parivar hardliners-Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, and RSS-which have fanatic, anti-muslim, anti-christian missionaries' attitudes and too rigid Hindu ideologies. Bahujan samajwadi parti (BSP) was formed mainly to represent Bahujans (literally meaning 'people in majority'), referring to people from the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes (OBC). The BSP has historically drawn a loyal base of voters from

dalits and most backward castes (Wikipedia. Org visited on 22 august 2016). Since voting provides an opportunity to castes to assert their influence therefore today dominant castes as well as ascendant castes (higher castes) are tying with the important political parties of the region. Dalit and muslim vote bank is having major share in the victory of political parties. Dalit candidates are mobilizing towards the other political parties instead of BSP. Muslims are also joining BJP which is considered as Hindu party.

Caste advocates social exclusion and democracy advocated social inclusion. The relationship between caste and politics may be analyzed at two levels: how caste affects politics? And how politics influences castes? During election period all the political parties calculate caste support for the distribution of tickets. People prefer to vote for a candidate of their own caste irrespective of the merits or demerits of the candidate. Leader of a particular caste prefers to select his/her own caste people in different post. Today the political parties are considering caste as a vote bank. This enabled the lower castes to be politically influential on the basis of numerical preponderance. Now days in selecting candidates for the elections, political parties often give consideration to the caste composition of constituencies. By the early 1990s there began a shift in caste politics the continuation of one party system, which was the congress party, composed mostly of upper-caste leadership, came to an end. This was partly due to 'economic liberalization in India' which reduced the control the state had on the economy and thus the lower castes, and partly due to an upsurge in caste based parties that made the politics of lower caste empowerment a central part of their political agenda (Wikipedia.org, visited on 21 August 2016). These new political parties emerged not on a national level but on a village and regional level, and were most dominant in North India. Some representatives of the SC and ST groups obtained access to congress and BJP in India and in Uttrakhand too. Similarly Muslims have joined BJP which is basically considered as the Hindu party (wiki.org, visited on 21 August 2016). India's political parties have found the caste based selection of candidates and appeals to the caste based interests of the Indian electorate to be an effective way to win popular support. More fundamental has been the economic development and social mobility of those groups officially designated as backward classes and scheduled castes. The backward classes are such a substantial constituency that almost all parties vie for their support for e.g. the congress (I) in Maharashtra has long relied on backward classes backing for its political success. The 1990s have seen a growing number of cases where political parties, relying primarily on backward classes support. In uttrakhand also congress relied on backward classes backing for its political success.

Main political parties in Uttrakhad are BJP, INC, SP, BSP. Elected members of BJP come from the various caste groups which include upper as well as lower castes such as: Malchand (sc purola), Bhim lal arya (sc, ghansali), Mahavir singh (thakur, rajput dhanaulti), Sahdev singh pundir (sahaspur), Harbans Kapoor (Panjabi, dehradun), Ganesh joshi (Brahmin, mussori), Premchand aggarwal (rishikesh), Madan Kaushik (haridwar), Adesh Chauhan (rajput, BHEL Ranipur), Chandra Shekhar (SC, jwalapur), Sanjay Gupta (kayasth, laksar), Yatishwaranand (haridwar rural), Vijya Barthwal (yamkeshwar), Tirath singh rawat (thakur, chaubattakhal), Dalip singh rawat (thakur, lansdown), Bishan singh chuphal (didihat), Chandan ram das (SC, bageshwar), Surendra singh jeena (salt), Ajay bhatt (Brahmin, ranikhet), puran singh (thakur, lohaghat), Dan singh bhandari (thakur, bhimtal), Banshidhar Bhagat (Brahmin, kaladhungi), Harbhajan singh cheema (Panjabi, kashipur), Arvind pandey (Brahmin, gadarpur), Rajkumar thukral (sardar, rudrapur), Rajesh Shukla (kichha), Prem singh (ST, nanakmatta), Pushkar singh dhami (thakur, khatima). Elected members of Indian National Congress also represent upper as well as lower castes: vijay pal sajan (gangotri), rajendra singh bhandari (thakur, badrinath), jeet ram (sc, tharali), anusuya Prasad maikhuri (karanprayag), vikram singh negi (thakur, pratapnagar), pritam singh (ST, chakrata), nav prabhat (Brahmin, vikasnagar), dinesh aggarwal (dhrampur), raj kumar (sc, rajpur road), heera singh bisht (thakur, doiwala), mamta rakesh (sc, bhagwanpur), furqan ahmed (muslim, piran kaliyar), sunder lal mandrawal (sc, pauri), ganesh Prasad (srinagar), surendra singh negi (thakur kotdwar), harish rawat (thakur, dharchula), mayukh singh mahar (thakur, pithoragarh), narayan ram arya (sc, gangolihat), lalit mohan singh pharswan (kapkot), madan singh bisht (thakur, dwarahat), rekha arya (sc, someshwar), manoj tiwari (Brahmin, almora), govind singh kunjwal (jageshwar), hemesh kharkwal (Brahmin,

champawat), sarita arya (sc, nainital), indira hridayesh (Brahmin, haldwani), yashpal arya (sc, bajpur). It is clear that in Uttarakhand SC leaders are included in the various political parties to balance the caste equation. The practice of politics is often understood as being about painstaking calculation, laboured alliance building and the clever use of power to grant and withhold favours in order to extract advantage. Complex caste equations, the understanding of ground level realities, the weighing of who needs to be backed against whom when these are some of the common skills that every party employs. When parties choose candidates in election, they keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate and nominate candidates from different castes so as they get their support to win elections. In Uttarakhand the congress chief is a Brahmin and the chief minister is a Thakur so the yashpal arya fits the caste equation. As the BJP has a lok sabha MP Ajay tamta from Almora, Pradeep tamta was a lok sabha MP from Almora belongs to congress party. The logic being given for Tamtas' name is that they are backward. With an eye on nearly 59% rajput voters in uttrakhand, the congress has fielded three rajput candidates out of five lok sabha seats (2014) in state. Renuka Rawat, KC Singh Baba and Harak Singh Rawat belong to the Rajput or thakur community. While tehri candidate Saket Bahuguna is a Brahmin, the Almora seat was reserved for scheduled caste candidates. BJP has fielded two rajputs-Bhagat singh koshyari and Mala raj laxmi shah, and two Brahmins-BC Khanduri and Nishank. Though, according to the congress spokesperson Surendra Kumar "it is not the caste factor but the factors like the candidate's political experience and rapport among workers that have been taken into consideration" (Hindustan times 09 April 2014).

The privileged upper caste groups benefit more by gaining substantially more economic and political power, while the lower caste groups have limited access to those powers. The caste system distributes to different castes different economic strengths. The upper caste groups can then manipulate the economic and political system to transfer economic strength into political power (Wikipedia. Org, visited on 21 August 2016). Uttarakhand is inhabited by hill people, many of them belonging to the upper castes. The dalits of Uttarakhand constitute almost one-fourth 23% to be precise, of the population, and consists of largely the landless, the artisans, the craftsmen and the marginal farmers. Dalits of Uttarakhand have not benefited from reservation to the extent the dalits of other states have. Beside educational and socio-economic exclusion political exclusion of dalits is seen in Uttarakhand state. They had no representation in the political executive in any dispensation, congress or BJP. The upper caste political leadership excludes them from policy making and plan implementation. The congress government led by N.D. Tewari had no dalit leader in its cabinet. Then the BJP government, with no dalit leader in its cabinet either, allowed to lapse a corpus of Rs. 5000 crore under special component plan (Times of India, 11 March 2012). But the scenario has changed now. The current cabinet (2014) of Uttarakhand shows the dalit representation.

Table 1
Current cabinet of Uttarakhand (2014)

S. No.	Name	Caste	portfolio
1.	Harish Rawat	Thakur	Chief minister
2.	Indra Hrydesh	Brahmin	Cabinet minister
3.	Yashpal arya	SC	Cabinet minister
4.	Surendra singh negi	Thakur	Cabinet minister
5.	Pritam singh		Cabinet minister
6.	Dinesh dhanai		Cabinet minister
7.	Dinesh aggrawal		Cabinet minister
8.	Mantra Prasad naithani		Cabinet minister
9.	Pritam singh pawar		Cabinet minister

Table 2

Lok sabha election results in Uttrakhand 2014

Assembly	Caste	Winner	Winner party
Tehri garhwal	Thakur	Mala rajya laxmi shah	BJP
Garhwal	Brahmin	Maj. Gen. Retd. Bhuwan ch. Khanduri	BJP
Almora	SC	Ajay tamta	BJP
Nainital udham singh nagar	Thakur	Bhagat singh koshyari	BJP
Haridwar	Brahmin	Ramesh pokhariyal nishank	BJP

Table 3

Uttrakhand assembly results 2014

Assembly	Caste	Winner	Winner party
Dharchula	Thakur	Harish rawat	INC
Someshwar	SC	Rekha arya	INC
Doiwala	Thakur	Heera singh bisht	INC

From the above tables it is clear that both the major parties of Uttrakhand i.e. INC and BJP are having leaders from the upper castes as well as from the lower castes. We find a new type of integration in politics and the whole process is described as secularization of the social system. Political parties in uttrakhand mobilize castes for their functioning and seek their support in winning elections. All the political parties in selecting candidates in election keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate and nominate candidates from different castes so as they get their support to win elections.

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