

# UNDERSTANDING CASTE IN UTTER PRADESH: A DALIT NARRATIVE FROM REMOVING DISGRACE TO MAKING SELF IDENTITY

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## Abstract

Caste has always been dominant in Indian society from ancient times; its impact can be traced in all aspects of social-setup. In Indian politics caste plays a vital role as the political behavior of the mass is often influenced by the caste consideration. Since independence the factor of caste has influenced U.P. politics, especially the voting behavior of the electorates. The dynamics of caste in politics is quite visible even many political parties have been formed on caste lines. The present study will try to understand this equation from pre-independence to after independence and so far, how politicians have used this tool (caste) to gain legitimate power to rule. Secondly almost all the untouchable intellectuals have a unanimous understanding and they shared this view and tried to 'purify' untouchable communities in their Endeavour to create a respectable social and political identity for untouchables. In this connection this paper also makes an attempt on how Dalit succeeded in reforming their self from self disgrace to making self identity.

**Keywords:** Dalit identity, Exclusion, Untouchables, Politics

## Introduction

Caste system 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 mass is often influenced by caste consideration. In the words of Andre Beteille, "Caste enters much more directly in to the composition of political elites at the state level". Particularly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu caste has been a major and dominant factor in politics. (Bhuyan, 2006) A famous social scientist, G.S. Ghurye distinguished six highlights of the caste framework: segmental division of society, order, limitations on taking care of and social intercourse, common and strict incapacities, absence of unhindered decision of occupation and limitations on marriage. It is an epitome. In any case, tremendous changes happened with the beginning of English rule in India. Present day school system got talk on freedoms, freedom and uniformity. Numerous intelligent people like Phule, Ranade, Periyar, Ambedkar and Gandhije battled for allowing acknowledgment and defending their freedoms. Jyotiba Phule went to the degree of making an elective history of Shudras and untouchables featured the Aryan victory and their mastery over the aboriginals-Sudras. (Ghurye, 1969) According to the 1931 Census, the upper castes constitute 20.5 per cent of the population, the Brahmins and Rajputs taken together amounting for 16.4 per cent. The Other Backward Classes (OBCs) represent 41.7 per cent of the population, the bulk of that number being composed of numerous small-size and geographically dispersed castes, usually referred to a most backward Classes (MBCs). The three main groups among the OBCs, namely the Yadavs, the Kurmis and the Lodhis, account for respectively 8.7, 3.5 and 2.2 per cent of the population. Other locally dominant groups, such as the Jats and the Gujjars, represent respectively 2 and 0.7 per cent of the population. Despite of that, nearly 200 million population of India is Dalit which is near about 25 percent of Indian population (Verniers, 2016).

The word Dalit is a Marathi word which means 'broken down'. The word does not occur in the Constitution of India, and it is used by Dalits to refer and assert them politically. Through the usage of this word Dalits refer to themselves as 'broken people' who have been 'broken' due to thousands of years of caste discrimination. It is difficult to ascertain who used the word for the first time since we find the existence of words like padadalit (crushed by foot) and Dalit even before India's independence. However, it could be stated that the word gained more currency after India's independence when Dalits gradually began to mobilize themselves. (Azam, 2020) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar named the caste framework as an 'encased class' and furthers in these nooks 'a few shut the entryways and others found the entryways shut.' In Indian culture, the caste standing framework alludes to an individual and social group identified based on birth. These standing fixed on heredity arrangement of birth which makes sense of in strict awe-inspiring text and the ascent of Hinduism. The main man of Hindu Manu and his book Manusmriti allude to the caste and impurity of the outcaste during the predominance of Brahman. Those of having a place lower caste are informed: "that their spot in the position is because of their transgressions in their previous existence." Manusmriti, the most solid text of the Hindu religion legitimizes social prohibition and caste framework which presents outright disparity as the directing the standard of social and Hindu regulation. Caste framework is still entirely extensive for the Religion and the resident of India even in the today world "However the point, that various groups of caste and religion have various purposes behind keeping up with the arrangement of legislative issues, fascinating how the upper caste for the sake of Hinduism attempting to consolidate their power and favored. How the lower caste people are being befooled in the name of common unified of bundle fold hinder, thereby maintaining their domination. (Brass, 1994)

**Caste in UP before independence**

Caste politics in India with special reference to U.P tended to look down upon and deprecate the earlier inhabitants of the land for whom they coined several derogatory terms. Aryan Varna, in the first stage of Rig Veda period, was made up of three classes the membership of which was based on individual traits and less upon descent. There is nothing in the hymns of the Rig Veda to show that the classes had become hereditary. They were not watertight compartments but rather open classes. In the Rig Vedic period the increase in agricultural production had led to a wide range of other occupational groups besides the four varnas; the carpenters, the metal workers, using copper, bronze, and iron, the potter, the tanner, the reed-workers, and the weavers were importantly members of Aryan village community. In fact, in the hymns of Rig Veda there is little trace of the rigid restrictions on inter varna interaction. There was hardly any taboo on inter-marriage, change of occupation or commensality. Families were not wedded to a particular profession. There was no trace of heredity defining the occupation of an individual."Nowhere in the Rig Veda is any mention of a Vaishya being regarded as less pure than a Brahman. (Bhat, 2019) In later Vedic age or the time of Brahmins and the Samhitas, there was no limitation in regards to marriage between the varnas, expecting the limitation upon marriage with a Shudra male or female by an individual from another Varna, The initial three varnas were urged no to wed a Shudra female before some other limitation of an endogamous nature was attempted to be proclaimed. Aitareya Brahmana notice that Kavasa Ailusa was ousted from a sacrifice since his mom was a dasi, i.e., skave; however he was readmitted after the Divine beings had shown him unique blessing. Consequently the Varna framework in the later vedic period was sufficiently adaptable to give due acknowledgment even to those rishis and holy people whose moms had a place with Shudra varna. For instance the arranger of the Aitareya who was the child of Brahman rishi and his Shudra spouse named Itara. (Ghurye, Caste and Race In India, 1969). However, the doors of occupational nobility were not shut totally regardless of expanding qualification between Varnas. In the Bramanic writing of the post-Vedic period, the initial three varnas were overwhelmingly referenced as dwijas (twice born) once at actual birth and a second time when started into varna status through the Upanayana - Sanskara ceremony. At the end of the day, through this inception function the youthful ones were officially gotten into the Aryan culture. The occasion was emblematic of resurrection and was set apart by the inauguration of the hallowed string. This honor was denied to the Shudras were called ekajati (once born). The word jati which was utilized in the Vasishta Dharmasutra to denote once-born and twice-born groups was from that point on utilized all the more frequently to mean the various sub-divisional of a varna. The term Jati is vernacular term for a 'rank' while the term Varna approximates 'class' in importance. By implication, the varna framework alluded to the arrangement of four enormous classes of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra and their interrelationship while the caste framework alluded to the reliant organization of a huge number of hereditary, proficient sub-divisions inside every Varna. (Kumar, 2005). Essentially, every Jati was personally associated with a specific occupation and from the post-Vedic period onwards the children generally followed the father's profession, and the hereditary principle was adhered to. With the development of towns and the quick advancement of exchange and trade, the number of professional groups expanded thus did the quantity of jatis, each rehearsing specific artworks and employments. Presently the premise and duration of the delineation framework are subordinate not to the four-crease division but rather to the huge organization of jatis. Accordingly, the caste framework kept on going about as a significant arrangement of social connection. (Bhat, 2019) During the middle Ages, the Varna system was transformed into the caste system. It is a typical hierarchical system that promoted division of labor which led to the division of labourers. This subsequent cycle is unique to the caste system. The service castes of sudras were additionally separated into touchable and untouchables in light of some unacceptable hypotheses of purity and impurity. Mahatma Joti Rao Phule redefined this division of Bahujans as two categories of producer sudras and ati-sudras (Dalits). In the ensuing time frames as Bakti developments, numerous social rebellions surfaced for the reason of Sudras and Atisudras. (Ghurye, Caste and Race in India, 1969) By then British authorities mediated in caste order in three significant ways: 1. Offered Brahmins priority by requesting their guidance, which prompted disdain and hostile to brahminical development (South India and Maharashtra) and formations of caste associations (Ahir Yadav Mahasabha) to oppose Brahmin mastery. 2. Morley Minto Reforms (1909) which presented separate electorates for discouraged classes. 3. English particularly missionary education began by the British Government which educated them towards their rights. Caste politics expressed itself in the form of politics of resistance to anti-Brahminical developments. There were intra and between-caste contests for status and power. Rajni Kothari had rightly argued that the quest for influence within the caste groups or amongst the castes led to politicization of caste. During these times caste associations and sabhas squeezed for higher status in statistics records and everyday interaction. (Schmitt-Beck, 2003) In spite of extreme difficulties put forward by heterodox sects, the caste framework would never be disposed of. Brahminism, in one way or the other, remained the religion of the multitudes, and purohit remained the nucleus of socio-religious activity in the society, as it was in agreement with the temper of the people who believed in the joy of living. The organic character of the system, and the interdependence of different caste groups upon each other, continued to make it indispensable. (Bhat, 2019)

**Caste in UP after independence**

At the time the colonial census officials finally began to accede to the demands of the caste petitioners, British rule in India was clearly nearing its close – indeed, much of the electoral jockeying of the caste associations was bent on filling

the political space that the decline of the Raj opened up. India's independence changed the formal attitude of state institutions towards the caste system from curiosity to strident hostility, and the political system from a curious colonial hybrid to a democracy with universal suffrage. Over time, the policies of the post-independence state would also change the distribution of wealth and education among social groups. The act of Untouchability, when almost general, has gone through a sharp downfall, particularly in metropolitan regions. Lower caste candidates regularly win elected office, and upper-position citizens regularly court lower-rank help, which they realize they can't underestimate. The conventional ad of castes to high caste status is likewise considerably less normal than it used to be; regardless, it is currently more normal for castes to profess to be 'backward'. Then again, regardless of the expectations of certain reformers of the independence generation, obviously caste has not shriveled away - truth be told, in certain regards, caste identities appear more salient now than they were in the colonial period. During the 1990s, expressly caste-based ideological groups became electorally effective in a few northern states, and the debate over caste-based standards in reservation and public business made the position a more perceptible component of political conflict than it had been during the 1950s and 1960s. Caste affiliations stay noticeable, as yet fiddling with electing governmental issues and directing lobbies for the social improvement of the caste. At the social level, caste stays a critical trait of the individual personality of numerous Indians, organizing marriage, business connections, and different types of social collaboration. (Lee, 2020) But what was striking about this associational activity was the broad range of castes that were involved. While the political power and social reach of caste associations during the colonial period had been less notable in the north than in other parts of India particularly among Dalits than other types of castes, the post-independence period saw caste associations becoming more influential there too. In the well-studied case of the Chamars (Jatavs) of Uttar Pradesh, this activism built on a colonial history of caste organization and the expansion of education during the colonial period. (Lee, 2020) In 1951 there was in existence in U. P. an organization called the Shoshita Sangh, comprising the lower castes, which had as its aim the improvement of the conditions of the latter. This seems to be but one indication of the fact that caste-consciousness is on the rise in U. P. The tussle between the Rajputs and Chamars for political power is likely to get keener in the near future. (Srinivas, 1957) In the event that we take a gander at the Nehruvian time, a greater part of the chief Ministers were Brahmins. It was an experimental truth that the initiative of every single ideological group, from Left to Right comprised of Brahmins. Caste-cognizant people of states like Haryana, Bihar, Tamilnadu, and Andhra Pradesh select state leaders in the interest of the predominant caste. The caste-based mobilization is one of the main devices of citizen assembly for all ideological groups today in India. The majority of the ideological groups have an immediate or circuitous caste base. In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party is firmly distinguished as a Yadav Party, while the Bahujan Samaj Party is recognized as the party of Dalits. Elections in India seek overwhelming popular participation, where electoral applicants attempt to charm the electors by promising long-haul changes like better administration, more prominent financial value, destitution rise, and so on. (Hussain, 2020)

According to numerous scholars, caste assumed new capabilities like affecting governmental issues and their part in political elements like a successful strain or vested party. Caste gave a broad premise to the association of popularity-based governmental issues. Caste character and fortitude turned into the essential channel through which constituent and political support was mobilized. Caste was utilized to a greater extent in preparing provincial than metropolitan help. Ideological groups found it more straightforward to prepare support from an individual from the caste local area by engaging. The political framework is used to support the utilization of caste for the purpose of breeding followers. Caste empowered the uneducated to politically participate in the democratic process. The correspondence of thoughts inside rank areas of strength for individuals from a similar station share comparative perspectives. Nehru said that caste and political democracy cannot exist together. Also, Ambedkar contended, 'You can't fabricate anything on the foundation of caste.' caste true to form didn't vanish. Ideological groups utilize the classification of caste for mobilization (Ambedkar, 1936). Kothari claims that the politicization of caste brought both caste and politics nearer and their interaction changed their structures (Kothari, 1970). At the point when politics bring the caste framework into the trap of its association, it tracks down material for its explanation, and when caste makes politics its circle of action, caste has an opportunity to declare its identity and to strive for position. The connection between caste and politics is fundamentally a relationship for the particular motivation behind putting together for the purpose of public activity. Rajni Kothari contends that democratic politics in post-colonial India led to the involvement of traditional structure and its leadership. (Bath, 2009)

### **Continuous struggle for self-identity**

It is cultural theorist Stuart Hall's belief that human identity is always in a constant state of becoming. The previous part have discussed how the colonial conjuncture and the exigencies of representative politics forced caste Hindus to acknowledge, within the bounds of Hindu Brahmanical ideology, the existential condition of untouchables. It is against this backdrop that the present study will discuss how Dalits responded to the actions of both the colonial power and caste Hindus by reimagining a new self, one grounded in social egalitarianism. This study also identifies a complex of reforms, ideas, and arguments that Dalits used to claim a dignified place in the emerging nationalist imagination. A Social and Historical Burden Dalits as untouchables in pre-colonial India were stigmatized as Candalas, Panchamas, Asprushyas, Antyajias, and in everyday life as Malas, Madigas, Pariahs, Mahars, Matangas, Chamars, Chindus, and Dhed. There were also many other pejorative caste identities. For centuries, Hindu Brahmanical ideology imposed

humiliating, insulting, and limiting nomenclature for the purpose of dehumanizing Dalits. The definition of caste was set out by B. R. Ambedkar as being 'not merely a division of labor. It is also a division of laborers into watertight compartments with hierarchy and graded inequality with an ascending sense of reverence and a descending sense of contempt based on birth into castes. (Patra, 2016) Although the untouchables' anti-caste epistemology acted as a buffer in the pre-modern period, they were compelled to bear their stigmatized identity without escape, always under threat from Brahmanical ideology and from the physical discipline imposed by the dominant castes. Caste Hindus and the Dalit Self Caste Hindus became concerned about the ways in which colonialism and the activities of Christian missionaries were altering the lives of untouchables and the implications that any improvement might have for inherited caste privilege. Under the influence of Enlightenment ideas, Dalits began to reconstruct images of self and identity in opposition to the Brahmanical identities. For centuries, Hindu Brahmanical ideology had imposed inequalities in worth through the stigmatization of castes outside the chaturvarna frame. In this way, caste as a hierarchical social practice fortified by religious teaching acted as mental yoke by normalizing unjust practices. In the colonial context Dalits faced formidable challenges in reimagining a positive self in order to assert their human dignity and social equality. (Jangam, 2015) Almost all the untouchable intellectuals shared this view and tried to 'purify' untouchable communities. In their endeavor to create a respectable social and political identity for untouchables, they initiated reforms that were in harmony with Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution. The intellectuals identified consumption of alcohol, meat (especially beef), animal sacrifice, and the lack of hygiene, both personal and domestic, the use of obscene language, smoking, illiteracy, and the absence of self-esteem as the principal evils infesting the untouchable communities. The intellectuals directed their efforts at eliminating these failings. Many identified the consumption of alcohol and its effect on untouchable communities as the prime target. Accordingly, he appealed to his community, 'Oh People! Stop drinking alcohol and awaken! Stop eating meat and drinking toddy! Stop smoking and drinking. Self-Cleansing: Eating and Living for Social Respect Hindu civil society, which was dominated by Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution stigmatized untouchables for eating beef?' Accordingly, Dalit intellectuals seized on the issue of eating habits as another means to promote social advancement and to gain accept-ability. In addition to relinquishing the consumption of beef, there was also the banning of animal sacrifice on the eve of festivals and on other ceremonial occasions. In his campaign to 'purify' untouchable communities, JalaRangaswamy wrote against the evils of eating beef and unclean habits in general. Moreover, he linked the issue of purity with the acquisition of rights by untouchables. He argued that eliminating these practices was a pre-condition for seeking rights and equality in Hindu society. Rangaswamy was strongly influenced by the Gandhian reformist ideology. As a Gandhian, he inclined towards Hindu Brahmanical ideas and this was the intellectual tradition from which his beliefs sprang. (Rao, 2015) To him, the lives of all creatures were equal in value to those of human beings. In the second section of his work, he drew upon the Hindu dharma Shastras in support of his argument. These hymns were generally used to spread the message of non-violence among untouchables and also among caste Hindus. He also founded Adi-Andhra Pracharaka Samajamu to communicate ideas of reform to his community. Accepting caste Hindu notions of purity and taking that message to his community was an important part of his reformist agenda. (Murthy, 2016)

The rationale for assisting the Aryans remained unexplained by Rangaswamy. The inconsistencies in the arguments were probably caused by his contemporary cultural and political situation. Being an untouchable, he claimed a proud ancestry of pre-Aryan roots, which strengthened his entitlement to equality and the right to respect. On the other hand, as a Gandhian, he tried to conform to the reformist Hindu framework by bringing untouchables into the grand Hindu fold. (However, Dharmanna's version of history did have some significant differences with that of JalaRangaswamy. He constructed the pre-Aryan past as something more democratic and egalitarian, contrasting it with the repressive, unjust, and exploitative Hindu social order. With this strategy, he tried to prove that the pre-Aryan past (associated with untouchables) was egalitarian; a time when there were no differences of caste, wealth, and status. Along with efforts to construct a glorious past for untouchables, Dalit intellectuals also wrote novels and biographies of puranic figures, namely Nandanar (Vaishnavite saints), Chokarriela, and other saints. Contesting Inequality As discussed earlier, Dalit liberation was predicated on access to modern liberal education and ideas. Even though anti-caste epistemology preceded colonialism in the form of counter-cultural narratives and anti-caste movements, colonial intervention definitely made a qualitative difference in terms of providing a language of rights and the tools of emancipation with which to contest the Hindu Brahmanical ideology. In this context, the pre-colonial anti-caste legacies acted as the stage on which modern anti-caste struggles were enacted in the public sphere. (Simon, 2020)

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary India is witnessing the appropriation by the Hindu right of the idea of nationalism and its use as a tool to undermine the legitimate claims of the deprived sections for justice, equity, equality, and dignity. Historical reading and the study of the writings and activities of Dalits demonstrates that the contemporary trajectory is a continuation of the historical legacy of the caste Hindu Brahmanical imagination embedded in the idea of nation in India. The 'dominant voice in this context that of caste Hindu elites in the discourse of power persistently and deceitfully insists that responsibility for suffering must be acknowledged by the sufferer himself or herself. Beginning with the colonial state's half-hearted policy initiatives and continuing to Gandhi's efforts towards the uplift of Harijans, a rhetoric of pity or compassion for the suffering Dalits was created. Instead of acknowledging that the root cause of the misery of Dalits lay

within the Hindu Brahmanical ideology in which the caste Hindu elites were complicit, the onus for their lot was placed on Dalits themselves. Caste Hindu elites blithely prescribed a Sanskritization models as a solution for the misery of Dalits, ignoring the fact that the Hindu Brahmanical hierarchical caste ideology based on birth would not have a place for Dalits and would not recognize them as human beings. In response, Dalits as bearers of the stigma of untouchability and suffering under the weight of social and economic deprivation wove themes about their suffering, not to gain pity, but to expose the immoral nature of Hindu religious philosophy and its social practices backed by the so called sacred texts. In contemporary India, the power of Dalits' political imagination is displayed in their growing radicalism in response to Hindu communalism. This current assertion represents a spot on a continuum of anti-caste activities by Dalits dating from the pre-colonial and colonial past

The politics of casteism ought to be lawfully restricted with severe activity. It has been seen that although the position practice is lawfully restricted through the constitution by Article 17, these have been polished by the general public and eventually entered into governmental issues. Eventually, the advantages of these have been taken by the political parties and leaders. In the states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal these have been more pronounced hence, the political leaders and parties easily take the chances of these. The ultimate solution lies in the attitude of the men. The people of modern society should have a modern attitude, not a traditional attitude. There is a need to stop political defilement, botch, and Marginalization. There is a need to kill outrageous destitution. The severe activity of established components is expected to relieve various issues emerging out of colossal variety in India. An incredible, energetic, and useful job ought to be played by the common society alongside each segment of the general public since this errand is the aggregate liability of all residents, lawmakers, educationists, instructors, understudies, erudite people, financial specialists, and worker's guild chiefs not of one part of the general public.

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