

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 What is Caste?
- 22.3 Main Features of Caste
- 22.4 Dynamic Relationship
- 22.5 Regional Variations
- 22.6 Caste and Class
- 22.7 Stratification within Caste
- 22.8 Pressure Group: Caste Association
- 22.9 Political Parties
- 22.10 Caste in Voting Behaviour
- 22.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.12 Some Useful Books
- 22.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

22.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to acquaint you with (a) nature and role of caste in Indian politics and (b) in the process how both caste and politics undergo changes. After going through this unit, you should be able to understand:

- To what extent and in what ways caste influences politics;
- Interrelationship between caste and politics; and
- How politics influences caste.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

Theoretically speaking caste and democratic political system stand for opposite value systems. Caste is hierarchical. Status of an individual in caste-oriented social system is determined by birth. It has religious sanction by various holy texts, reinforced by priests and rituals. Traditionally, upper castes enjoy certain privileges not only in religious sphere but also in economic, education and political spheres. Customary laws differentiate individual by birth and sex. That is, certain rules are harsh to women and Shudras and soft to males and Brahmins. On the other hand, democratic political system advocates freedom to an individual and equality of status. It stands for rule of Law. No one irrespective of status is above law. Indian democratic system under the Constitution stands for liberty, equality and fraternity among all citizens. It strives to build egalitarian social order.

However, politics notwithstanding the ideals in any society does not function in vacuum. It operates within social milieu. Therefore, it cannot be devoid of the prevailing social forces. At societal level, politics is related to struggle for and distribution of political power and resources. One of the important functions of politics is to govern society. This calls for resolving conflict among various interests. It identifies needs of society at a given point of time. Needs are prioritised: what is important and immediate to attain and what can wait. In order to meet the needs of society, nature of production system has to be decided – whether the factories, farms or mines are owned privately

by individual for profit or they be owned and managed by community or state or combination of the both. For that rules are made and executed. In short who gets what, when and how in society is the central concern of politics. Though such decisions are taken by the state, people get involved in decision making process in democratic system. They elect their rulers. While electing their representatives people express their material and non-material needs, expectations and aspirations for today and tomorrow. Their expectations are for themselves and also for community - immediate primordial group, caste and larger society that include region, and country. People also build pressure on decision-makers through organised or unorganised struggles, personal contacts and many other ways. Political leaders cannot ignore social forces, as they themselves are part of them. It is imperative for the decision-makers in democratic system to seek and extend support of the constituents for obtaining and preserving their political power.

It however, does not mean that politics is just a proxy or a blueprint of societal forces. It sets goal and priorities. It has a vision for change, a better social order than the existing for the larger good. Politics introduces new values such as equality and freedom; institutions such as political parties and trade unions; government policies like abolition of zamindari system or untouchability undermines the traditional social order and value system. It shifts location of power in society from one group to another. Moreover competitive politics like elections encourage several individuals from a group to aspire for political positions. They compete among themselves so the caste members also get divided. In the process caste cohesiveness gets weaken; and new formation takes place. Thus, not only caste influences politics but the political system also influences caste and induces changes in it. There is no one way traffic. Both influence each other. It is to be seen: to what extent and in which way politics attain its objective of social transformation and to what extent it is influenced by prevailing social forces, particularly caste?

India became a Republic in 1950. For the first time in history all adult citizens of the country have gained the right to vote and elect their representatives for decision making bodies from village Panchayat to Lok Sabha. They also have the right to contest elections so as to become rulers. As a result, large number of social groups who were hitherto deprived of political power began to realise that they could compete with traditionally dominant power elite and also wield power so as to express their grievances, needs, priorities and aspirations. Thus they decide their destiny. Politics has become competitive and open. Moreover, the state has undertaken a number of social and economic programs, which have developed monetary and contractual relationship affecting traditional social ties and monopoly of privileges. And, judicial authority of caste panchayat has been replaced by state judiciary system.

22.2 WHAT IS CASTE?

Caste is an English translation of Indian word Jati. As Indians we all know what is Jati because we all have a tag of Jati by birth. This applies to non-Hindus also. But meaning of Jati is not the same among the Hindus and non-Hindus. Caste does not have religious sanction among the non-Hindus. It is a social stratum. Among the Hindus, it is believed that one's Jati is due to one's Karma (deeds) in previous birth. This is not so among the non-Hindus.

Meaning of Jati for oneself and for others is not always uniform and consistent among all. It varies from purpose to purpose for which the tag is used. Jati has a specific social meaning identifying one's place in social order in village society where one interacts everyday with other members of the local community. For instance in a village in central Gujarat its inhabitant, say Mr. X identifies himself as Khant when he interacts with another villager of neighbouring locality who calls himself a Bareeya

for inter-dining purpose. Mr. X would introduce himself as Kshatriya when he attends political party meeting at taluka or district place. He would call his caste as OBC (Other Backward Caste) when he visits government office to get loan or subsidy for government sponsored program or to get scholarship for his son. There is one meaning of Jati for matrimonial and kinship relationship, a different meaning for economic interaction and a third meaning for political purpose. One does not necessarily have the same meaning when one exercises vote for village panchayat than Lok sabha elections.

Thus it is difficult to give precise meaning of caste applicable in all situations. It is partly a subjective category. Social construct of caste by actors and observers varies from context to context.

22.3 MAIN FEATURES OF CASTE

Notwithstanding difficulties in arriving at precise definition of caste as a unit, there is a consensus among the scholars regarding general characteristics of caste system as a social order. Most sociological writings on caste conclude that homo hierarchicus is the central and substantive element of the caste system. The phrase is used by a French sociologist Louis Dumont to differentiate Hindu social system from other social systems - particularly that of the western society. Hierarchy is the central core of the caste social order. It includes hierarchy of status, values, customs and behaviour on the basis of purity and impurity, interpersonal relationship among individuals in terms of blood, food and occupation; and rituals divided into two orders: pure and impure. Certain occupations or type of food are considered as pure for certain castes and the same are impure therefore forbidden for other castes. It is obligatory for each Hindu to confine relationship and interaction within the restricted circle called Jati, as to maintain purity in marriage relationship; exchange of food and pursuing caste based occupation. There are four essential features of the caste system. They are: (1) hierarchy; (2) commensurality; (3) restrictions on marriage; and (4) hereditary occupation.

22.4 DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP

No social system remains static. Social system changes from time to time with the changing social, economic and political circumstances. This is also true for the caste system. At the empirical level the caste hierarchy has never been static throughout history. Theoretically, all Jatis are hierarchically placed within a prescribed social status. Some Jatis enjoy high status and some occupy low status. Place of the Jati in the social order in the hierarchy is determined by its ritual status based on the observance of customs for interpersonal relationship. Some scholars believe this value system - acceptance of one's station in the life is the result of previous birth - has consensus among all Hindus including the Untouchables. But it is not true. Though the upper castes try to maintain their higher status, the middle and lower castes have successfully tried to change their status. Having improved their economic condition, a dominant section of some of the low castes, including the groups, which were at one time treated as untouchables, imitated customs and norms of the upper castes residing in their vicinity. Sociologists call this process as sanskritisation. One also comes across instances of some castes or even individuals who have succeeded in improving their status even without adhering to the norms and rituals of the upper castes. Acquiring political authority facilitates not only power holder - ruler - but also his kin and relatives to enjoy higher social status in caste hierarchy. One can cite instances in history, which show that Shudras and ati-shudras having occupying position of power have acquired status of Kshatriyas even without following the path of sanskritisation.

The process of sanskritisation which was prominent among the lower castes at one point of time, particularly in the 19th and early 20th century, has been slowed down in the 'sixties and 'seventies'. Earlier many castes hesitated to be called 'backward' despite the poor economic condition of the members. They feared that they would not be able to improve their social status by identifying themselves as 'backward'. But this is no longer true now, as the State has provided certain benefits to the backward castes. These castes have realised that they could improve their status by improving their economic condition rather than observing rituals followed by the upper castes. Now there is competition among the castes to be called 'backward'. Even some of the Brahmin and Rajput Jatis have approached the Government to be classified as 'backward'. The Kolis of central Gujarat followed the rituals of the Rajputs and struggled for three decades to be acknowledged as Kshatriyas. In the past, they used to feel insulted if they were called Kolis. But now they have started calling themselves as Kolis so that they could get material benefits which is the surest way to improve social status. Social status based on the observance of the rituals has increasingly become redundant.

Traditionally caste members have been forbidden to accept cooked food from persons belonging to the Jatis that they considered lower than theirs. These rules have been weakened, particularly in public spheres in urban areas during the last five decades. In their bid to gain broad support base the political elites at district and state level do not hesitate to take food with the caste members belonging to lower strata.

Most of the Jatis are endogamous. A few follow hypergamy generally within the caste cluster. The earlier restrictions on marriage have become flexible. Marriage circles are expanding in some castes. With education and urbanisation, instances of inter-caste marriages among the upper and middle castes have somewhat increased though such cases are still exceptions.

22.5 REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Caste structure in terms of hierarchy and boundary for interaction between the social groups is more or less neat and identifiable at the village level. But it is not so at regional level. And to draw empirically based macro picture of castes at the national level is all the more difficult and hazardous. Caste structure has not developed uniformly in all regions of the sub-continent. Assam has developed a loose caste structure with less rigid hierarchy than that of Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. It is the same regarding observation of caste specific rules.

The number of castes also varies from region to region. Gujarat has a larger number of castes than West Bengal. Different historical experiences have contributed to shaping of the present day socio-political processes in different regions. Moreover, there is and had been uneven economic development in the country and also within the states. Some regions had zamindari and some had royatwari land tenure system. Generally, Rajputs in Rajasthan or Brahmins in Tamilnadu were enjoying dominance in the farmer and peasant castes like Marathas in Maharashtra and Patidars in Gujarat were dominant castes. All castes do not have uniform numerical strength and spread. Some have a larger number of members and some are very tiny. Some are scattered throughout the region and some are heavily concentrated in a few geographical pockets. Hence, the role and position of caste in relation to politics varies from time to time, area to area and caste to caste.

22.6 CASTE AND CLASS

According to some scholars, caste system is essentially a class system. It was essentially so in the early formative years. The classes were: Rajanyas or the Kshatriyas, the aristocracy, the Brahmins, the priests, the Vaishyas, the people at large, mainly peasants and traders, and the Shudras, the service communities. There are various theories of the origin of the system. Some believe that the system was created by the Divine Power for maintaining harmony in society. Accordingly, one gets birth in a particular caste because of one's karma of the previous birth. Others believe that the system has been evolved in course of time with the development of economic surplus. It came into existence with economic divisions; or the invaders to subjugate the local tribal population created it.

A number of village studies of different parts of the country carried out in the post-independent period show a certain amount of overlap between twin hierarchies of caste and land. M.N. Srinivas observes, "The village community consisted of hierarchical groups, each with its own rights, duties and privileges. The caste at the top had power and privileges, which were denied to the lower castes. The lower castes were tenants, servants, landless labourers, debtors and clients of the higher castes." Data from two Tamilnadu villages collected by Sivkumar and Shivkumar in the late 'seventies show that 59 per cent of Mudaliyars (upper castes) and 4 per cent of Palli (untouchable castes) are rich peasants or landlord households. No Mudaliyar is engaged as an agricultural laborer, whereas 42 per cent of Palli households earn their livelihood as farm labourers. A study of six Rajasthan villages carried out by K.L.Sharma in the 'seventies offers a similar pattern'. "Only 12.5 per cent of the lower class households belong to upper castes, 60 per cent of the higher class households belong to the upper castes, 24 per cent of the upper castes belong to the higher class, whereas among the intermediate and lower castes only 6.2 per cent and 1.3 per cent belong to high class respectively."

The Anthropological Survey of India in its Project on "People of India" has studied 4635 communities/castes. The study confirms that the highly placed castes are marked by "(i) a higher position in the regional socio-ritual hierarchy, (ii) better control over land and other resources, and (iii) non-commercial relations with other communities of inferior status.... (The low castes) are placed at the bottom due to their : (i) abject poverty caused by less possession of land and less control over economic resources (ii) socio-ritual degradation based on the notion of purity and pollution, and (iii) traditional engagement in occupations which are considered ritually unclean.

Aggregate data at regional and national level on caste and occupation\land holding give us a similar picture. Table 1 presents caste and occupation data collected by the National Sample Survey (NSS) collected in 1952, analysed by K.N.Raj. The data shows that there is a positive relationship between caste and occupational status. The small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers mainly belong to the low or backward castes and ex-untouchable (scheduled) castes. There is a marginal diversification of occupations among the members of low and the lowest castes in rural areas. However, one should not ignore that a small proportion of lower and scheduled caste households are rich peasants who hire labour and produce marketable surplus. According to the survey carried out by Centre for Social Studies, Surat in Gujarat, 10 per cent of the lower caste and 5 per cent of the scheduled caste households own more than 15 acres of land. The reverse is also true. According to the NSS data 1 per cent of the upper castes and 12 per cent of the middle castes are agricultural labourers. Moreover it may also be noted that there are a few upper castes in some parts of the country whose majority members do not belong to the upper class. Rajputs (upper caste) of Gujarat are a case in point. Their condition in terms of land ownership and other occupation is not significantly different than many OBCs.

**Table 1: Occupational Distribution of Different Caste-Groups ++
Among Hindu Rural Households**

(Millions)

Occupation*	Upper castes	Middle castes	Lower castes	Scheduled castes	Total
Agriculture Farmer	1.09 (24.38)	0.93	1.69 (6.95)	0.18 (1.54)	3.80 (7.35)
Cultivator	1.96 (43.91)	6.52 (53.30)	10.20 (41.79)	3.19 (27.05)	21.67 (41.35)
Share cropper	0.17 (3.91)	0.76 (6.18)	1.51 (6.17)	1.00 (8.50)	3.44 (6.50)
Agri. Labour	0.05 (1.09)	1.46 (11.91)	4.11 (16.85)	4.27 (36.19)	9.89 (18.70)
Forestry, Fishing & Livestock +	0.02 (0.62)	0.17 (1.39)	0.81 (3.31)	0.28 (2.38)	1.28 (2.42)
Total: Agriculture	8.29 (73.91)	9.84 (80.35)	18.32 (75.07)	8.92 (75.66)	40.37 (76.33)
Others@	1.17 (26.09)	2.39 (19.65)	6.09 (24.93)	2.87 (24.34)	12.52 (23.67)
Total: All	2.26 (100.00)	12.23 (100.00)	24.41 (100.00)	11.79 (100.00)	52.89 (100.00)

Notes: Figures in brackets represent percentage of All-India average in each case.

* The main farming occupations are classified into four groups:

- a) Farmer – a tiller who cultivates his own land, mainly with hired labour; (b) Cultivator – one who cultivates land mainly owned by him and sometimes land taken on lease or sharecropping system, with the help of other household members and partly with hired labour; (c) Sharecropper – one who mainly takes up cultivation of others' land on a sharecropping basis and cultivates without hired labour; and (d) Agricultural labourer – one who cultivates others' land either for wages or for customary payment.

+ Includes wood cutters, plantation labour, gardeners, fishermen, animal breeders, cattle grazers and herdsmen.

@ Includes households in the rural sector engaged in administrative and professional services, teaching and medicine, manufacturing – specially of food products and textiles – trade and commerce, transport and communication, construction and sanitation, and mining.

++ According to the NSS, "The upper castes were defined as those who, according to custom, used the sacred thread, the middle as those from whom the Brahmins take water by tradition and the lower as the other castes who were not scheduled."

22.7 STRATIFICATION WITHIN CASTE

Industrialisation and penetration of market economy in rural areas have affected traditional occupation of several castes. In most of the castes some members have

given up their traditional occupation. As early as 1950, F.G. Bailey observed in a village situated in a relatively backward state like Orissa, "Not every person works at his traditional occupation. The distillers do not touch liquor. The Knod potters (?) do not know how to make pots. The fishermen do not fish. The warriors are cultivators. Everywhere there is a scope for practising a hereditary occupation not all members of caste engage in the work ". In the 1950s, Kathleen Gough also observed a similar pattern in Tamilnadu. She noted, "The caste community is no longer homogeneous in occupation and wealth, for caste is today a limiting rather than a determining factor in the choice of the occupation. Exactly half of Kumbarpettai's adult Brahmins are now employed in towns as Government servants, schoolteachers or restraint workers. Of the reminder, some own up to thirty acres of land, others as little as three. One runs a grocery store and one a vegetarian restaurant. Among the non-Brahmins, the fisherman, toddy-tapers, Marathas, Kallans, Koravas and Kuttadis have abandoned their traditional work ". Village studies carried out in the fifties and sixties from different parts of the country bear out the same trend. And, diversification of occupation in non-farm sector has increased within most of the castes with the spread of the green revolution.

But there are still several Jatis whose members have more or less similar economic condition. One can find such instances among several Scheduled Castes and numerically small other backward castes. Such castes have still less than 10 per cent rate of literacy and all the households depend on manual labour for their livelihood. On the other hand there are number of castes which are internally stratified. There are three types of economic differentiation within different castes: (1) A caste characterised by sharp polarisation; (2) A caste having a majority of members from upper strata; (3) A caste with a majority members belonging to poor strata. Rajputs and Thakurs of Rajasthan, UP and Gujarat fall in the first category. A few households own large estates and factories and a large number are agricultural labourers. Most of the households of the several upper castes such as Brahmins, Baniyas, Kayasthas are well off. On the other hand a large number of the Backward castes have overwhelming majority households who are small and marginal farmers, tenants and agriculture labourers. Economic stratification affects their cohesiveness on political issues. Dominant stratum projects its interests as the interests of the caste; and gives it priority while bargaining with the government.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the main features of caste?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What is the relationship between caste and land ownership in rural India?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 3) Give example of one caste showing intra-stratification.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 4) What is the difference between social caste and political caste?

.....

.....

.....

.....

22.8 PRESSURE GROUP: CASTE ASSOCIATIONS

Numerical strength of a group is important in a democratic polity. All the Jatis do not have equal numerical strength and spread in a geographical region - village, cluster of villages, taluka or district. A few are very large, some are small and some are minuscule. Some are concentrated in a village/taluka and some are scattered in four to five households in a village. Numerically large Jatis have an edge over others in political bargaining with the government and political parties. Jatis confined to endogamous character alone cannot muster a very large number at district levels and beyond for political activities. Some of the leaders of such Jatis form caste associations called Sabha or Sangam consisting of cluster of Jatis having similar social ranking in a region. A few caste associations are also consist of multi -castes having different social ranking in traditional order. They may be called caste "federation".

It should be remembered that caste association is not the same as caste panchayat or council. Generally the office bearers of caste council enjoy hereditary position. This is not the case with association. Often the latter has written constitution specifying power and responsibilities of different office bearers. The former has judicial authority dealing with ritual and social aspects related to marriage, divorce and other family disputes of the members. Its decisions are binding to all caste members. Caste associations carry out economic, educational and political programmes. All caste mates are not members of the Sabhas. The decisions of the Sabha are not binding on all caste members. It is not so with caste panchayat. In that sense caste association is closer to voluntary organisation. Many caste associations though hold an objective "to promote and protect the interests and rights of the community," do not necessarily directly involve in electoral politics. Some caste associations are active in electoral politics at one time or another. Rudolph and Rudolph call the participation of caste associations in politics as "the democratic incarnation of caste". Kothari calls it "democratisation" of castes.

The history of caste associations goes back to the late 19th century, though their number has increased after Independence. They are found in all states. Let us take a few illustrations. As the Government decided in the early 1880s to debar Kulmis as Kulmis of Uttar pradesh from being recruited in the police service. The government servants belonging to Kurmis formed the "Sardar Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha" in 1884 to protest against the decision. Another example can be cited of Nadars of Tamilnadu. In order to enhance their economic development, the wealthy Shanars of Tamilnadu formed the Nadar Mahajan Sangam in 1895. In Gujarat, the Rajputs after independence

having lost political power as rulers and ownership of land under land reforms realized a need for a larger numerical support base, as they constituted only 4 per cent of the population. Some of the political aspirant Rajputs formed Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha. The caste organisation embraced various Jatis of Kolis who aspired Kshatriya status. Caste pride and sentiments were invoked through various ways among the Rajputs and the Kolis as the Kshatriyas brethren. Caste associations make representation to the government demanding educational facilities, land ownership and its distribution, government jobs etc. for their caste members. Some of them submit memoranda or organise public meetings demanding infrastructure facilities like irrigation, electricity, loan and subsidy for fertiliser for agriculture development.

22.9 POLITICAL PARTIES

Several castes join together and launch movements. Non-Brahmin movement in Tamilnadu and Maharashtra are the examples. Jyotirao Phule started Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 challenging Brahminical hegemony. In Tamilnadu several peasant castes such as Vellala, Gaunda and Padayachi, trading castes such as Chetri, artisan castes - Tachchan (Carpenter), Kollan (Blacksmith), and Tattan (Goldsmith), individually and jointly initiated non-Brahmin movement. The movement followed several caste associations such as Parayan Mahajan Sabha, Adi-Dravin Mahajan Sabha in the 1890's. In 1916 the Non-Brahmin manifesto was brought out highlighting dominance of the Brahmins in government services and injustice to non-Brahmins who constituted a vast majority. The formation of the Justice party followed in 1916. The party sent a delegation to England in 1919 to present the non-Brahmin case before the joint Parliament Committee which was responsible for preparing the Government of India Bill. DMK is its offshoot. Two factions Vanniyaakkula Kshatriya Sangam of the Nadars formed Tamilnadu Toilers' Party and Commonwealth Party and fought the 1952 elections. They then bargained with the Congress for positions in the state cabinet. Scheduled Caste Federation was formed in the forties by Dr. Ambedkar and the Republican Party formed in 1956 by Dalit leaders. They primarily remained the parties of and by the Dalits. Jharkhand Party formed by Adivasi leaders of Bihar, has primarily remained a party of Adivasis. Bahujan Samaj Party launched by Kanshiram is a party of Dalits aiming at forming alliance of Dalits, minorities and OBCs.

After Independence some caste associations were formed with political objectives to compete in elections. In Gujarat some of the leaders of the Kshatriya Sabha contemplated in the early fifties to form the party of the Kshatriyas. They soon realised that they could not muster enough support to contest elections only on the strength of the Kshatriyas. Similarly, political elite of the Kurmis, Yadavas and Koeris formed the Bihar State Backward caste Association in 1947 to contest elections. The plan did not take-off thanks to the resistance of the Congress leaders belonging to these castes.

Such caste associations are asserted with different leading political parties to see that their caste members get party tickets in elections. These parties initially resisted such pressures because of the counter pressure from the dominant castes that controlled the party. The latter accused the former as castiest or communal. But as the competition among the parties intensify and as the caste association successfully mobilised the members for political activities, all parties began to woo leading aspirants of the caste who could mobilise caste votes. Such political aspirants join different political parties. As they are primarily interested in gaining political positions for themselves rather than serving social or ritual interests of the caste, they either launch a new association or split the existing one. For them caste association is among several instruments to gain political power.

Some of the political parties identify with certain castes for nomination of the party candidates and mobilisation in elections. Bha:atiya Kranti Dal evolved an alliance of

four major peasant castes of UP in 1969 elections. The alliance was called AJGAR; that is, Ahirs, Jats, Gugars and Rajputs. In 1977 in Gujarat the Congress (I) formed KHAM alliance of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims. Lok Dal was identified with Jats in Uttar Pradesh in 1977 and 1980 parliamentary elections. Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh was identified with Backward castes in general and Yadavas in particular in 1997 state assembly elections. BJP is generally identified with upper castes and the Congress with the middle and backward castes. That reflected in their support base in the eighties in Gujarat and Maharashtra. In the nineties the BJP has followed the strategy of the Congress of accommodating the backward caste candidates in the elections and successfully getting support of their caste fellows.

There are three consequences of such interaction between caste associations and political parties. One, caste members particularly poor and marginalised who were hitherto remained untouched by the political processes got politicised and began to participate in electoral politics with an expectation that their interests would be served. Second, caste members get split among various political parties weakening hold of the caste. Third, numerically large castes get representation in decision-making bodies and strength of the traditionally dominant castes get weaken. This explains the rise of middle and backward caste representations in most of the state assemblies. Table 2 presents caste composition of MLAs in Gujarat Assembly from 1957 to 1990. The table shows that the strength of Brahmins and Vaniyas has declined considerably over a period of time, whereas the Kolis and Rajputs together as the Kshatriyas increased their strength by double. In Uttar Pradesh proportion of the upper castes in the State Assembly has gone down from 42 per cent to 17 per cent between 1967 and 1995; whereas the members of the OBCs have increased from 24 per cent to 45 per cent during the same period.

Table 2: Caste Composition of the MLAs in Gujarat Assembly from 1957 to 1995

Caste	First 57-62	Second 62-67	Third 67-72	Fourth 72-75	Fifth 75-80	Sixth 80-85	Seventh 86-90	Eighth 91-95
Brahmin	18(16)	25(18)	20(14)	17(12)	14(8)	20(10)	14(8)	10(6)
Vania	19(17)	16(12)	21(15)	17(12)	26(14)	13(10)	13(7)	7(4)
Patidar	26(24)	27(27)	32(23)	35(25)	49(27)	37(20)	39(22)	44(27)
Kshatriya (Rajput and Kolis)	13(12)	14(10)	19(20)	24(17)	32(18)	38(21)	44(25)	40(25)
Muslims	4(4)	9(7)	3(3)	3(2)	5(2)	11(6)	7(4)	3(2)
SCs	10(9)	11(8)	11(8)	11(8)	14(8)	13(7)	13(7)	14(9)
STs	15(14)	21(15)	22(15)	22(15)	27(15)	29(16)	29(16)	30(19)
OBCs	5(5)	3(2)	3(2)	9(7)	14(8)	16(9)	18(10)	14(9)
N.A.	22	18	26	30	1	-	5	20
Total.	132	154	154	168	182	182	182	182

22.10 CASTE IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Role of caste in elections has two dimensions. One is of the parties and candidates and the second is of the voters. The former seeks support of the voters projecting themselves as champions of particular social and economic interests, the latter while exercising their vote in favour of one party or candidate whether people vote on caste consideration. And if so, how exclusive is it?

As mentioned above different parties accommodate certain castes in distributing party tickets. While nominating candidates parties take into consideration caste of the aspirant candidate and numerical strength of different castes in a constituency. Caste leaders also mobilised their followers on caste lines so that they could show their strength. In the fifties wherever caste associations were able to maintain their unity and did not formally align with any one party they appealed to their members to vote for their caste fellows irrespective of their party affiliation. In Rajasthan Meenas were asked "Do not give your daughter or your vote to anyone but a Meena." Similar slogan was used in Tamilnadu: "the Vanniya vote is not for anyone else". But wherever caste association aligned with a particular party the caste leaders asked caste members to vote for that party. The Kshatriya leaders of Gujarat in 1952 elections asked Kshatriya voters that it was their Kshatriya dharma to vote for the Congress because it was "the great institution and working for the development of the country". In the subsequent elections as the caste leaders split some Kshatriya leaders appealed, "It is our pledge that the Kshatriya of Gujarat vote for the Congress, and not for anyone else." The others appealed that it was the dharma of the Kshatriyas to vote for the Maha Gujarat Janata Parishad (a regional party).

Though there is a trend among the caste members to vote for a particular party, there is never a complete en bloc caste voting. Some castes identify with a particular party as their party. It was expected that it would protect their interests. Jats in Western UP identified Lok Dal as their party just not only because the leaders of the party were the Jats, but also the party raised the issues concerning the peasants. But all the Jats did not vote for the party because there were some who were traditional supporters of the Congress, or they perceived their interests differently than other Jat peasants which the Jats predominantly are.. In UP 51 per cent of the SC voters voted for the BSP in the 1998 state assembly elections. 18 per cent voted for the BJP. The vast majority of the BSP SC voters belonged to poor strata and of the BJP from the middle class. While analysing the election data, Pushpendra observes, "Occupationally, the BSP's voters are mainly unskilled workers, agricultural and allied workers, artisans, and small and marginal farmers. Persons engaged in business and white collar jobs constitute only 2.6 and 1.6 per cent of the BSP voters (in UP)."

In the National Election Survey of the 1972 carried out by Center for the Study of Developing Societies a question was asked, "What was your considerations for voting this candidate/party/symbol?" For a very insignificant number of respondents (less than 1 per cent) candidate's caste was the main consideration. Some of the respondents might have voted for persons who happened to belong to their caste. But it was not caste voting. They voted for the candidate not because he/she was of their caste irrespective of his party and ability. They voted for him/her because he/she was the candidate of the party to which the respondent felt closer for variety of reasons including the feeling that the party would "protect his/her" interests or the party had done good work for the people like him/her. Or, they were in touch with the candidate who might have helped them or they feel that he would help them when they need. Their primary consideration is their perception of their interests. In a given alternative parties/candidates they consider as to who would serve their interests better than others. If the candidate happens to be of their own caste and his/her party is the party, which they identify as theirs, they vote for him/her. If they feel that the candidate

belongs to that party which is either not able to serve their interests or hostile or insignificant in electorate politics, they do not vote for that candidate even if he belongs to their caste. That is the reason why several caste leaders lose the elections in the constituency predominantly because of their caste members at one time or another when they change the party or their party loses popularity. Therefore there is no one to one relationship between candidate's caste and that of the voter's caste.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What is the difference between caste panchayat and caste sabha?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) Explain "democratic incarnation of caste".

.....

.....

.....

.....

3) How does caste influence voting behaviour?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4) Give names of three parties, which are closer to particular caste.

.....

.....

.....

.....

22.11 LET US SUM UP

Politics does not function in vacuum. It operates in society in which it is influenced by social forces. Politics influences social forces and change them. If political institutions and political leaders make conscious effort in intervening in social forces they can influence and bring changes in social order and relationship to a considerable extent. Democratic politics in India has been influenced by caste but it also changed the traditional caste system and its values. While participating in electoral processes at different levels structure and functions of caste has changed. Its traditional aspect of

purity and impurity has been considerably weakened. Caste has provided institutional mechanism to the poor and traditionally deprived groups for political participation. Caste has been politicised to pursue economic and social rather than ritual concern of the members. In that sense it is a democratic incarnation of caste. But this process has reached an impasse and caught into vicious circle. Political leaders use caste consciousness for mobilisation but do not pursue vigorously, economic and social problems that the majority members of the caste face. Caste framework has its own limitations. It is divisive and hierarchical. This is a challenge before the caste-oriented politics.

22.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Beteille, Andre, *Essays in Comparative Perspective*, Chapter 4, Delhi, Oxford university Press, 1992,

Centre For Social Studies, *Caste, Caste Conflict and Reservation*, Chapters 1,2 and 8, Delhi, Ajanta Publication, 1985

Kothari, Rajni, *Caste and Politics in India*, Hydrabad, Orient Longman 1970.

Rudolph L.I. and Rudolph S.H. *The Modernity of Tradition*, Delhi, Longman , 1961.

Shah, Ghanshyam, *Caste in Indian Politics*, Delhi, Permanent Black 2000.

22.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) These are four, i.e., (1) hierarchy, (2) commensurality, (3) restriction on marriage, and, (4) hereditary occupation.
- 2) There is a positive relationship between caste and land. The main trend about this relationship shows that the low or the backward castes and the ex-untouchables belong to the agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, and the high and intermediate castes belong to the rich and middle peasants. However, there are instances where the high castes belong to the poor agricultural classes, and the low castes to the rich and middle peasants.
- 3) One example of intra-caste stratification is that of the Rajputs and Thakurs of Rajasthan, UP and Gujarat. Majority of them belong to the upper strata, some own land and a large number of them are agricultural labourers.
- 4) The social caste denotes the operation of the caste at the social level – its role is confined to the social and cultural spheres. When caste becomes the symbol of mobilisation either in elections or for any other political purpose it becomes a political caste.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) All members of a caste are members of the caste sabha; its leadership is hereditary; it has judicial authority dealing with rituals and other social aspects like marriage, divorce and other disputes in the family. Not all members of a caste on the other hand are members of the caste associations; its leadership is not hereditary; its decisions are not binding on all members of the caste; these have economic, educational and political programmes.

- 2) The participation of the caste associations in politics is termed as “the democratic incarnation of caste” by Rudolph and Rudolph.
- 3) The influence of caste in the voting behaviour can be visible in two ways – by allotment of tickets to the candidates, and by casting of the votes by the voters on the caste lines. Generally voters of a caste vote for a party or the candidate on the consideration of caste. But there is never a complete en block voting.
- 4)
 - i) The Congress (I) in Gujarat was identified with the KHAM – an alliance of Khatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims,
 - ii) The Bharatiya Kranti Dal in UP was identified with the AJGAR – an alliance of Ahirs, Jats, Gujars and Rajputs; and,
 - iii) Bahujan Samaj Party is identified with the dalits.