

Reshaping the Political Landscape: The Rise of Marginalized Sections in Contemporary Indian Politics

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Abstract

This article explores the reshaping of the political landscape in contemporary Indian politics. How the marginalized section of the society shaped their place in the active politics of India. Post 2014 Lok Sabha of Indian politics has undergone a significant transformation with the increased participation of marginalized groups, particularly Dalits and Adivasis. This shift is not just a change in the political landscape but a considerable challenge to the long-standing dominance of upper-caste elites. It brought some significant changes in social movements, legislative reforms, and identity politics that produced substantial impacts on lower caste politics. This paper delves into the factors behind this political rise, focusing on grassroots movements, affirmative action, and caste identity mobilization. The emergence of political parties and leaders from these communities is not just a change but a reshaping of traditional norms. The study examines how these groups navigate caste, class, and gender to enhance political participation and representation.

The rise of marginalized groups in Indian politics is not just about gaining political power; it signifies a broader struggle for social justice and equity. Their growing influence is not just a change but a force that compels established political parties to adapt, often leading to more diverse perspectives in policy-making. However, this progress is not without its challenges. It faces resistance from entrenched interests, resulting in new social and political conflicts. Understanding this transformation is vital, as it significantly impacts the future of Indian democracy. The increased visibility and engagement of marginalized communities are not just changes but also a reshaping of the electoral landscape and a challenge to social hierarchies, promoting a more inclusive society.

Keywords: marginalization, Identity, Politics, mobilization, movements, and representations

Introduction

India, known as the largest democracy globally, is distinguished by its extensive diversity, encompassing numerous castes, religions, and ethnicities. Throughout history, the political sphere of the nation has been predominantly controlled by upper-caste and privileged factions, resulting in marginalized communities having minimal representation (Jaffrelot,

2003). However, the emergence of marginalized sectors—consisting of Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs (Other Backward Classes), and religious minorities—has initiated a shift in modern Indian politics. This shift is not just a change but a result of the impact of identity politics, political awareness, and the representation of subaltern groups on the transformation of the political landscape in India. In contemporary times, a notable shift in India's political environment has been characterized by the heightened involvement and portrayal of underprivileged population segments (Jaffrelot, 2003). These segments, such as Scheduled Castes (S.C.s), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and religious minorities, have traditionally been marginalized from the dominant political mechanisms (Shah, 2004). Nevertheless, present-day Indian politics is experiencing a change where these marginalized groups assert their influence and alter the nation's political discourse and power dynamics (Yadav, 2010).

One of the fundamental drivers of this transformation is the increasing awareness and validation of identity within marginalized communities, which have been a significant driving force. The rise of identity politics, characterized by forming political groups and movements based on caste, tribe, and religion, has been crucial in uniting these groups. For instance, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), founded by Kanshi Ram and later led by Mayawati, has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities. The BSP's successes in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous State, illustrate how marginalized groups can leverage their shared identity to gain political power (Jaffrelot, 2003). Furthermore, the execution of affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education, employment, and political representation, has granted underprivileged segments chances for upward mobility. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which stipulated reservations for S.C.s, STs, and women in local self-governance institutions, have had a significant impact. These steps have allowed marginalized groups to establish a presence in political establishments at the grassroots level, cultivating a new breed of leaders within these communities (Pai, 2001).

Additionally, civil society and grassroots movements play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of marginalized sections. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) are examples of organizations leading campaigns against social discrimination and political inclusion. These movements have raised awareness about the systemic injustices marginalized groups face and exerted pressure on political parties to address these issues in their agendas (Shah, 2004). On the other hand, the emergence of digital technology and social media has further amplified the voices of marginalized communities. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become robust political mobilization and advocacy tools. These platforms have enabled marginalized groups to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly reach a wider audience. The online campaigns and movements, such as the Dalit Lives Matter campaign, highlight the grievances and demands of these communities, thereby influencing public opinion and policy-making (Nielsen & Waldrop, 2014).

Despite the institutional hurdles such as political violence, prejudice, and symbolic inclusion, marginalized communities continue to strive for political empowerment. Their resilience in the face of these obstacles is truly inspiring. However, discrimination based on caste, communal conflicts, and economic inequalities persistently obstruct the complete attainment of political equality (Thorat & Newman, 2007).

Historical Context of Marginalization in India

Various socio-economic, political, and cultural elements profoundly shape the historical origins of marginalization in India. The Indian subcontinent, characterized by its heterogeneous population and intricate social hierarchies, has experienced diverse manifestations of marginalization, frequently stemming from the caste system, colonial governance, and economic strategies implemented post-independence. However, it explores the historical background of marginalization in India. The caste system, a distinctive hierarchical social structure in India, has been a significant factor contributing to inequality and social exclusion for a considerable period (Ambedkar, 1945). Positioned at the lowest rung of this hierarchy are the Dalits (previously referred to as "untouchables") and Adivasis (indigenous tribes), who have endured systematic discrimination and oppression throughout history (Shah, 2006). However, the hierarchical social stratification known as the caste system has long been a significant factor contributing to marginalization in India. This system historically categorized individuals into distinct social groups, with the Brahmins occupying the highest position as priests and scholars. At the same time, the Dalits, previously referred to as "untouchables," were relegated to the lowest rung. This rigid framework not only determined one's occupation, social relationships, and economic prospects but also resulted in severe discrimination, social exclusion, and economic oppression against Dalits and other lower-caste communities. Consequently, their education, employment, and social advancement opportunities were greatly restricted (Gupta, 2000).

Furthermore, the colonial rule not only perpetuated but also intensified the social disparities that already existed within Indian society. The British East India Company and later the British Crown implemented policies that deepened the divide between the privileged and the marginalized. The Zamindari system, for instance, empowered a select group of landlords to collect taxes from the peasants, resulting in the exploitation and marginalization of lower castes and tribal populations. This system further entrenched the hierarchical structure of society, with the wealthy landlords at the top and the oppressed peasants at the bottom, exacerbating the social injustices that plagued the Indian subcontinent (Mukherjee, 1969). Moreover, the strategy involved exploiting existing tensions and differences within the population to prevent unity and resistance against British rule. The British could maintain control and avoid any cohesive opposition from forming by fostering animosity and distrust among different groups. The divide-and-conquer approach was a key component of British colonial rule in India and other territories, allowing them to effectively govern and exploit these regions for their benefit (Dirks, 2001).

Additionally, following independence, India began a journey towards economic progress and social equity, incorporating values of fairness and impartiality in its Constitution. However, despite these endeavors, exclusion continued to exist as a result of systemic disparities and socio-economic gaps. For example, although the Green Revolution of the 1960s led to increased agricultural output, it predominantly favored affluent landowners in specific areas, neglecting the interests of small-scale farmers and landless workers, especially those from lower castes and tribal communities (Frankel, 1971). However, Urbanization and industrialization have played a role in the marginalization of specific demographics. The swift growth of urban centers resulted in the relocation of rural inhabitants as they sought improved prospects in urban settings. Nevertheless, due to insufficient skills and education, these migrants frequently found themselves in poorly compensated, unregulated employment within the informal sector, thus sustaining patterns of poverty and marginalization (Bhaviskar, 2003).

In Contemporary times, marginalization persists in diverse manifestations. Although stimulating economic expansion, the financial liberalization measures implemented in the 1990s also heightened income disparity. Marginalized groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, and women frequently encounter exclusion from the advantages of economic progress as a result of systemic obstacles (Kannan, 2014). Furthermore, religious minority groups, especially those belonging to the Muslim faith, have experienced social and political exclusion, which communal conflicts and prejudicial policies have intensified (Hasan, 2009). Government policies and affirmative action programs have been implemented to tackle these challenges, but obstacles persist. While reservation policies in education and employment have opened doors for underrepresented communities, their execution has been inconsistent, and societal perceptions frequently impede their efficacy (Deshpande, 2011).

Moreover, the emergence of identity politics has sometimes led to the division of communities, making it more challenging to achieve comprehensive development. According to Gangadhar Patil, a Dalit writer, the concept of Dalit transcends mere caste identity. Instead, Dalit represents a symbol of change and revolution, rooted in humanism. Patil rejects the notions of God, rebirth, soul, and sacred texts that promote discrimination, blind faith, and promises of heaven, as he believes these have historically oppressed and enslaved the Dalit community. Similarly, Gopal Guru (2001) argues that Dalit signifies identity and embodies the aspirations and ongoing struggle for social transformation and revolution (Shah, 2006).

Methodology

This research is rooted in the enduring hierarchical caste system. It utilizes a qualitative methodology to examine the emergence of identity politics in India, particularly emphasizing caste, religious, and regional mobilization. A multi-method framework is employed, integrating historical analysis, case studies, and discourse analysis to offer an in-depth

understanding of the topic. The article adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to facilitate this analysis.

The Rise of Identity Politics in India

Identity politics involves organizing distinct social groups around common traits like caste, religion, or ethnicity to impact political results. In India, identity politics has been instrumental in rallying support from marginalized communities for political purposes (Kaviraj, 1997).

Caste-Based Political Mobilization

Caste-based political mobilization in India has influenced the country's electoral politics and social structure. Mobilization has been pivotal in reshaping power dynamics and promoting societal transformation. Traditionally, the caste system segregated society into separate social categories with fixed roles and positions, establishing a framework that perpetuated the systematic marginalization of lower castes and Dalits (Dirks, 2001). Post-Independence, the Indian Constitution prohibited discrimination based on caste. However, the enduring impact of these societal divides required specific political approaches to rectify past wrongs and secure adequate representation for disadvantaged groups.

Furthermore, the Mandal Commission Report 1980 marked a significant turning point in the mobilization of caste-based politics. By proposing reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government positions and educational establishments, the Commission sparked widespread demonstrations and a notable political transformation upon implementing these recommendations in 1990. This initiative elevated the discussion on caste-based bias to a prominent position in the national discourse. It triggered a newfound political consciousness among the OBCs, prompting them to assert their entitlements with incredible determination (Jaffrelot, 2003). However, political parties wasted no time acknowledging the potential of the newly mobilized electorate, which led to the rise of new parties and the reformation of existing ones to address the needs and desires of the OBCs.

Additionally, in the latter part of the 20th century, the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) led by Kanshi Ram and, subsequently, Mayawati stands out as a notable instance of caste-oriented political mobilization. Established with the primary objective of advocating for the rights of Dalits and other disadvantaged sections of society, the BSP effectively galvanized support by addressing the concerns and challenges faced by these communities. This strategic approach enabled the BSP to garner substantial electoral support in Uttar Pradesh, thereby exerting a significant influence on the political landscape at the national level (Pai, 2002). The BSP's motto, "*Bahujan Hitay, Bahujan Sukhay*," emphasized its dedication to the well-being of the majority, explicitly focusing on the lower castes and Dalits in Indian society. Furthermore, the effectiveness of caste-driven political mobilization extends beyond the BSP. In Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), under the leadership of Lalu Prasad Yadav, has also leveraged caste dynamics to establish a strong political influence. By prioritizing the empowerment of OBCs and challenging the dominance of upper castes, the

RJD successfully connected with a substantial portion of the voting population, resulting in notable political advancements (Brass, 1997). Similarly, The Dravidian political parties in Tamil Nadu, including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have successfully employed caste-based mobilization strategies to advance the rights of non-Brahmin castes, while also championing social justice and equality (Barnett, 1976).

Caste-driven political mobilization has significantly impacted the landscape of national politics. Major political entities such as the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been compelled to adjust their approaches to cater to different caste factions' diverse aspirations. Traditionally viewed as a party representing the interests of the upper castes, the Congress must actively work towards incorporating lower castes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) within its organizational structure (Chandra, 2004). On the contrary, the BJP has adopted a method of social restructuring, striving to form a comprehensive coalition of castes by integrating lower castes and Dalits in its political rhetoric while preserving its traditional upper-caste support (Jafftelot, 2012).

Religious and Regional Identity

Religious and regional affiliations have significantly impacted India's political and social spheres, frequently intertwining to mold the intricate socio-political environment of the nation. India's extensive religions and regional traditions encompass various historical and cultural backgrounds. Religious identification, notably Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, and other faiths, holds a pivotal position in the mobilization of political forces. For example, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has utilized Hindu identity to strengthen its voter base, highlighting Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, as a key element of its political discourse (Jaffrelot, 2011). This approach has occasionally intensified social divisions, evident in outbreaks of conflict between religious groups, like the Gujarat riots in 2002 and the more recent Delhi riots in 2020 (Brass, 2003; Varshney, 2020). Religious affiliation has played a crucial role in shaping the landscape of Indian politics. The emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Hindutva ideology has galvanized Hindu voters. In contrast, political entities such as the Indian National Congress (INC) have endeavored to garner support from religious minority groups (Hansen, 1999).

However, Regional identity plays a crucial role in influencing political dynamics within India, as evidenced by the strong regionalist sentiments observed in states like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Punjab. For instance, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu has effectively leveraged Tamil identity and linguistic pride to contest the central government's policies and advocate for greater regional autonomy (Barnet, 1976). Similarly, the ascendance of regional political entities like the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab underscores the value of regional identity in electoral politics (Chhiber & Kolman, 2004). These parties significantly focus on local matters, regional languages, and cultural heritage, nurturing a feeling of regional pride and unity.

Inter-Sectionality

The interaction between religious and regional identities introduces multiple levels of intricacy to India's political landscape, impacting individuals' voting patterns, the strategies adopted by political parties, and the decisions made regarding policies. This complex tapestry of identities necessitates sophisticated political tactics to promote comprehensive governance and foster social cohesion within a nation characterized by significant diversity (Chandra, 2004). The notion of intersectionality acknowledges that people can be part of various marginalized communities, each facing distinct forms of prejudice and subjugation (Crenshaw, 1989). Political movements focusing on the interconnected aspects of caste, gender, and religion have risen to prominence, pushing for a society that is more inclusive and fairer (Guru, 2009).

Political Awareness among Marginalized Sections

Political awareness pertains to recognizing and comprehending an individual's social, economic, and political circumstances and the drive to collaborate to tackle these challenges. Within marginalized groups in India, there has been a noticeable rise in political consciousness, resulting in heightened political engagement and advocacy (Omvedt, 1994). The fundamental factors for political mobilization among the marginalized sections were various events such as Dalit Movements, Adivasi Movements, OBC Mobilization, and Women's Movement.

Dalits Movement

Dalit movements have historically played a significant role in enhancing political consciousness. The Ambedkarite movement, influenced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, has been crucial in mobilizing Dalits to advocate for social justice, political representation, and economic empowerment. Groups like the BSP and various Dalit rights organizations continue to push for Dalit concerns (Jaffrelo, 2000). Dalit movements in India boast a significant legacy of defiance and opposition to caste-based discrimination and societal marginalization that led from a quest for parity and fairness, and these movements have endeavored to deconstruct the firmly established caste system. The inception of Dalit movements can be identified in the initial decades of the 20th century, spearheaded by figures such as B.R. Ambedkar, who ardently advocated for the rights of Dalits and advocated for their empowerment within the framework of the Constitution (Jaffrelot, 2005).

Furthermore, the Dalit Panthers, influenced by the Black Panthers in the United States, came into existence during the 1970s, promoting revolutionary social transformation and shedding light on caste-based discrimination and violence (Zelliot, 2001). In Contemporary decades, there has been a transformation in Dalit movements, as advocates have utilized political arenas and community organizing to tackle concerns like land ownership, access to education, and discrimination against Dalits (Guru, 2010). The emergence of figures such as Kanshi Ram and Mayawati within the Bahujan Samaj Party represents notable political milestones, underscoring the increasing impact of Dalit perspectives in Indian politics

(Jodhaka, 2012). Despite progress, Dalits still encounter systematic obstacles, perpetuating the ongoing effort for equality and justice (Teltumbe, 2019). The enduring nature of these actions highlights the strength and resolve of Dalits as they strive for equality and justice (Shah, 2001).

Adivasi Movements

Adivasi movements in India have been instrumental in the fight for indigenous rights, land, and the protection of their cultural identity. Emerging as a response to the historical injustices suffered by Adivasis, these movements strive to address the deliberate marginalization and exploitation of indigenous groups. The early stages of resistance can be linked back to British colonial rule, with notable uprisings like the Santhal Rebellion (1855-56) and the Birsa Munda Revolt (1899-1900) (Guha, 1983). After gaining independence, the Adivasi movements have emphasized addressing problems related to land alienation, displacement resulting from industrial projects, and the deterioration of traditional livelihoods (Xaxa, 1999). However, The Chipko Movement of the 1970s, primarily an environmental campaign, witnessed considerable participation from the Adivasi people, emphasizing their strong ties to forest conservation (Guha, 2000).

Additionally, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and similar movements from the 1980s and 1990s were pivotal in their efforts to oppose the construction of large dams that endangered the habitats of the Adivasi people (Baviskar, 2004). Similarly, the emergence of the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* in the 1970s played a crucial role in the political mobilization that ultimately led to the establishment of the Jharkhand state in 2000 (Shah, 2010). Despite these endeavors, indigenous communities still face challenges in addressing socio-economic inequalities and experiencing political exclusion (Rao, 2006). Hence, the Adivasi movements' unwavering determination and persistent activism highlight their dedication to protecting their rights and cultural legacy (Shah, 2007).

The Mobilization Other Backward Class (OBC)

Mobilizing Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India has played a crucial role in shaping the socio-political environment. Beginning to gain prominence in the mid-20th century, the mobilization of OBCs aimed to rectify past injustices and advocate for equal access to education, employment, and political participation (Jaffrelot, 2003). The Mandal Commission Report 1980 marked a significant turning point by proposing quotas for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government employment and educational establishments, leading to extensive demonstrations and discussions (Mandal, 1980). In 1990, Prime Minister V.P. Singh's adoption of these suggestions energized OBCs, resulting in heightened political awareness and the establishment of local political parties such as the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (Yadav, 1999). For instance, leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav were instrumental in galvanizing the OBC community, championing the cause of social equality, and confronting the hegemony of the upper castes (Pai, 2000). The emergence of OBC leaders reshaped the political landscape, highlighting concerns related to caste-based prejudice and financial hardship (Narayan, 2009). Despite

considerable progress, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) still encounter obstacles stemming from socio-economic disparities and political exclusion (Mitra, 2004). The continuous mobilization is indicative of a broader fight for respect, fairness, and societal equity within the intricate caste system of India (Sharma, 2002).

Findings and Observations

The Representations of Marginalized Sections in Contemporary Politics

The political inclusion of marginalized communities is essential to amplify their voices and advocate for their needs. In recent times, there has been a steady rise in the representation of Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, and religious minorities in the political sphere (Shah, 2004).

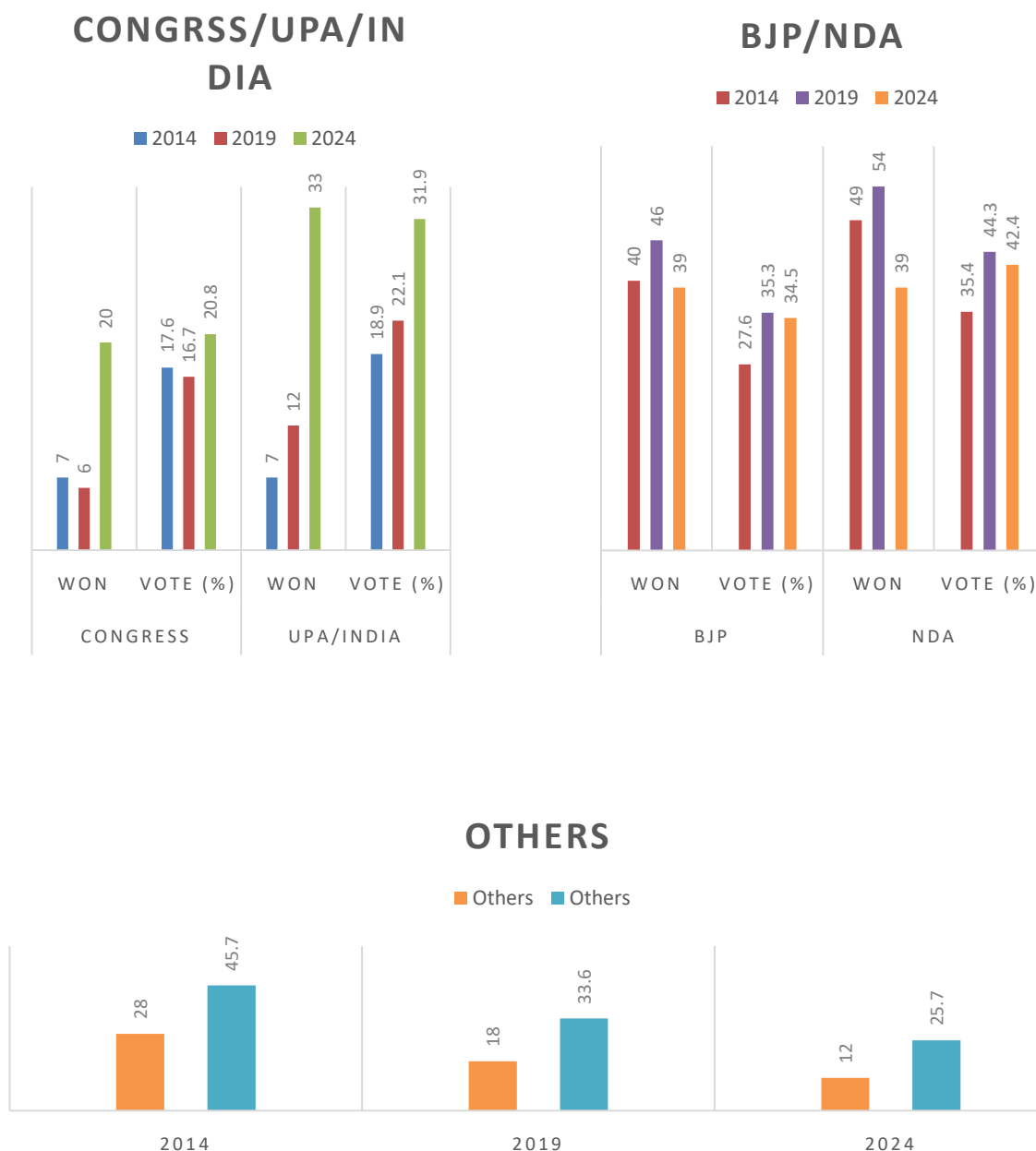
Representation of Dalits

The achievement of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, particularly during Mayawati's leadership as Chief Minister, marks a noteworthy advancement in Dalit political participation. Under Mayawati's tenure, which spanned multiple terms in the late 1990s and 2000s, the BSP emerged as a significant political force, advocating for the rights and representation of Dalits, who have historically faced systemic discrimination and marginalization in Indian society. Mayawati's rise to power was not just a personal triumph but also a symbol of the broader empowerment of the Dalit community, as she became the first woman from the Dalit community to hold the office of Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh. Her administration implemented various welfare schemes to improve Dalits' socio-economic conditions, including initiatives in education, employment, and housing (Pai, 2013).

Moreover, the BSP's success in Uttar Pradesh has inspired a wave of political mobilization among Dalits nationwide. Several other Dalit leaders have risen to prominence in different states, championing policies aimed at addressing the issues faced by the Dalit community. For instance, leaders like Ram Vilas Paswan in Bihar and Jignesh Mevani in Gujarat have emerged as influential figures, advocating for social justice and equality. These leaders have worked to highlight the challenges faced by Dalits, such as caste-based discrimination, poverty, and lack of access to education and healthcare. The increasing visibility of Dalit leaders in various political arenas has led to a greater awareness of the issues affecting the community, fostering a sense of solidarity and collective identity among Dalits. This political awakening has also encouraged grassroots movements and organizations focusing on Dalit rights, further amplifying their voices in the national discourse. As a result, the political landscape in India is gradually shifting, with Dalit issues gaining more attention and representation in mainstream politics.

However, in recent times, the level of Dalit representation in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections serves as a critical measure of India's advancement towards an inclusive democracy. By 2024, there has been a notable, yet intricate, rise in the presence of Dalit leaders in the Lok Sabha. The reservation of 84 seats for Scheduled Castes (S.C.) out of the 543 total seats in the Lok Sabha is a constitutional guarantee of Dalit representation, ensuring that this historically

marginalized group has a platform in the highest legislative institution of the nation (ECI, 2024). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this representation is frequently a topic of discussion. Rest, Chart titles below explain.



The visual depictions presented in the charts illustrate the evolving political terrain in India across various election periods, emphasizing the changes in the allocation of seats and the electorate's preferences. The number of seats won and vote share percentages by different political parties in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha elections. In 2014, the BJP and NDA secured a considerable number of seats, with 40 and 49 seats respectively. Others won 28 seats, while Congress and UPA/INDIA each obtained seven seats. By 2019, the BJP increased its seat count to 46 and the NDA to 54.

Conversely, others experienced a decrease to 18 seats. Congress secured six seats, while UPA/INDIA won 12 seats. In the most recent election of 2024, Congress witnessed a significant rise in seats, winning 20 seats. UPA/INDIA also made substantial progress with 33 seats. On the other hand, the BJP's seat tally decreased to 29, and the NDA secured 39 seats. Furthermore, others saw a further decline to 12 seats in 2024.

Moreover, the highest vote share was held by others at 45.7%, with NDA following at 35.4% and BJP at 27.6%. UPA/INDIA secured 18.9%, while Congress received 17.6% in 2014. In 2019, NDA's vote share rose to 44.3% and BJPs to 35.3%. UPA/INDIA and Congress obtained 22.1% and 16.7%, respectively. Meanwhile, the vote share of others dropped to 33.6%. By 2024, NDA maintained the highest vote share at 42.4%, with BJP at 34.5%. UPA/INDIA garnered 31.9%, while Congress received 20.8%. Others experienced a further decline to 25.7%.

Who gets it, and how much?

The voting preferences of Dalit voters may have influenced the electoral destiny of political parties in numerous States. Specifically, their support may have significantly influenced the electoral results of the NDA and INDIA coalitions in various States. While Dalit voting patterns varied across different States, data indicates that in cases where Dalit voters backed either the NDA or the INDIA coalition, those alliances secured more parliamentary seats. For example, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar share a similar political landscape. The INDIA coalition saw success in Uttar Pradesh, whereas its performance in Bihar was not as strong. The results of the National Election Study (NES) 2024 reveal that Dalit voters predominantly supported INDIA coalition candidates in Uttar Pradesh, but this level of support was not mirrored in Bihar.

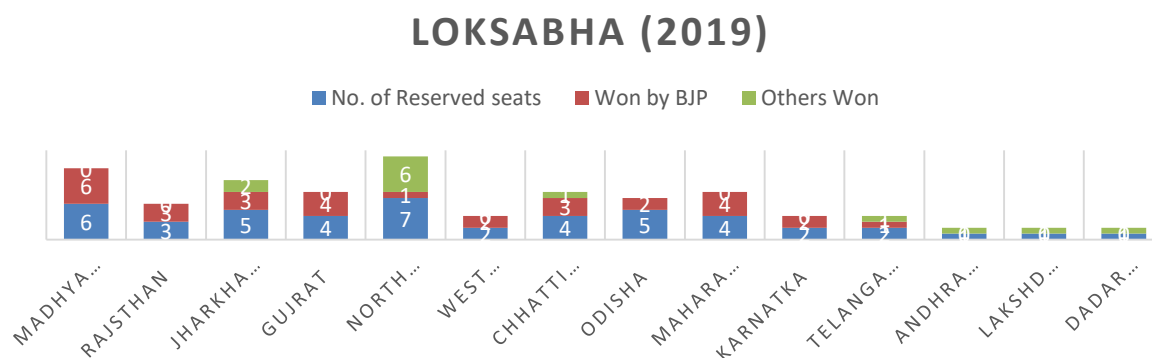
Therefore, the results of the NES indicate a consistent pattern in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Dalits showed a higher preference for candidates of the INDIA bloc over those of the NDA in Maharashtra but not Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan, 46% of Dalits voted for the Congress, while only 37% voted for the BJP candidates. Despite this, the BJP secured all 25 seats in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections but lost ten seats in 2024. In Gujarat, 57% of Dalit voters supported the BJP, while only 43% voted for the Congress. The BJP won 25 out of the total 26 Lok Sabha seats. In Haryana, Dalit voters favored the Congress, which won five out of the ten seats. In the 2019 elections, the BJP had secured all 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana.

Moreover, the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) emerged victorious in 20 of the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies and secured 78 out of the 147 Assembly seats in Odisha. Within the Dalit electorate, 46% extended their support to the BJP, 40% favored the *Biju Janata Dal* (BJD), and 15% cast their votes for the Congress/INDIA alliance in the State. In the neighboring State of West Bengal, the *Trinamool Congress* maintained its stronghold by clinching 29 out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats. Notably, 45% of Dalit voters in West Bengal opted for the BJP, while a smaller proportion (41%) backed the *Trinamool Congress*, which successfully garnered support from diverse social groups.

In Southern India, the Dalit vote has evenly split between the *Telugu Desam Party* and its allies and the YSR Congress Party in Andhra Pradesh. In Telangana, 46% of Dalits supported the Congress/INDIA bloc, 23% favored the BJP/NDA, and 31% backed the *Bhartiya Rashtra Samiti* (BRS). The Congress' success in Karnataka has primarily been attributed to the shift of Dalit voters towards the party, with 66% casting their votes for the Congress. The BJP's strong performance in Assam has been attributed to the consistent backing of Dalits for the party. According to the NES 2024 survey data, 70% of Dalits supported the BJP/NDA in Assam, while only 12% voted for the Congress/INDIA alliance (NES, 2024).

Representations of Adivasis

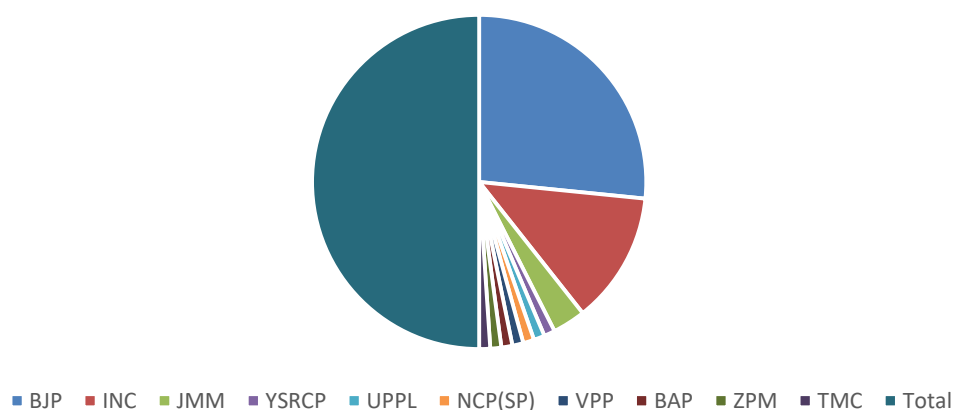
Adivasi representation in India has experienced substantial development, demonstrating the increasing political awareness and mobilization within these communities. Traditionally marginalized and frequently left out of mainstream political procedures, Adivasis have made significant progress in asserting their political rights and visibility. The establishment of the State of Jharkhand in 2000, primarily due to the endeavors of Adivasi leaders and movements such as the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM), is evidence of their growing political sway (Shah, 2010). Furthermore, Adivasi political leaders have played a significant role in states with large indigenous populations, like Chhattisgarh and Odisha. These leaders have actively advocated for critical issues such as land rights, environmental protection, and preserving their cultural heritage, which are crucial aspects of Adivasi identity and well-being (Bhaviskar, 2005). However, enacting the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 represents a vital achievement in acknowledging the land rights of Adivasi communities, providing a legal structure to safeguard their ancestral lands (Sundar, 2009). Despite these developments, Adivasis persist in confronting numerous challenges, such as displacement and socio-economic disadvantages, highlighting the importance of ongoing advocacy and policy support to secure their full and equitable participation in India's political landscape (Xaxa, 2011). Therefore, the study comprehends representations of Adivasis representations of recent Lokasabha results, which provide actual representations of STs through the chart and pie chart below.



Source: Election Commission of India, 2019

Currently, 47 out of the 543 Lok Sabha seats are designated for Scheduled Tribes (STs), with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) securing 31 seats in the 2019 elections. In contrast, Congress victorious in four ST seats, followed by Biju Janata Dal with 3, Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party with 1, Shiv Sena with 1, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha with 1, Naga People's Front with 1, National People's Party with 1, Mizo National Front with 1, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party with 1, Bharat Rashtra Samithi with 1, and Nationalist Congress Party with 1 in 2019. In the 2014 elections, BJP secured victory in 27 ST seats, while Congress won five constituencies reserved for STs.

Loksabha Results of STs Seats Party-Wise 2024



Source: ECI, 2024

In the Lok Sabha Election, 2024, out of forty-seven reserved seats of STs, ten parties had candidates who emerged victorious in the election. The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) secured the highest number of seats at 25, followed by the Indian National Congress (INC) with 12 seats, *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM) with three seats, *Yuvajana Sramika Rythu* Congress Party with one seat, United People's Party, Liberal with one seat, Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar) (NCP-SP) with one seat, The Voice of The People's Party with one seat, *Bharata Adivasi* Party with one seat, Zoram People's Movement with one seat, and TMC with one seat. However, Tribal communities and settlements are dispersed throughout various states in India. The central Indian tribal belt, which includes southern Rajasthan, the eastern belt of Gujarat, and parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, exhibits a significant presence of the BJP and faces similar challenges. In the east region, Jharkhand and Odisha, each with five Lok Sabha seats reserved for tribal and Chhattisgarh with four such seats, play a crucial role in the BJP's political strategy. Additionally, it shows the tribal strongholds in the Northeast region and specific areas of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana, where regional political parties also wield influence.

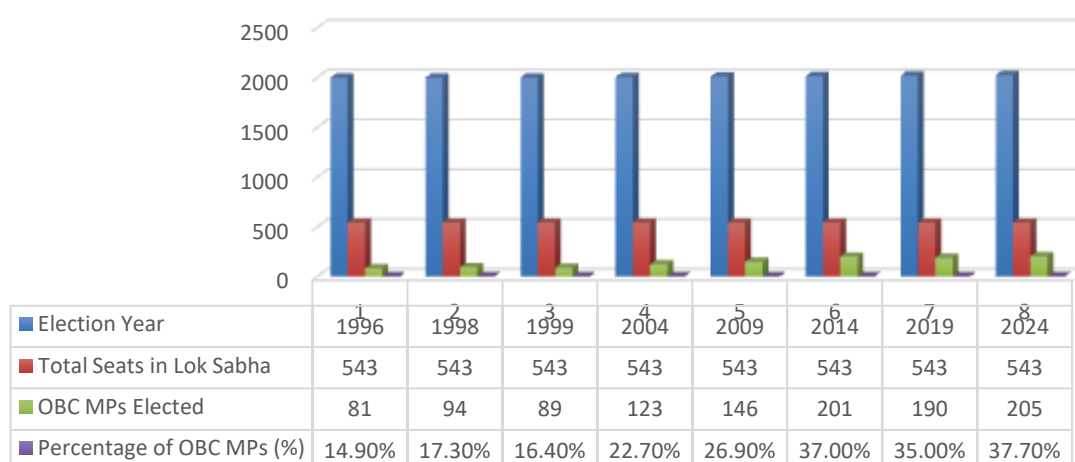
The Other Backward Castes Representations

The political landscape in India has been significantly reshaped by the representation of Other Backward Classes (OBC), especially after adopting the Mandal Commission's

suggestions in the early 1990s. The Commission, formed in 1979, was assigned to recognize socially and educationally disadvantaged groups and propose strategies for their progress. Its proposals, such as reserving 27% of government jobs and educational opportunities for OBCs, were designed to address long-standing social and economic inequalities (Yadva, 1996). The adoption and execution of these suggestions in 1990 sparked substantial political activism within OBC communities, resulting in the rise of influential OBC political figures and organizations. However, notable OBC figures such as Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav played crucial roles in championing OBC rights and securing adequate representation for their communities in political decision-making (Jaffrelot, 2003). The emergence of leaders and the establishment of political parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) have highlighted the growing political influence of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), leading to substantial changes in the political landscape of states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This newfound political consciousness among OBCs has enhanced their representation in legislative bodies and played a pivotal role in shaping policy priorities toward rural development, social equity, and economic parity (Pai, 2002).

Moreover, the influence of OBC representation has been visualized in the heightened attention to formulating policies that tackle the socio-economic challenges encountered by marginalized communities. It encompasses improved availability of education, job prospects, and social welfare initiatives. However, obstacles endure, such as disparities within the group and the necessity for fairer representation in political organizations and leadership roles (Jaffrelot, 2010). However, the surge in OBC representation indicates a substantial move towards a more inclusive and diverse political system in India, highlighting a broader movement towards democratizing political power and addressing historical inequities. Now, let us understand the OBC representation in recent *Loksabha* elections.

OBC Representation in Lok Sabha (1996s to 2024)



Sources: Election Commission of India. (1996-2019). *Statistical Reports on General Elections*. Available at <https://eci.gov.in>./ The Hindu, Indian Express, and the Times of India News Paper

The representation of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the Lok Sabha has experienced a profound evolution from 1996 to 2024, mirroring significant social and political changes within India. This timeframe is pivotal for establishing a cohesive OBC political identity and influence within the Indian parliamentary framework. This examination presents a comprehensive analysis of the data regarding OBC representation in the Lok Sabha over various electoral cycles, highlighting the emergence of OBCs as a formidable political entity. During the general elections of 1996, the inaugural elections following the Mandal era, OBCs secured 81 seats in the Lok Sabha, representing 14.9% of the total 543 seats. This era was characterized by the repercussions of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, which were enacted in 1990 and resulted in enhanced reservations for OBCs in public employment and educational institutions. The outcomes of the 1996 elections signified an early yet significant presence of OBCs within the national legislative assembly, indicative of their initial stages of political mobilization.

However, the elections of 1998 witnessed a modest enhancement in the representation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), with 94 Members of Parliament (MPs), constituting 17.3% of the Lok Sabha, being elected. Although this increase was not substantial, it reflected a consistent upward trend in the political engagement and representation of OBCs. Conversely, the 1999 elections experienced a slight decline in OBC representation, with the number of OBC MPs falling to 89, or 16.4%. This decrease has been linked to the political realignments and coalition dynamics prevalent during that period. A notable advancement occurred in the 2004 general elections, during which OBC representation escalated to 123 MPs, representing 22.7% of the Lok Sabha. This election was crucial, as it signified a consolidation of OBC support for regional and national parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress, which increasingly aimed to attract the OBC vote bank. During this timeframe, the increase in OBC MPs underscores the rising political consciousness and mobilization within OBC communities and the growing recognition of their electoral importance by major political entities.

Furthermore, the elections of 2009 reflected a sustained trend in the representation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), with the number of OBC Members of Parliament (MPs) rising to 146, constituting 26.9% of the total seats. This period was marked by a significant deepening of OBC influence in Indian politics, as several OBC leaders emerged as key players in regional and national spheres. The rise in representation during this time illustrates the effectiveness of political strategies centered on OBC interests and the increasing prominence of caste-based identity politics within the Indian electoral context. The general elections 2014 represented a significant turning point for the representation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), as 201 OBC Members of Parliament were elected, constituting 37.0% of the Lok Sabha. This notable rise in representation can be primarily credited to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) effective mobilization of OBC voters, spearheaded by Narendra Modi, who belongs to the OBC category himself. The 2014 elections highlighted the crucial importance

of OBCs within the BJP's electoral framework and the broader context of national political discussions.

Moreover, the representation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the Lok Sabha was significant, with 190 Members of Parliament (MPs) accounting for 35.0% of the total in 2019. While this figure represents a minor decline from the 2014 elections, the enduring presence of OBC MPs underscores the persistent political clout of OBC communities. As the 2024 elections approach, projections indicate a potential rise in OBC representation to 205 MPs, representing 37.7% of the Lok Sabha. This forecast suggests that OBCs are poised to continue as a pivotal element in Indian politics, with their legislative presence expected to expand further. The data from 1996 to 2024 shows a clear trend of increasing representation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the Lok Sabha, reflecting the growing political power of OBC communities. This trend is representative of broader socio-political changes, including the impact of the Mandal Commission, the rise of caste-based political mobilization, and the strategic importance of OBCs in the electoral tactics of major political parties. The steady increase in OBC representation underscores the significant role of caste in shaping India's democratic landscape and the ongoing evolution of Indian politics in response to changing social dynamics.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of caste-based political mobilization in India is intricate and diverse, profoundly influencing the nation's political environment. It has enabled marginalized groups to advocate for their rights, shaped political parties' approaches, and highlighted matters of social justice and equality within political discussions. Despite ongoing challenges, especially in achieving authentic social change beyond mere electoral success, caste-based mobilization remains essential in molding the democratic and social structure of India.

Since 2014, Dalit and Adivasi representation in the Lok Sabha has shifted, with the BJP, under Prime Minister Modi, gaining support from these communities that traditionally backed regional parties or Congress. It has increased Dalit and Adivasi MPs in the BJP, indicating a change in political affiliations. However, genuine representation remains hindered by issues like caste discrimination, land rights, and socio-economic inequalities. Critics argue that this growth has not resulted in meaningful policy changes or improved living conditions, often favoring symbolic gestures over substantial reforms. While political inclusion has improved, its effectiveness is limited, underscoring the need for targeted strategies to address these communities' challenges.

Further, the analysis of OBC representation in the Lok Sabha from the 1990s to 2024 shows a significant upward trend, highlighting the growing political influence of OBC communities in India. The increase in OBC MPs, particularly during the 2014 elections, underscores the impact of caste-based identity politics on electoral outcomes. This trend reflects the evolving nature of Indian democracy, where caste remains a crucial factor in political interactions. Projections for 2024 suggest that OBC representation will continue to be vital in Indian parliamentary politics, influenced by the Mandal Commission's legacy and ongoing OBC

mobilization. Understanding caste dynamics is essential for analyzing India's political landscape and the representation of marginalized populations.

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