

Caste in Indian Politics — Reservations

35.1 INTRODUCTION

The political process of any society is influenced by the nature of the society. To understand the nature of the society we study its social structure. India's social structure is best understood in terms of caste (*varna*) and sub-caste (*jati*). These castes and sub-caste taken together — constitute the caste system, wherein these are hierarchially arranged. Over the years, the caste system developed into an elaborate system to maintain socio-economic inequalities in the society. Individuals belonging to the lower castes and the out-castes suffered from many disabilities and were oppressed and exploited by the upper castes. The conditions of the out-castes was particularly pathetic. The practice of untouchability epitomised their conditions.

The first major challenge to the caste system came with the advent of the British rule. Under the impact of modern ideas and institutions the caste system was undermined. Caste as group identity, however, got strengthened in the new context of modern ideas and institutions. This happened because it became one of the bases of political mobilisation in the course of freedom struggle.

There were several interacting and reinforcing processes that led to the politicisation of caste groups. One must note here that the socio-religious movements of the 19th century had made the lower castes conscious of their backward conditions and also of their rights that had been denied to them over the centuries. As a result many amongst them were no longer prepared to accept their position in the caste system as divinely ordained. In the backdrop of this awakening, the introduction of democratic principle of governance, the emergence of party-centered politics and the attempt of the British rulers of mobilise to lower and the out-castes along with the Muslims in its support to thwart the growing national movement — all combined prepared the ground for the politicisation of the castes. The emergence of caste based organisations such as the caste associations and caste federations, by mediating between the caste groups and the political process, further helped the politicisation of castes.

By the time India gained Independence, the Backward classes, because of politicisation, had become a force to reckon with. Their claims and demands could no longer be ignored. At the same time the nationalist leaders were also committed to the task of improving their conditions.

In light of the above, the constitution makers enjoined upon the new state to take positive measures for bringing the backward classes at par with the rest of the society. They realised that without the positive intervention by the state it would not be possible to remove their historically accumulated backwardness. The policy of reservation for the backward classes needs to be understood in this context. Backward classes refer to three categories of the people — the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the other backward classes (OBC).

35.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- recognise caste and jati as the base of India's social structure as well as the basic features of the caste system,
- explain the impact of the process of modernisation on the caste system,
- appreciate the role of caste in the political process,
- assess the contribution of caste in the working of Indian democracy,
- recall the special constitutional provisions for the upliftment of the backward classes,
- understand the significance of the 'Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 (PCR Act)' and the function of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes,
- identify class as another sociological category in the study of politics.

35.3 INDIA'S SOCIAL STRUCTURE: CASTE AND JATI

The historical roots of the caste system can be traced back to the early vedic times. The caste system, also known as the Varna-Vyavastha, was based on the social division of labour. With the passage of time, however, vocation and status became dependent on caste instead of the other way round.

In the ideal-typical Varna-Vyavastha there are four Varnas: Brahmin (the priest and the intellectual class), Kshatriya (warrior and the ruling class), Vaisyas (the producing class - peasants and artisans) and Shudra (those who performed menial and 'polluting' jobs).

One must note here that the varna-vyavastha provides more the theory than the actuality of the caste. In reality there are not four but thousands of castes and jatis, in which the caste system is organised. It is possible, nevertheless to classify most of the jatis in accordance with the Varna distinctions, although it is easier done at the extreme ends of the social spectrum than at the middle ranges. In other words, Varna system is related to jati in that it gives an all India frame-work to which any jati will fit.

In politics the mobilisation of caste has been at both the levels, Varna and jati, depending upon the context and the purpose of mobilisation.

(A) What is Caste?

N.H. Risley defines caste as "a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, divine or human, and professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community".

Caste then, is a localised group having a traditional association with an occupation. The principle of birth forms the exclusive basis of membership in a caste group. Accordingly, the choice of occupation is not open but is determined on the basis of one's birth in a caste.

In addition caste groups have rules governing food and marriage. The group defines rules of behaviour for its members and exercise some degree of authority over them including the right to expel those who defy its authority.

(B) Features of the Caste System

In the caste system, caste groups are arranged in a hierarchical order of relationship, based on the notion of "purity and pollution" derived from the scriptures. G.S. Ghurye, an eminent Indian sociologist, lists six outstanding features of the caste system. These are: 1) segmental division of society, 2) hierarchy, 3) restrictions of feeding and social intercourse 4) civil and religious disparities and social discourse 5) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and 6) restrictions on marriage.

A little reflection will show that the caste system has been based on the principles of inequality. Moreover, individuals belonging to different castes had different social privileges and entitlements. While the upper castes (i.e. the Twice Born) enjoyed high ritual status, economic well-being and fruits of power, the lower castes and the out-castes suffered from various ritual, social-economic and political disabilities and exclusions. As a result, over the centuries, the lower castes and the out-castes suffered a great deal with all roads to a better life blocked for them. It is this aspect of the disabilities, discriminations, oppression and exploitation which has lent caste its explosive dynamics in contemporary politics.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 35.1

Fill in the blanks.

- 1) and are at the base of India's social structure.
- 2) In the caste system, castes are arranged on the basis of "..... and" derived from the scriptures.
- 3) The caste system, also known as was based on the division of labour.
- 4) Varna-Vyavastha is related to in the sense that it gives an All India to which any jati will fit.
- 5) In the caste system, the choice of occupation is not but is determined on the basis of one's

35.4 MODERNIST IMPACT ON THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system in the traditional sense could best work in the narrow localised environment of the village. It had a close-knit organic character. Under the impact of modern Ideas and Institutions, the caste system however began to lose its organic character. The western liberal ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity were critical of the inegalitarian ideology that had helped to institutionalise and provide justification to the caste system.

Along with the spread of modern liberal ideas, the introduction of modern secular education, the establishment of the new legal system and parliamentary institutions during the British rule served a severe blow to the inner logic of the caste system that had provided coherence to the system.

The new legal system and its law courts, for instance, treated people of different castes as equal. Modern education broke the intellectual monopoly of the Brahmins by opening education to all castes. The traditional linkage between caste and occupation became tenuous with new employment opportunities arising in the course of industrialisation and

commercialisation. These new opportunities facilitated occupational, social and geographical mobility—something which was inconceivable in the past.

Urbanisation and industrialisation that was taking place during the British rule also undermined the caste system. The social distance between individuals belonging to different castes was considerably broken, as the rules governing the social behaviour and interactions in the village could no longer be enforced in the urban setting. Thus, the spread of new institutions created a new environment that was very different from that of traditional India.

In the encounter between tradition and modernity, the caste system, although greatly undermined, however, survived. This was because it could adapt itself to the new environment. But in the process, it did undergo transformation in its nature, while the ritual, social, economic and occupational aspects of the caste system were undermined, caste as group identity acquired a new significance. Caste identity became object of political mobilisation in the changed politico-economic context.

Modernisation, thus had a paradoxical impact; while on the one hand it undermined the caste system especially its ritual, social and occupational aspects, on the other hand it strengthened the identity of caste. Further, by exposing the oppressive and the exploitative side of the caste system, it provided a strong motive for the politicisation of backward classes in its struggle for positions, upliftment and establishment of an equitable socio-economic and political order.

35.5 CASTE AND POLITICS: INTERACTIONS

Caste began to play an important role in the political process during the British rule. After independence, its involvement in politics has increased much more. The fact that it existed as easily identifiable social cluster of people made it an easy object of political mobilisation by political parties in their quest for political support and votes. While the political parties sought to exploit caste for its own electoral purposes, caste groups by making politics their sphere of activity got a chance to assert their identity and bargain for benefits and position in society. Thus caste and politics interaction has been a two-way process.

In an earlier section, we mentioned that the British rule introduced parliamentary institutions. These were introduced in a piecemeal manner in response to the demands for self-rule by the national movement. The Ripon Reforms of 1882 for the first time conceded the Democratic principle of governance. Since then one finds an ever widening arc of participation by caste groups in the political process.

In politicising the castes, the caste associations played a crucial role. Caste associations were quasi-voluntary associations in the sense that its membership was open only to the individuals of the caste community. These associations were formed to secure economic benefits or educational openings or for more clearly political purpose of uniting to fight the hegemony of the upper castes. In either case, involvement in politics was considered necessary for securing the specific purpose(s) for which they were formed. Thus, once formed on the basis of caste identity, caste association went on to acquire non-caste functions.

In addition to the caste association there was another type of caste based organisation called, caste federation. A caste federation was composed not of one caste but several castes which were mostly socially homogeneous, but at other times may simply have some specific interest or political objective in common. These two types of organisations, in mediating between the political process and the social structure, played a crucial part in the politicisation of castes, especially during the colonial rule.

Since independence the role of the caste in politics has become much more pervasive than it was during the colonial period. This can be seen at all levels of the political process and in

most regions of the country. All political parties tend to give party ticket to candidates for contesting elections from amongst the numerically or otherwise dominant caste in every constituency. Major caste groups get representation in the council of ministers. Be it elections, political appointments or even formation of political parties caste has been of the major considerations.

The influence of caste, however, varies depending upon the level of election and the region. Its influence is far more at the local and state-level political process than at the national level. Caste plays greater role in the rural than in urban areas. In the rural areas and at the local level, the smallness of constituency and the fact that there is greater face to face interactions account for the strong influence of caste in politics.

Since independence two factors have especially brought the issue of caste in Indian politics into sharp focus. These are (1) the introduction of universal adult franchise and (2) the constitutional provisions for protective discrimination in favour of the backward classes. The introduction of universal adult franchise brought a very large section of the populace, who had been hitherto excluded on account of property qualification to vote, into the arena of electoral politics. This made the task of mobilising votes enormously difficult for the political parties. The daunting task was, however, made easy when political parties relied upon castes to get their votes. In the process castes' involvement in politics deepened with every election in India. In addition to the enlarged arena of electoral politics, the constitutional provisions for protective discrimination also provided the ground for castes to play a significant role in politics. The question of reservation, as a form of protective discrimination, for the Other Backward Classes (OBC), itself became a contentious political issue. While we will discuss the constitutional provisions later on, here let us understand why such provisions became a keenly contested political issue.

One may note here that protective discrimination was meant for three categories of people — the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the OBC — collectively called as the backward classes. Of these three categories, the SCs and STs were easily identifiable and there was a large measure of consensus on the need and the desirability of having reservations for them. But the case of the OBCs was different.

First of all, it was difficult to identify the OBCs for want of clearly recognisable and acceptable criteria of backwardness. While some argued that backwardness should be determined on the basis of economic and educational criteria, there were others who maintained that the position of the jati in the caste hierarchy should be that basis as it epitomised their historically accumulated backwardness.

The constitution makers, in their wisdom left the matter of identification of the people belonging to the OBC as well as the criteria to be adopted for identification to the future government. This opened the gates for caste politics to acquire a virulent form.

Since Independence two types of caste politics can be discerned. The first type involved the caste groups clamouring either for being recognised as OBC by the state governments or those already recognised for getting a higher quota in the reservations. The decision of the State governments to appoint Backward classes Commission from time to time provided the occasion for such caste politics to flourish. The second type of caste politics, involved mobilisation of social and political forces for and against reservations for the OBC based solely on caste criteria. While the first type of caste politics sought to influence the reservation policy of the state government, the second type of caste politics was targeted at the reservation policy of the central government.

The reservation issue thus, provided a fertile ground for castes to play an active role in politics. The extent of castes involvement in politics can be appreciated by noting a simple fact that over 50% of the populace belong to the category of the OBCs.

35.6 IMPACT ON THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

It would be interesting to note that western Scholars studying Indian politics were sceptical about the success of Indian Democracy. They argued the success of democracy required certain pre-requisites, such as social and material equality, education and existence of individualised society.

But in India there were extremes of social and material inequalities, widespread illiteracy and its social principles supported communitarian culture that were fundamentally opposed to individualism. While democracy demanded egalitarian ethos, India's social structure was based on principles of hierarchy and inequality. The crux of the argument was that modern institution like democracy can not strike roots in the given traditional social structure of India. Thus they predicted that India's democratic experiment would fall like a house of cards.

Such misgivings notwithstanding, over the years one finds that India's democratic experiment has been by and large successful. When compared to other post- colonial societies where democratic experiment had begun but failed after sometime, the success of Indian democracy is a unique achievement. To a large extent the success of democracy in India has been due to the adaptive capacity of the traditional social structure to the needs of democratic functioning. Tradition did come in the way of democracy. Caste by adapting itself to the new context, infact, facilitated the working of democracy. It successfully bridged the distance/dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Finding this, seeing the success of democracy here, some scholars such as Rudolphs were led to point out the 'modernity' of Tradition in India's traditional institutions.

In the absence of well developed interest groups, pressure groups and other supportive agencies of democratic institutions, caste groups played a crucial role akin to interest groups and pressure groups in western liberal democracies. Far from being a hinderance the democratic experiment, the traditional social structure, served as a suitable under-structure of democratic political institutions. But for caste groups and caste based organisations, a large section of the population still submerged in the traditional society and culture would have been simply by-passed by the modern political process. Caste in other words, brought democracy to people's doorsteps. Not only did caste turn out to be helpful in the functioning of the democratic system but also in deepening the democratic process, through caste-politics interactions. If politics needed caste for organising power, caste especially the lower castes needed politics to fight against the glaring socio-economic inequalities.

Mobilisation and politicisation of the backward classes, thus, has deepened the democratic process and contributed to democratising the society.

INTEXT QUESTION 35.2

I Which of the following sentences are true or false:

- 1) The western liberal ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity were not critical of the caste system. (T/F)
- 2) Modernisation undermined the caste system, but caste as group identity got strengthened (T/F)
- 3) In the politicisation of castes the role of caste associations and caste federations was insignificant. (T/F)
- 4) After independence universal adult franchise and the constitutional provision for protective discrimination in favour of the backward classes enlarged the role of caste in politics. (T/F)

- 5) Politicisation of the backward classes has been helpful in deepening the democratic process in India. (T/F)

II Fill in the blanks:

- 1) The legal system introduced by the British rule treated people of different castes as
- 2) The traditional linkage between and occupation became with new employment opportunities arising in course of industrialisation and commercialisation.
- 3) The fact that existed as easily identifiable cluster of people made it an easy of mobilisation by political parties.
- 4) Caste associations were voluntary associations in the sense that its membership was open only to the individuals of the caste community.
- 5) Caste by adapting itself to the new context in fact facilitated the of democracy.

35.7 CONSTITUTION AND THE BACKWARD CLASSES

In the Constitution there are several provisions dealing with the backward classes. These provisions can be found in the chapters of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) and also at other places in the constitution. The concern of the constitution makers for the backward classes, also referred to as weaker sections in the constitution, can be clearly seen in the Preamble of the constitution. It talks about: Justice — Social, Economic and Political and “equality of status and opportunity”. Needless to say such a mention is specially relevant to the interest of the backward classes.

Keeping in mind the backward conditions of the backward classes, the constitution makers also made special provisions for the upliftment of the backward classes. The special provisions are in the form of protective discrimination. The policy of reservation is an instance of protective discrimination. Before we discuss the policy of reservation and its constitutional provisions, let us briefly look at the constitutional provisions relating to the backward classes.

Articles 38 and 46 in the chapter of DPSP, enjoin upon the state the duty to strive for the welfare of the people in general and the backward classes in particular. Article 38 states: 1) the state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and promoting as effectively as it may a social order in which Justice — social, economic and political shall inform all institutions of national life; 2) the state shall in particular, strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate the inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities not only amongst individuals but also amongst group of people residing in different areas and engaged in different vocations.

Article 46 stipulates: “The state shall promote with special care the educational and the economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and shall protect them from injustices and all forms of exploitation.”

Moreover, the Right to Equality under Article 14 guarantees every citizen, equality before law and equal protection of law. Articles 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. In addition, the constitution prohibits discriminations that was common in the past in the traditional hierarchical social order of India. This is elaborated and specified in Articles 15(1), 16(2) and 29(2). In the same way, Article 17 abolishes untouchability and states that its practice in any form is forbidden.

(i) Provisions for Reservation

The policy of reservation is based on the principle of protective discrimination. Protective discrimination in favour of the backward classes was felt necessary by the constitution makers because of the realisation that equality of opportunity alone would not suffice to bring the backward classes at par with the rest of the society. Equality of opportunity in absence of equality of conditions would result in deepening of inequality instead of promoting equality. One must note here that the provision of protective discrimination is not an exception to but integral to the Right to Equality.

(ii) Reservations for SCs and STs

The constitution recognises three categories of people as backward classes. In this section we will deal with the provisions relating to the SCs and STs.

The constitution provides for three types of reservations for the SCs and STs. These are 1) reservation of jobs in government services and in public sector, 2) reservation in educational institutions, and 3) reservations in legislative representations.

Under Articles 16(A), 320(4) and 333, 15% and 7% of the jobs are reserved at all levels in the public services for the SCs and STs respectively. This reservation however, must as far as it may be, consistent with the maintenance of efficiency of the administration (Article 35).

Article 15(4) deals with the reservation of seats in the educational institutions. Article 15(4) states: "Nothing in Article 15 or clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes." Accordingly, the Union and the State governments have reserved 20% of the seats in all educational institutions maintained by public money. Moreover, qualifications for admission have also been relaxed for the SCs and STs so that they can get access to educational opportunities.

Articles 330 and 332 provide for reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. 78 seats for the SCs and 38 seats for the STs are reserved in the Lok Sabha. In State Legislative Assemblies 540 and 282 seats are reserved for SCs and STs respectively. Moreover seats are also reserved in the Panchayati Raj institutions.

(iii) Reservations for the OBCs

Sociologically speaking, the OBC is a residuary category after excluding the SCs and STs on the one hand and the backward castes on the other. They constitute 524 castes of the population as per the Mandal Commission estimates. They get the benefits of reservation under Articles 15(4) and 16(4).

While the SCs and STs were specified by the Presidential order under Articles 341 and 342, the same was not done with respect to the OBC. The task of specifying and identifying them was left to the union and state government. Here, one must note Article 340 which states that the President may by order, appoint a Commission to investigate the conditions of the socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties and to improve their conditions.

In many States where the backward classes movement was strong, such as in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Bihar, to name a few, the state governments set up their own Backward classes commission. On the recommendations of these commissions, jobs at all levels in the public services and seats in educational institutions were reserved.

The Union government, however, took a very long time in deciding to provide reservation to the OBCs in the central services. The Union government had as early as 1953 appointed Kalelkar Commission under Article 340. The Commission submitted its report in 1956, but its recommendations were not implemented by the Union government. The second Commission under Article 340 was appointed by the Janta Party Government in 1978. This Commission known as Mandal Commission submitted its report in 1982. It identified 3943 castes as OBC and recommended 27% reservation in government and semi-government jobs and admission to educational institutions.

On 13th August 1990 the Union Government headed by V.P. Singh issued an office memorandum extending reservation to the OBCs on the lines recommended by the Mandal Commission. Soon thereafter, widespread protests were staged. Writ petitions were filled in Supreme Court and many High Courts questioning this memorandum. The Supreme Court examined the issue in November 1992 and permitted the Union Government to reserve 27% of the jobs for the OBCs subject to the exclusion of the 'creamy layer' among the OBCs. Ramaniand Prasad committee was set up by the Union government to identify the "creamy layer". Once it had done its job, the government executed the order of 13th August 1990 in September 1993.

Thus, we can see that it took nearly forty years for the union government to provide the benefits of reservations to the OBCs. It also took as much time to accept caste as a valid basis for the identification of socially and educationally backward classes.

We must also note that benefits of reservation to the OBC apply only to government jobs and admission to educational institutions. No seats have been reserved for the OBC in Lok Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies — a benefit which has been given to the SCs and STs.

35.8 OTHER MEASURES FOR SCs AND STs

In addition to the policy of reservation, the government also took other measures in the interest of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Two such measures can be noted here. The Parliament enacted "Untouchability Offences Act 1955" which was later comprehensively amended and renamed as PCR Act 1976. This act was meant for effective implementation of Article 17 in particular and Article 15(2) in general. Second, the government appointed a special officer known as Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes under Article 338 of the constitution.

The Protection of Civil Right Act 1955 (PCR Act) provides penalties for preventing a person, on ground of untouchability, from entering a place of public worship and offering prayers or taking water from a sacred tank, well or spring. Enforcing any kind of social disability such as denying access to any shop, restaurant, hotel, public hospital, or educational institutions or any place of public entertainment or denying the use of any road, river, well, tank, tap, bathing tank, ghat, cremation ground etc. attract the provisions of this Act.

Under the PCR Act, practicing "untouchability" includes insulting or grounds of untouchability as well as preaching and justifying untouchability. One may also note here that Under People's Representation Act 1951, a person who is convicted for an offence under the PCR act is disqualified from contesting elections to the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies for a period of six years commencing from the date of conviction. In case of conviction one to two years of imprisonment is also laid down. There is also a statutory presumption of offence having been committed under this Act, i.e. unless the convict proves himself not guilty it is assumed that he has committed the offence.

Article 338 of the constitution states that there shall be a special officer for the SCs and STs to be appointed by the President. Under this Article a commission for the SCs and STs,

constituting a chairman and four members including the special officer known as the Commissioner, was set up in July 1978. The role of the Commissioner is to investigate 1) all matters relating to the safeguards provided to the SCs and STs and 2) reservation in public services and 3) the implementation of the PCR Act.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 35.3

I Identify the most appropriate answer:

- 1) Backward classes refer to:
 - a) the scheduled castes only,
 - b) the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes only,
 - c) Minorities
 - d) the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and the OBC.
- 2) The provision of protective discrimination is:
 - a) meant only for the SCs and STs,
 - b) given in the chapter of DPSP,
 - c) an exception to the Right to Equality,
 - d) integral to Right to Equality.
- 3) The State's duty to strive for the welfare of the people in general and the backward classes in particular is mentioned in:
 - a) Article 46,
 - b) Article 38,
 - c) Article 29,
 - d) Articles 38 and 46.
- 4) Article 46 of the Indian Constitution is about:
 - a) protection of weaker sections from injustices,
 - b) protection of SCs and STs from injustices and all forms of exploitation,
 - c) the state promoting with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections-d), b) and c).

II Answer the Questions:

- 1) When was the PCR Act, 1955 comprehensively amended?
- 2) Which Article of the Indian Constitution deals with reservation of seats in the educational institutions for the backward classes?
- 3) Mention the Articles under which seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures are reserved for the SCs and STs?
- 4) Under which Article of the Indian Constitution, Kalelkar Commission and Mandal Commission were appointed by the President of India?
- 5) Who headed the committee appointed to identify the "creamy layer" among the OBC from excluding them from the benefits of reservation?

35.10 THE CLASS VIEW OF POLITICS

So far our discussion has centred around caste and role it has played in the political process. In addition to a caste-centric view of politics there is also a class view of politics. But before we come to that let us first understand the meaning of class.

Like caste, class is a social group but unlike caste it is not based on birth. Class is an economic social group based on income and occupation. In this general sense we refer to different classes in Indian society as the upper class, upper-middle class, middle class, lower middle class and the working class. This basis of kind of social stratification is income and the pattern of consumption.

For Marxists, class is just not any social group based on economic criteria. Class is understood in a special way, in the context of the mode of production. A social class is defined by its relationship with the means of production. Those who own the means of production are called the ruling class(es), and those who have to sell their labour power to get access to the means of production are the working class(es). In between are the middle class(es). Marx had anticipated that capitalism in course of time, would push the middle class into the ranks of the working class. Such was the logic of competition in the capitalist system. Marx on this score has been proved wrong not only in India but also in the advanced capitalist countries. Instead of polarisation of classes, which ought to have happened with maturing of capitalism, there has been a significant expansion of the middle classes.

In the class view of politics, politics is seen in terms of class struggle. It assumes that so long as there is private property in the means of production, the society will be divided into two antagonistic classes — the haves, who own and control the means of production and therefore have a stake in the maintenance of the system, while the have not's challenge and strive to overthrow the system as they find it exploitative and unjust. Thus to understand politics, one needs to look into the class division in society.

In the Indian case, Marxists while giving paramount importance to class contradictions do not, however, completely ignore the caste dimensions of politics. This is because they find some overlap between caste and class divisions in Indian society. One may note here that a person's caste not only indicate his social and ritual position in the society but also his economic position and his relation with the means of production. For instance, in rural India the landlords and the rich peasants, who own and control the land, generally belong to the upper castes such as Bhumihaar, Rajput and Brahmin. While the bulk of the landless labourers and sharecroppers are Harijans and other low castes. At the intermediary level however, there is no clear cut correspondence between caste and class. Middle castes such as Yadavs, Kurmis, Jats and others can be found among the land owning and controlling class as well as among the landless.

INTEXT QUESTION 35.4

Fill in the blanks

- 1) Like caste, class is a social group but caste it is not based on birth.
- 2) Marxists define social class with reference to the means of.....
- 3) Those who own the means of production are the class.
- 4) There is caste and class at the extremes of the socio-economic spectrum.

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

Castes and jatis are at the base of India's social structure. Over the centuries caste system, evolved into an elaborate system to maintain and perpetuate socio-economic inequalities in society. The condition of the lower castes and the outcastes was particularly pathetic.

During the British rule, the caste system came under attack from modern liberal ideas and institutions. Caste system, as a result was undermined. Caste as a social factor declined in significance but became important as a political factor. The fact that it existed as easily identifiable social cluster of people made it an easy object of mobilisation by the political parties. Caste based organisations further helped in the politicisation of the castes. Politicisation of the backward classes deepened the democratic process in India. Caste groups by performing role akin to the interest groups and pressure groups in western liberal democracies facilitated the working of Indian democracy.

In light of the historically accumulated backwardness of the backward classes and the need to bring them at par with the rest of the society, constitution provides for protective discrimination. Protective discrimination is not an exception but integral to the Right to Equality. While the SCs and STs got the benefit of reservation from the state and central governments since the inception of Indian Republic, the OBCs could get the benefits of reservation in central services as late as 1993. No reservation in legislative Representation is provided to the OBCs.

Besides caste, there is another social group called, class. It is based on economic criteria. Marxists define it in relation to the means of production. There is a close correspondence between caste and class at the extremes of socio-economic spectrum in India, particularly in the rural areas.

TERMINAL EXERCISE

- 1) How is Varna and Jati related? Describe the basic features of the caste system?
- 2) What has been the impact of modernisation on the caste system?
- 3) Briefly discuss the role of caste in Indian democracy.
- 4) What is protective discrimination? Mention the constitutional provisions under which the benefits of reservation have been provided to the backward classes?

KEY TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

- 35.1
- 1) Castes, -Jatis
 - 2) Hierarchically, purity, pollution
 - 3) Varna-Vyavastha, social
 - 4) Jati, framework
 - 5) Open, caste
- 35.2 I
- 1) F
 - 2) T
 - 3) F
 - 4) T
 - 5) T

- II 1) equal
2) Caste, temous/weak
3) Caste, Object
4) Quasi
5) Working
- 35.3 I 1) d
2) d
3) d
4) d
- II 1) 1976
2) 15(4)
3) 330 and 332
4) 340
5) Ramanand Prasad
- 35.4 1) Unlike
2) Production
3) Ruling
4) Correspondence

Hints to the Terminal Questions

- 1) Please refer to section 35.3. and 35.3(B)
- 2) Please refer to section 35.4
- 3) Please refer to section 35.5
- 4) Please refer to section 35.7(i), 35.7(ii) and 35.7(iii)