

CHALLENGING ISSUES BEFORE THE INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF SOCIO - ECONOMIC OBSTACLES***Professor Vimal Joshi and **Dr. Roshni Duhan*****Head and Dean, Deptt. of Law, B.P. S. Women University, Khanpur - Kalan, Sonipat******Counsellor, IGNOU Study Centre, Rohtak-124001****Abstract:**

The political system does not merely mean the formal Constitution but it includes besides Constitution other non-Constitutional elements such as political culture, etc. In fact, the Constitution prescribes the legal framework of the political system. The political system results from the interaction of historical, social, economic and constitutional elements. Thus political system consists of both formal structures i.e. Constitution, and informal structures, i.e. political groups, socialization and culture. The Indian political system has also resulted from the interaction of formal Constitutional structures and historical, social and economic structures and processes; which provide the basic of the political system itself. The Preamble of the Constitution underlines the aims of the political system in India. After the commencement of the Constitution, various political parties and pressure groups emerging from the interaction between political dynamism and social cultural and economic context, have shaped and conditioned the behavioural formulations of Indian political system. Many attempts have been made through Constitutional Amendments from time to time to reshape and reorient the political system in desired directions; but its basic aims and objectives have not been tempered. The Indian political system has adhered to the parliamentary form of democracy which has been strengthened at various levels in last fifty years. India has moved from one party dominated political set up to a multi party set-up, influenced, to a great extent, by the increasing role of regional parties, giving rise, in the process, to political instability and coalition politics. Thus, the Indian political system is a dynamic political system generating new patterns and tendencies in its functioning.

Keywords: social stratification, Indian political system, vote bank, minority community, criminalization of politics

Introduction:

The democratic politics in India took shape only after independence. Before independence, the main goal of the Indian political leadership was the liberation of the country, but after independence, its aim has become to capture political power. In the beginning, various attractive policies, ideals and future promises were pressed into service to garner the support of the people. As the awareness of the people increased, these slogans became ineffective. As a result, the politicians resorted to the politics of casteism and communalism. Behind the curtain of amelioration of depressed classes, casteism was closely integrated into the political process. In the name of welfare of minorities, politics was defined in communal terms. The growing organized casteism and communalism in Indian politics appear to have changed the objectives and aims of the State and Government. Apparently, the objective of the government remained the welfare of the people but substantially the government authority was used and misused for the appeasement of various castes and communal groupings. Thus, the Indian politics has encouraged evils of the social system such as caste conflicts, communal riots and mutual hatred among different sections of society^{[1][2]}. Interestingly, the political leaders do not spare any opportunity to serve their vested interests in the situation of social turmoil. The Constitution dreams of a polity emphasizing the dignity of the individual, distanced from the politics of casteism, communalism and mutual hatred. But the political process has gone in the opposite direction and shattered the dreams of the Constitution. The ideal of 'Sarva Dharma Sambhav' was in practice replaced by appeasement of

minorities by treating them a potential vote bank. This has led to a social environment polluted by communal hatred and social tensions. Like every other political system, the nature of Indian political system has been shaped by its historical, social, economic, religious and many other traditions of the society. It simply means a political system cannot completely slip away from its social, economic as well as historical conditions. It is well known to all, that the performance of a political system depends upon the nature and culture of a society. So far as Indian political culture is concerned, it is in the formative stage and still continues to evolve new features and tendencies. Again, the nature of Indian politics becomes the causes of threat to national integration^[3]. National integration simply means political, social and cultural binding or in another word it means a feeling of oneness by the people of a country. A critical study of the nature of Indian politics indicates that the national integration is under threat due to many reasons which are none but the nature of Indian politics themselves like role of caste, regionalism, communalism, linguism, and politics of minorities, politics of backward classes, politics of agitation, rallies and violence, politics of secession, disintegration and terrorism. The basic objective of this paper is to analyze how the nature of Indian politics become causes of serious concern and become obstacle to the national integration. This paper concludes with suggestion to overcome these challenges^[4].

Casteism in Indian Politics:

Caste is a very old and prominent basis of social stratification in India. The caste has influence every political process from top to bottom and has imparted a distinct character to Indian Politics. This is the most important basis for political support and voting in elections. Besides voting, the caste is an important factor, influencing the selection of candidates in elections, appointment of ministers, transfer and posting of public officials etc. The policy of reservation has given further impetus to the role of caste in politics, particularly in the last few years. The role of caste in the different aspects of politics is given below:

1. Caste has influenced the policy making of the government, for example the policy of reservation in a favour of certain castes.
2. The programmes, policies and declarations of political parties are made, keeping in view the caste factor. Even different positions within a political party are distributed in terms of caste configurations^[5].
3. Caste plays a very important role in elections and voting. Political parties select their candidates on the basis of caste composition in the constituency. The voting in elections and mobilization of political support from top to bottom moves on the caste lines^[6].
4. The caste factor also influences the formation of the council of ministers and making appointment to various political positions in the government.
5. Caste also functions as a pressure group in politics. Political bargaining is also done on the caste lines. Cast organizations have emerged to organize caste members for collective bargaining with each other.
6. The administration has not escaped the influence of the caste in India. The postings, transfers and appointments of public officials are influenced by caste considerations. Even the behaviour of public officials in carrying out administrative duties get influenced by caste considerations.
7. The political leadership in many political parties emerges and survives in politics on the basis of the support of certain caste groups.

Religion and Communalism in Indian Politics

Religious faith of Indian people is very strong even amidst technological progress and modernization. India is also a multi-religious country. Even before independence, the British rule had played the politics

of divide and rule for a long time and continued in power. The British policy of divide and rule on the basis of religion resulted in the partition of the country in 1947. But more than that, it has introduced the element of communalism in politics. In Independent India, the tendency of communalism has increased in the democratic process. Thus Muslims have been treated as a 'Vote Bank' by different political parties in different times. Political parties have adopted the policy of appeasement towards Muslims and other minority groups like Sikhs and Christians to seek their political support. On the other hand, the minority leaders have not spared any opportunity to cash in on this weakness of political parties^[7]. This is the root cause of the problem of communalism in Indian politics. Some of the important reasons for emergence of communalism in India politics are given below:

1. Because of historical reasons, many of the Indian Muslims consider themselves closer to the Muslims of other countries rather than other religious groups of India.
2. Some of the Muslims and their leaders undermine the feeling of nationalism and espouse religious fundamentalism.
3. Indian Muslim leaders suffer from minority complex and fear psychosis and find the reasons of backwardness of Muslims on communal lines. They always blame the government for their backwardness and allege that the governments are discriminatory towards Muslims.
4. The narrow approach of our neighbor Pakistan towards Indian Muslims incites the feeling of separateness and fundamentalism among Indian Muslims.
5. The educational and economic backwardness of Indian Muslims keeps them away from national mainstream and perpetuates fundamentalism and separation among them. They become easy victims of vested political interests.

The policy of 'Vote Bank' towards Muslims, adopted by political parties has further encouraged the divisions among different religious groups and obstructed the possibility of religious harmony and closeness^[8]. The recent controversy regarding construction of a temple at Ayodhya has aroused feeling of communalism in both Muslims and Hindus alike. The political parties are not sparing any opportunity to capitalize on this issue. Many Committees and Commissions like Raghvir Dayal Commission (1967), Datta Commission (1970), Joseph Vithyasis Commission (1971) have blamed political parties for the accentuation of communalism in politics^[9].

Religious Minorities:

India is inhabited by people of various faiths and religions. The major religious groups are Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis. In terms of population Hindus are largest in number, followed by Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. Thus, all religious groups except Hindus, are considered minorities. India is a country where from time immemorial, there has been the existence of various religious orders and sects. This diversity of religious faiths and beliefs has divided the Indian people among various sects and religious groups. The long spell of Muslim rule and activities of Christian Missionaries in India have led to substantial followings of Islam and Christianity in India. The British Government had taken full advantage of this religious divide and generated feeling of animosity between Hindus and Muslims which resulted in the division of the country in 1947. Even after the foundation of a separate Muslim State, i.e., Pakistan, many Muslims remained in India, recognized as minorities in this country^[10]. After Independence, various political parties encouraged the separate identity of these minority groups by following a policy of appeasement. In fact, in due course, the problem of minorities has become the problem of vote-bank politics. The policy of appeasement followed by different political parties and the division of sections of the people on religious lines led to communal riots and communalization of politics. The intermixture of religion and politics has given rise to different problems like Punjab problem and Babri Masjid controversy.

Muslims – Among all the minority groups, the Muslims have played the most important role in Indian Politics. In terms of numbers they are in a position to influence the performance of political parties in elections. They have tried to fulfill their specific interests in the way of political bargaining. Their political demands include giving special status to Urdu language, continuation of Muslim Personal Law and giving special facilities to Muslims in education and government service. They have organized themselves under various organizations such as Muslim League, Muslim Majlis etc. There are other non-political organizations and groups of Muslims, such as Jamate-Islami, Islamic Sevak Sangh etc. The Indian Muslims have been influencing politics of the country through these organizations. The policy of treating Muslims as vote bank by our politicians has given them a position of effective presence in Indian politics.

Sikhs – Sikhs are largely concentrated in Northern India particularly in the State of Punjab. Akali Dal, a regional party active in Punjab, is the major political party of Sikhs. Even before independence, the Sikhs launched movement for the reformation of Gurudwaras. The agitation launched for the creation of a separate State of Khalistan is the major movement launched by Sikhs in post-independence period. Such Khalistan types demand affect the smooth process of political system.

Christians – The Christians in India are largely concentrated in Southern parts of our India, especially in Kerala. The Christians of India do not have any political party of their own but their political leanings have been a matter of debate among political parties. It has been alleged by some political parties that Christian social and religious organizations have been engaged in converting Hindus to the Christian faith by giving some monetary incentives. However, Christians have been associated with the Congress Party in terms of political support. The Constitution provides them a special provision for the nomination of Anglo-Indian members in the Lok Sabha, if they fail to get adequate representation.

Linguistic Minorities:

The definition of the term, minority, was explained in *A.M. Patroni vs E.C. Kesavan*^[11]. Here it was held that any community, religious or linguistic, numerically less than 50 per cent of the population of the State is a minority community. This makes it evident that there may be political minorities, religious minorities and linguistic minorities, and that the unit of determining the status of linguistic and religious minorities would be the State. The minority communities in India are inhibited by several factors in the exercise of their basic human, social and legal rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India and the general and special laws of the land. They are often treated with suspicion and prejudice by the majority community. They are also victims of poor representation in the administrative institutions of governance. They are victims too of the poor performance of the state and central government agencies in collecting comprehensive and disaggregated data about their socio-economic and criminal justice situation.

Politics of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes – The political significance of the SC/ST and OBC finds its genesis in the provisions of the Constitution, which provide some special facilities, especially reservation in public services, to these classes of people. This special treatment of these classes makes them aware of their special position in the political system. The government led by V.P. Singh implemented the policy of reservation in favour of Other Backward Classes thus giving a new turn to the caste politics in India. More and more castes are agitating to be included in the category of the OBC. Political parties have been playing the politics of reservation to seek the support of these classes^{[12][13]}.

Politics of Agitation, Rallies and Violence – Agitation, rallies, violent demonstrations. Padyatras, Gherao, Hartals etc. have been in use as political tools to advance political interests and to seek popular

support. According to Rajni Kothari, these practices and activities are called 'Direct Action'. Direct Actions refer to all those political actions which are non-constitutional. India is replete with the examples of many national and regional agitations and movements. For example, Total Revolution Movement of Jai Prakash Narain, call for Bharat Bandh by different political parties, Ayodhya Mandir Andolan of 1992, launched by BJP, Delhi Rally of 1993 organised also by BJP etc. These examples underscore the importance and influence of these practices in Indian politics. These agitational activities not only disrupt the law and order but also cause inconvenience to general public. Sometimes, many innocent people lose their life and property in these agitations. The government has to spend huge amount of resources in terms of deployment of forces to control such movements and agitations. The net result of these activities is national loss which hampers the national progress. Peaceful movements for raising genuine demands are justified but violent agitations launched just to demonstrate the political clout or to capture political power, cannot be justified in a matured democracy. These negative and violent agitations would weaken both the nation and the democracy.

Politics of Separatism and Problem of National Integration

Various tendencies like regionalism, linguism, communalism etc. have posed a serious threat to national unity and integrity. According to Rajni Kothari, the problem of national integration is the fundamental problem of political development. In the view of M. N. Srivastava, the secessionist tendencies are in existence today and these are likely to continue for many years in future too.

Following are the major obstacles in the process of national integration:

1. Caste
2. Communalism.
3. Problems of Minorities.
4. Demand for creating small States.
5. Regionalism.
6. Politics of Language.
7. Political opportunism.
8. Socio- Cultural conflicts.
9. Discriminatory policies of government towards different communities, groups and regions.
10. Policy of pacification and 'Vote Bank'.

The government of India is committed to protect the unity and integrity of the country by following ideals and goals of the Constitution. To achieve this objective the government has taken certain measures like establishment of National Integration Council, organizing national integration conferences and conferences Chief Ministers of States from time to time etc. But the official efforts are not adequate, as many of the problems of national integration are political and have cultural and psychological dimensions. The government should ensure that the operation of political system is just and equal to all groups and communities. The political parties should also rise above narrow interests to face the challenges of national unity and integration.

Economic Factors:

Immediately after Independence, the poor and weak economy of India and lack of self-reliance in the field of basic necessities of life compelled India to seek the help of Indian capitalists and the capitalist countries. The prominence of capitalists in the process of industrialization has also strengthened their influence on the political system. Thus, on the one hand, the amelioration of poor was aimed at and the

capitalist class was influencing the course of public policy on the other. The geographical and cultural diversities have given rise to the nation of regionalism. Various regional movements in order to maintain a distinct regional identity have caused immense damage to the unity and integrity of India. The problem of Kashmir, like a disease by birth, defies any logical solution. This needs courageous and determined political action which Indian leaders seldom display. The strong feeling of regionalism has given birth to various inter regional problems such as boundary disputes, distribution of inter-State river waters, causing tensions and weakness in the national political order. The formal structure of a political system may be the same in two countries but their informal and operational structure would be different in these countries. This is due to the fact that the environment, consisting of cultural, socio-economic and geographical factors, in which a political system operates, is different in every society. The final shape a political system adopts is the result of interaction between the formal structure and environmental factors. Similarly, in India, the interaction between the prevalent socio-cultural and economic traditions and the adopted democratic political system has given way to distinct political culture, styles and the distinctive political process. The famous political expert on India, Morris Jones has also upheld the same view about Indian polity in his well-known book, 'The Government and Politics in India'. According to him there exists an inherent and unstable contradiction between the political system and the social order in India. Therefore, the nature of Indian Political system cannot be understood without understanding social and cultural elements and forces.

Criminalization of Politics

In recent years, criminalization of politics in India has become a debatable issue. There have been allegations that there are some elements in politics who do not have faith in democratic values and practices. They indulge in violence and take refuge in other unhealthy, undemocratic methods to win elections. Undoubtedly, this is not a healthy trend in politics and there is an urgent need to apply serious check on such tendencies. Criminalization of politics is the very negation of democratic values and has no place in a democratic set up. Democracy can be strengthened by adopting and promoting democratic values and shunning criminal activities^{[14][15]}. Recently, the judiciary, while taking a serious note of criminal tendencies in politics, has showed signs of adopting remedial measures to apply a serious check on such elements. The Central government and many State governments have been taking steps to address this issue effectively. This is a matter of great satisfaction and a healthy sign for the successful functioning of democracy in our country. We, as awakened citizens and as voters of the largest democracy in the world, can also contribute by discouraging such persons who have a criminal background, from contesting elections.

Suggestions to Improve the Indian Political System

1. Strengthening of the Political Institutions and the Practices to be followed in its functioning
2. Enhance and ensure effective people's participation in parliamentary politics
3. Supporting the local government functioning and giving them more powers
4. To control criminalization of politics
5. To take necessary measures for efficient functioning of administration
6. To give more powers to the Lokayuktha
7. To set up an Ombudsmun Institution

8. Control the influence of rich and powerful in decision-making process
9. Ensure free and fair elections
10. To opt out of Globalization and strengthen indigenous functioning.
11. To strengthen the federal fabric of functioning
12. Take measures to empower women for their political participation.
13. To ensure gender sensitive environment to curtail violence against women
14. Elevate poverty and provide necessary basic needs to the people
15. Ensure education and employment to all
16. To set up a recall system (as in Switzerland)
17. Pro-active role of citizens in the political system (recently the formation of Delhi Government by AAP)
18. To contain communalism through non interference of state in religious matters of citizens
19. Removal of regional imbalances
20. To ensure administrative and judicial reforms

Conclusion

Recent years have seen the emergence of so-called RTI activists - tens of thousands of citizens, often poor, sometimes almost illiterate, frequently highly motivated - who use the Right to Information legislation of 2005 to promote transparency and attack corruption in public institutions. In the first five years of the legislation, over a million RTI requests were filed and so threatening to authority have some of the RTI activists become that a number of have been murdered. More recently than the RTI movement, there has been a related movement around the demand for an anti-corruption agency. This movement has been led by the hunger-striker Anna Hazare and draws most of its support from the growing Indian middle-class which feels alienated from politics since the votes are to be found in poor, rural communities while the power is to be found in rich, urban elites. In fact, Delhi government has become successful in passing this Anti- corruption Bill, called the Lokpal Bill which was much awaiting for the successful democratic system. Democracy in actual should become a way of life and not just for political functioning. This should involve people in not only decision – making but also make them conscious of their rights and involve them in political participation^[16]. Then and then only, can India play a vital role in world politics. The government should ensure that the operation of political practices and system are just and equal to all groups, regions and communities. The political leadership and political parties should also rise above narrow interests to face the challenges of national unity and integrity. Politics in India is much rougher and much more corrupt than in the democracies of Europe and North America. Assassination is not uncommon: the revered Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, and the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 were all murdered. Communal, caste

and regional tensions continue to haunt Indian politics, sometimes threatening its long-standing democratic and secular ethos. The language used by political candidates about each other is often vivid. In spite of all such obstacles, India remains a vibrant and functioning democracy that is a beacon to democrats in many surrounding states which is really appreciable.

References:

1. Democracy in Theory & Practice by Subrata Mukherjee & Sushila Ramaswamy, MacMillan India Ltd., (pp3,237,)
2. Balancing Democracy edited by Roland Axtmann, published by Continuum, London
3. Challenges to Democracy by Jyothi Malhotra
4. India's Democracy :New Challenges by Prabhat Datta
5. Dr. R. M. Pal, "The Caste System and Human Rights Violations," in Human Rights from the Dalit Perspective (Madras: Dalit Liberation Education Trust), p. 23.
6. Bright K Davinder, The Caste System "Competition Refresher" April 2008 Vol. xxvi, No. 4, p- 53
7. Balkrishna Kurvey, Communal Crisis in Indian sub-continent and its peacefull resolution journal of Indian institute for peace, disarmament and environmental protection,summer2002,P.4
8. Shukia, Subhash (2008). Issues in Indian Politics, New Delhi: Anamika Publishers, p.219.
9. Committee on Electoral Reforms (Dinesh Goswami Committee), Report of the Committee on Electoral Reforms, New Delhi: Legislative Department, Ministry of Law and Justice, 1990.
10. Singh, Mahindera Prasad, "Communalism and Party Politics in India", Trends in Social Science Research, 1(1)
11. AIR 1965 Kerala 75 (FB)
12. National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Highlights of the Report for the Years 1994-95 & 1995-96 (New Delhi: Government of India, 1997), p. 2.
13. Agarwalla. Shyam Sunder (1998). Religion and Caste Politics, Jaipur: Rawat, p. 118.
14. Kaur, Amanleep (2009). Electoral Reforms in India: Problems and Needs (1989-2009), Chandigarh: Unistar Publication, p.35
15. Election Commission of India, Model Code of Conduct for the Guidance of Political Parties and Candidates, New Delhi Nirwachan Sadan, 2009.
16. Sundriyal, R. B. and Dighe, Sharde (Ed. 1997). Electoral Reforms. New Delhi: Shree Publishing House, p.122.