International Journal of Enhanced Research in Educational Development (IJERED)
ISSN: 2320-8708, Vol. 14 Issue 3, May-June, 2026

Role of Mandal Commission for paving the way for Equality and its impact on social strata: Investigating OBCs in Contemporary Society

Amrit Kumar Yadav

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, 110007

ABSTRACT

Caste is one the most primordial identities of Indian society and since ages it is deciding from socio-political trajectory to distribution of resources .Other Backward Caste (OBCs) which formed more than half of population came into center of caste discourse and welfare politics since the implementation of Mandal commission reports. This research will analyze the effect on social mobility and integration from the period of Mandalisation to the Modi era. The observation of trends would give us an understanding of deep-rooted caste-based identities that have a key role in the formation of mainstream politics and how implementation of Mandal Commission reports has bring OBC caste consciousness, resource distribution for them and emergence of caste based political parties with the second democratic upsurge. The implementation of Reservation Policies has a social and political impact promoting equality with differential treatment for creating a level playing field for Other Backward class communities.

Keywords: Mandal Commission, Caste, Welfare Politics, Political Participation, Social Justice

INTRODUCTION

After independence, Indian politics had the national issue at the center. Other issues like caste, gender, poverty, farmers, etc. were revolving around it but couldn't get succeed to create their space in mainstream politics. The notion and consciousness of OBC politics and institutional demand of reservation has its roots from Colonial period from Hunter Commission recognized the need of reservation for socially backward class .Shahu ji Maharaj of Kolhapur has given 50 percent reservation to backward classes and it is also widely discussion in constitutional assembly debates. Matter of reservation and equitable distribution of resources is center of politics and debates from the formation of constitution .As directive principles of constitution suggest the government in promoting welfare politics and distribution of resources affirmative action is tool to compensate historical wrongs. The debate of representation based on population which has logical grounding that; why a small fraction of population has monopoly over socio-economic and political and cultural capital and of that society has highest ever inequality and it is increasing by generations. To rectify this huge disparity and for just egalitarian society the policy of affirmative actions and representation based on population is need of hour. The implementation of Mandal commission has seen series of demonstrations, protests and support for nearly one and half years, and there is also a politics of implementations itself and talking about that is beyond the scope of study.

This paper analyses about the post-Mandal changes specially associated with Other Backward Class (OBCs) that how they emerged as new class and class despite huge fragmentation along caste and demographic lines. The implementation of Mandal commission report has not only uplifted the social status and employment opportunity but also the political consciousness of these caste they it fuelled the notion of caste alignment among OBC community however they are still fragmented on voting lines. The visible results of implementation is seen in rise of regional caste based parties and rise of middle class with getting reservation in employment and latter in educational institutes around 2006 and recent debates around caste census is attributed to political awareness of these communities and parties raising this issues to target OBC community as political group.

The historical trends emerged during the 1990s after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report and made caste a hot topic at the center. The implementation of the Mandal Commission report gave a new direction to politics. This leads to the emergence of a new class but the assumption of the class to the castes became the reason for the diffusion and polarisation and we saw a shift from this in the contemporary political scenario. The caste-based politics emerged since long time ago but my focus would be the politics of Mandalisation and the consequences of unveiling

the role of OBCs in shaping society. The Mandal Commission is the mark for the study of this class which works as the breaking barrier and unmasking the new horizontal inequalities in society. Since caste is a key factor that plays a crucial role in the Indian social and political landscape and after Mandalisation saw many changes so it is necessary to have a Systematic research study to check the role of caste and how it changes its shape over a period of time that would be helpful for the policy-making and governance. It would also analyze the emancipatory steps taken by the government. Through my research, I would figure out how the caste identities are vis-a-vis political transformation, socio-economic and institutional changes. In this article, I will focus on how Mandalisation imagined inclusivity and what are the factors of polarization among OBCs. It would also focus on the social, political, and economic disparities faced by individuals belonging to Other Backward classes in India.

Mandal Commission and Inquiry into Social Justice

The concept of equality of opportunity requires differential treatment or affirmative action but the point is that would it be possible with this we can make an egalitarian society. We have seen the implementation of the recommendation of the Mandal Commission result as a step towards democratization and nation-building. We saw the upliftment of the OBCs communities in the socioeconomic, political, and education fields. The political ascendency was an outcome of Mandal Politics. Affirmative policies based on caste have led to the empowerment of previously marginalized communities and have led to the politicization of caste identities that fixed quotas or reservations by addressing social inequalities. Social inequalities are existing for a long time, and the Varna system converted into a caste system. The occupation was decided by the caste and by which graded inequalities emerged. In the past steps were taken to abolish this unjust system but due to these graded inequalities the marginalised or depressed class could not get united. (Ambedkar, 1946) goes beyond a mere historical account; he engages in a comprehensive analysis of ancient Hindu scriptures, including the Vedas and other religious texts, to understand the evolution of the Shudra caste and the factors that contributed to their subjugation. He argues that the Shudras were relegated to a position of servitude and were denied access to education, religious rituals, and social privileges. That's why our constitutional framers have also taken this subject into mind and added the criteria for backwardness to combat this unjust system for promoting social justice in society.

According to Article 340 of the Constitution of India, there is a provision for the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes. On 07 August 1990, the National Front coalition government implemented the reservation policies for the 0ther Backward Classes which were. The caste index was "On the basis of 1891 and 1931 Census, data was collected and analyzed with a view to getting a frame for the linkage of traditional occupations by caste" (Commission, 1980). From here the identification criteria and foundational basis for reservation policies for OBCs starts. This policy no doubt brought significant changes for the upliftment of the Other Backward class communities but it is also important to see their division on the caste line. As (Jaffrelot, 2000) says that in the early 1990s, a significant number of individuals who were previously referred to as "Shudras" adopted the administrative classification of their identity. During this time, the category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) also took shape due to strong opposition from upper castes against reservation policies. This intensified the divide between upper castes and lower castes, leading to a collective and evident animosity from the former group, accompanied by a surge in violent actions. On the other side, counter practices were done by the OBCs group and organizations such as Mandal Rath, movement, etc. In this decade we see a drastic change among OBC communities, (Jaffrelot, 2003) has argued that Mandalisation has had a significant impact on Indian politics and society. The implementation of affirmative action policies based on caste has led to the empowerment of previously marginalized communities and has created a more inclusive political system. However, he has also noted that Mandalisation has led to the politicization of caste identities and has reinforced the idea of caste- based quotas as the primary means of addressing social inequality. This trend brought a genuine '*democratization*' of India which he calls "*The Silent Revolution*." (Yadav Y. , 1996) calls this period a '*Second Democratic Upsurge'* which is characterized by representing marginalized and previously excluded social groups, known as Bahujan. The 1990s also saw the formation of political alliances and coalitions to challenge the dominance of national parties. These alliances often revolved around regional identity and Bahujan interests. These coalitions played a crucial role in reshaping the political landscape. This second wave of democratic upsurge has brought about significant changes in India's political system. It has led to greater decentralization of power, the strengthening of federalism, and the emergence of new social and political identities. However, Yadav also warns that these changes have not been without challenges and that India's democratic system continues to face several obstacles, including corruption, inequality, and the influence of money and muscle power in politics.

According to the data collected by (Jayal, 2006), the Representation of OBCs from the 10th Lok Sabha to the 14th Lok Sabha are, in the 10th Lok Sabha 1991 OBCs represented 18.96% of seats by 103 MPs, and next general election of Lok Sabha in 1996 (11th Lok Sabha election) they secured 22.65% seats by 123 MPs. After three years Congress withdrew its support and a fresh election was held in 1998 (12th Lok Sabha election) NDA alliance won this Election and the Representation of OBCs fall down slowly which was 20.62% by 112 seats but this government could not complete its term because AIMDMK took its support from NDA alliance and fresh election again held in 1999 (13th Lok Sabha election) in this election NDA under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee won the election and the Representation of OBCs remained at 20.99% by 114 MPs. When the fresh election was held after this term in 2004 (14th Lok Sabha election) the Representation of OBCs was 21.91% by 119 MPs. This election was won by the UPA coalition. (Yadav

Y, 2004) says that the paradoxically, 1990s decade has seen *the second democratic upsurge* as the political opposing forces to these very groups. He marked the 2004 election as the more basic realignment of social and political power. Yadav wrote this election has continued the basic features of the *'third electoral system'* which was the sum total of the state-level verdict.

The debate on merit also emerged after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report. Supporters argued that it was necessary to provide opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups, while critics believed it could compromise the principle of rewarding individual abilities. The debate often centers around striking a balance between affirmative action and maintaining a fair system that rewards talent and hard work. According to (Ilaiah, 2006) "*the principle of reservation was aimed at engendering organic intellectuals who engage with the state and civil society with altogether different assumptions."* This principle was constructed by B.R. Ambedkar for giving equal opportunity to the backward and marginalized castes. This system opens creativity among the marginalized class. Reservation is the instrument to remove inequalities from society and build consciousness among the backward class. Reservation is a successful method but today we need to reform this, (Yadav S. D., 2006) says that quotas are not necessarily the best possible way to bring an affirmative action solution, but it is the default option in contemporary India. The relationship between caste and privilege or lack thereof is more intricate among the OBCs, which introduces both difficulties and potential for affirmative action policies. Creating more nuanced policies is essential to address the specific disadvantages faced by OBCs. However, rather than seizing this chance to broaden policy perspectives, the common approach has been to further divide the OBC category into subgroups and apply the same quota rationale. Creamy layer within OBCs would ensure grassroots empowerment and the unfilled seats in lower OBCs should filled by the upper OBCs. (Sadanandan, 2021) in the series article also called reservations "*India's affirmative action,"* a comparison that Tharu et al believe to be unjustified. The American approach, the authors argue, is to "voluntarily" right historical wrongs, but reservations in India, which predate affirmative action by decades, embody an altogether different political proposal.

According to (Vishnoi, 2021) the Justice Rohini Commission took into consideration this politically sensitive question of equitable redistribution of the 27% quota of OBC. The Commission, formed on 02 October 2017 has proposed the idea of subcategorization of 2,633 OBC castes into four parts which would be into 2,6,9 and 10 percent. Through this initiative, fruits of development would be benefitted by the downtrodden of OBCs. It will reimagine inclusivity and unveil the role of OBCs in shaping society. (Hasan, 2011) focuses on two main subjects that have been central to policy discussions concerning reservations for OBCs. The initial topic is whether caste currently reflects any form of disadvantage, particularly concerning OBCs. The primary concern is whether OBC identification should rely on caste or on economic and occupational standards. The second topic concerns the definition of backwardness. The previous definition of backwardness largely left out non- Hindus. Both of these matters gain fresh significance given the extensive social and economic transformations witnessed in the nation over the past twenty years. While (Rupa, 1992) sees this reservation step as while the ritualistic aspect of caste has diminished, it has gained renewed significance and obtained a new opportunity in the realm of politics. This shift has actually heightened, rather than reduced, casteism within the nation, as various caste-based advocacy groups compete to attain a share of benefits for their respective communities.

DEBATES OVER RESERVATION AND RISE OF REGIONAL PARTIES

There is always debate over on the groundings of reservations of OBCs; that they are not historically much subjugated as Schedule Caste and Schedule tribe and always been in a better positions and class of producers and traders .Some of these communities have their powerful dynasties and have better economic conditions. High number of differentiation of caste and also numeric and economic disparity creates a fault line in OBC politics.

Here we see the fragmentation of OBCs on the caste line, what were the factors for such division that makes the horizontal inequalities among OBCs communities? In the 1990s, the political ascendency has been an outcome of Mandal politics. But as in the early phase, the OBC's movements frittered away due to internal conflicts and political fragmentation; the contemporary one is also doomed to fail because of (a) its uneven geographical distribution; (b) intra-OBCs rivalry leading to political fragmentation; and (c) counter-strategy of the Congress and the BJP. As (Ambedkar, 1916) *"A caste is an enclosed class."* And OBCs are not a single class within this there exists caste or caste which is enclosed. Further Ambedkar says the infection of mitigation results in the subdivision of the caste and marriage outside the caste emerges a new caste. This made a complicated structure because it has mobility. Intra-OBCs conflicts are so pronounced in this phase that Jaffrelot is unable to treat them as a (*homogenous) political community*. (Narayan, 2015) offers insights into the complex relationships between caste, religion, and politics in Indian society. His key argument is that identity politics has become a significant force in Indian democracy and that this has both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, identity politics has given voice to marginalized communities and helped to challenge dominant power structures. On the other hand, it has also led to increased polarization and fragmentation within Indian society, which can be detrimental to democratic processes. His work also highlights the ways in which identity politics intersects with caste politics in India. Caste has long been a powerful force in Indian society, and Narayan argues that it continues to play a significant role in shaping political identities and alliances. He suggests that addressing caste-based

discrimination and inequality is crucial for promoting a more inclusive and egalitarian democracy in India. In his case study of Chamars in Uttar Pradesh, a low Dalit caste has been empowered politically but at the same level communities could not empower themselves due to these recognitions of identity-based politics. The dominant group enjoys the resources and fruits of development and the minor groups are misrecognized. Asha Singh and Nidhin Donald underline the limitations and possibilities of OBCs and contextualize OBCs for *'identification and enlisting'.* He sees quota within quota as a viable option for the welfare of the downtrodden among OBCs (Donald, 2019). That is why they demand the Caste census and the political parties also demand it but the real fact is that all of them are not equally concerned for all the castes, they are serving the interest of a particular caste or a group of caste. Even we can see the regionalism within caste-based politics for example the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh has a political affinity with the Yadav caste but within this, the Western Uttar Pradesh Yadavas have more opportunities for fruits of development. As (Srinivas, 1997) also points out, there exists considerable diversity within the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This encompasses influential land-owning and socially esteemed castes on one end, while on the other end, there are smaller, extremely impoverished castes situated slightly above the "*Pollution"* line. It's crucial to distinguish between the OBC groups to ensure that the more disadvantaged segments receive their rightful portion. There are horizontal inequalities among backward classes and this inequality is not only socio-economic but also political and institutional. Speaking to The Print, a national fellow at the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Sudha Pai explained that the Mandal Commission recommendations helped the economically better-positioned OBCs more than the most backward castes (Krishnan, 2020).

(Srinivas, 1956) use the term '*Sanskritization*' which describes a process of upward mobility in the Indian caste system. According to him, *Sanskritization* is a process by which lower castes adopt the customs, rituals, and beliefs of the upper castes in order to improve their social status. He also noted that *Sanskritization* is not a one-way process, but rather a two-way process in which upper castes also adopt elements of lower-caste culture in response to social and economic changes. Srinivas believed that *Sanskritization* played a significant role in shaping the Indian caste system and in creating a more fluid social hierarchy. But the point is that only a few castes got empowered whether other castes' conditions remained marginalized in the socio-economic and political sphere. The Sanskritized castes also started to discriminate against marginalized castes. (Sampath, 2021) says OBCs, is an administrative category in the context of public policy and academic research as a *'monolithic unit'*. They are *brahmanised* within themselves and the Hindutva cannot be stopped unless they are *de-brahmanised*. Hindutva forces are trying to consider all the masses on a single banner.

Socio-Political Change after Mandal Commission

The Other Backward classes have been seeing continuous changes in their social, political, and institutional area with new political structures. (Thachil, 2010) observes how the political system changes from a '*hierarchical and clientelist*' political structure to '*programmatic and participatory'* this enhances the voice of the lower by organizing them into a horizontally organized political community. He discovers a connection between the division of parts due to the growing political empowerment of backward castes and the extent of localized program-based politics. This type of examination holds significant consequences for understanding political involvement in new democracies. He discovers a connection between the division of parts due to the growing political empowerment of backward castes and the extent of localized program-based politics. This type of examination holds significant consequences for understanding political involvement in new democracies. We see the divergence in the voting behavior of the OBCs in the current political system. According to (Pal, 2021) it is understandable that the BSP-SP alliance received more votes from wealthier upper and middle-class OBCs, while poorer OBCs tended to support the BJP. This pattern makes sense when considering the influence of specific castes, as the SP is primarily associated with the Yadav community, which includes wealthier members.

	INC			BJP			BSP		
Class	2019	2014	2009	2019	2014	2009	2019	2014	2009
Poor	14	15	24	39	28	19	7	2	3
Lower	21	15	24	36	37	23	7	3	4
Middle	18	16	26	37	33	23	8	2	4
Rich	19	14	23	44	37	27	4	1	3

Source: Lokniti-CSDS, National Election Survey (NES), 2009, 2014 and 2019.

The BJP, like any political party, might aim to create a cohesive identity among OBCs for various reasons, such as political support or social unity. This could involve emphasizing common issues, providing targeted policies, and promoting OBC representation within the party that attracts voters and (Pal, 2021) writes *"Narendra Modi appeared to be equally popular among all the strata of society"*. However, it's important to note that OBCs are diverse and have distinct identities and concerns, so attempts to homogenize them could also be met with challenges and variations based

on regional, cultural, and socio-economic differences. On the other side (Subrata K. MIitra, 2022) highlights the challenges of Congress and Prof. Rekha Saxena writes "*The two pulls have constructed for the Congress what Mitra has termed the dilemma between "winning and governing*". The former may require conflict and polarisation while the latter requires consensus and distributive justice."

The increasing number of splinter groups from OBCs arises the question of whether collective mobilization is the way to upliftment and for egalitarian society or whether the fragmented groups would ensure the participation and emancipation of OBCs. The fragmentation leads to horizontal inequality which conceptualizes hierarchical unjust Brahmanical practices. Applying the same unjust castiest practices to their fellow beings could not be just at all. The end justifies the upliftment of the OBCs but the means using of this kind used by the groups of this backward class is not a fair process. This impacts the downtrodden harshly. (Yadav Y. , 2008) says that "*The policy agenda and institutional design have not kept pace with the democratic upsurge from below.Progress on 'Who is the representative?' is accompanied by a step back in 'What does the representative do?' A focus on these two questions takes our attention away from 'What gets represented?*'" (Kailash, 2012) has studied the internal structure of the questionnaire, especially on closed-ended options, and has focussed especially on non-responses on political and social issues. He highlights the paradox of the Mandalisation of politics. No doubt, the Mandalisation of politics has failed to channel caste assertion towards the annihilation of caste. In the early 1990s it became evident that the "*socially underprivileged"* had become the most active participants in elections, a phenomenon that Yogendra Yadav famously characterized as "*the second democratic upsurge*. "This phase of consistent increase in the electoral participation of socio-economically marginalized voters was considered as closed with the 2004 national elections. But after that, the diffusion started due to their internal conflicts of Bahujan unity. While the marginalized have had some say in who rules, they are less successful when it comes to the public policies the rulers adopt. The radical hopes of social change that this discursive shift in Indian politics carried remained unfulfilled for the backward class. Hence the politics of appropriation emerged to mobilize these sections by the new parties and the national parties for social engineering. The central question raised in this article is that; How has identity and self-perception been built with the emergence of Caste- based politics after the Mandal Commission and what are the impacts in the dynamics of Politics of India and in society?

CONCLUSION

This paper contextualises the 'backwardness' criteria by giving consideration to all the factors including income, region, population, etc. Caste equity is the main ideology behind this research but how the wrong assumption of castes as a class in a Marxist style could not emancipate the downtrodden and this caste dynamics along with political dynamics create a complex structure in Indian society. Through this, we can analyze the upcoming trends in the politics of India, the level of democracy, and how OBC communities shed on their political significance, the challenges they face, and the need for inclusive policies to address their specific socio-political issues. This research delves deeper into the social and political conflict of OBCs in Indian society and how did they channelise the direction of the emerging trends in that political scenario that affect social mobility and integration. The rationale of the article is based on the idea of social justice for OBCs communities and the recognition that the historical oppression and exclusion of marginalized communities must be addressed through affirmative action and policies that promote their empowerment. The steps seek to challenge the dominant narrative within OBCs that has occupied the resources and has sought to maintain the status quo of unequal power relations. Mandal commission is watershed moment for securing greater representation, access, and rights for historically marginalized OBC communities in all aspects of society, including politics, education, and employment. I have used drawn attention to the social and political aspects of the OBCs. We can also work on the impacts on the Party-System in India, impacts on gender questions, impacts on poverty and corruption, the environment, workforce, education, and also in the private sector too.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. 340, A. (1949). *Constitution of India.*
2. Ambedkar, D. B. (1916). *Caste In India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development.* Jullundur, Punjab: Bheem Patrika Publications.
3. Ambedkar, D. B. (1946). *Who were Shudras: How they came to be Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society?* Prabhat Prakashan.
4. Commission, M. (1980). *Second Backward Classes Commissioon.* Government of India .
5. Donald, A. S. (2019). Asking Questions of 'OBC' as a category. *Prabuddha: Journal of Social Equality* , 32-49.
6. Hasan, Z. (2011). *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities, and Affirmative Action.*
7. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
8. Ilaiah, K. (2006). Merit of Reservations. *Economic and Political Weekly*.
9. Jaffrelot, C. (2000). The Rise of the Other Backward Classes in the Hindi Belt. *The Journal of Asian Studies*.
10. Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's Silent Revolution: The rise of Lower Castes in North India.* New York: Columbia University Press.
11. Jayal, N. G. (2006). *Representing India: Ethnic Diversity and the Governance of Public Institutions.* Basingstoke, Hamisphere U.K.: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
12. Kailash, K. (2012). The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same in India: The Bahujan and the

Paradox of the "Democratic Upsurge". *Asian Survey*, 321-347.

13. Krishnan, R. (2020, August 07). *30 years since Mandal Commission recommendations-how it began and its impact today*. Retrieved from The Print: https://theprint.in/theprint-essential/
14. Narayan, B. (2015). Democracy and Identity Politics in India: Is It a Snake or a Rope?
15. *Economic and Political Weekly* .
16. Pal, D. V. (2021). Roll of Dalit and OBC sin the 2019 Election-New dimension of Voting for Modi. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 42-48.
17. Rupa, C. (1992). *Reservation Policy- Mandal Commission And After.* Green Park, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
18. Sadanandan, A. (2021). Caste Consciousness and Academic Performance. *Economic and Political Weekly* .
19. Sampath, G. (2021, March 27). *'The Shudras: VIision for a New Path' review: The Paradoxical status of OBCs*. Retrieved from The Hindu .
20. Srinivas, M. (1956). A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization. *The Far Eastern Quarterly*.
21. Srinivas, M. (1997). *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar.* New Dekhi: Penguin Groups.
22. Subrata K. MIitra, R. S. (2022). *The 2019 Parliamentary Elections in India: Democracy at the Crossroads.* London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
23. Thachil, E. T. (2010, August 09). *Demanding Deeper Democracy: Party Fragmentation, Ethnic Mobilization, and Programmatic Politics in the Indian States.* Retrieved from Yale Leitner Program: https://leitner.yale.edu
24. Vishnoi, A. (2021, Febuary 15). *Rohini Commission proposes 27% OBC quota be split into 2,6,9 & 10%*. Retrieved from The Economic Times: https://m.economictimes.com
25. Yadav, S. D. (2006). Redesigning Affirmative Action. *Economic and Political Weekly*.
26. Yadav, Y. (1996). Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections, 1993-1995. *Economic and Political Weeekly* .
27. Yadav, Y. (2004, September). *Opening Piece*. Retrieved from Science Po: http:ceri- sciences-po.org
28. Yadav, Y. (2008). *The Paradox of Political Representation* . Retrieved from India- Seminar.com : https://www.india-seminar.com