

INDIAN POLITICS AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

By means of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Uttar Pradesh, we demonstrate how caste and a shared sense of youth impact politics during electoral cycles. The young people attending North Indian universities are forming new social groups and becoming members of caste associations that are significant during election seasons. They are also assimilating into diverse classes, religions, and castes. In light of the political and cultural practices of India's educated youth, this article explores the relationship between castes and politics.

Keywords

Political participation: India; caste; class; youth; politics etc.

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Introduction

This article examines young men's views of castes and their place in politics, building on internal caste and policy research done at Meerut in 2019–2020. We contend that, in contrast to the mainstream understanding of caste in India, the current crisis in Meerut's education and employment, as well as the associated sentiment among youth, present new opportunities for friendship, camaraderie, and intense evil between the wealthiest senior caste men and the poorest Dalits.

In addition, sometimes young people, regardless of caste and class differences, sometimes gathered to start collective protests against the state. Using data from follow-up studies done in 2019–20, we demonstrate how a feeling of camaraderie and unity progressively diminished as certain young men took advantage of their local political clout. Cross-caste youth solidarity is being undermined from within by higher-caste “fixers” and a new generation of Dalit politicians who are pursuing self-serving agendas.

In the state assembly, the majority of middle-class, Muslim, and Dalit youth determine who forms the government. The “fixers” in student politics, such as Dalits and Jats, whose actions weaken demonstrations by groups.

Rather, the focus of this paper is caste and politics with a particular emphasis on youth. Specifically, we look at situations where castes in West Uttar Pradesh, particularly in the districts of Meerut and Baghpat, favor or oppose a particular political party.

According to Thomas Hansen (1996), in Bombay during the 1990s, young men from the lower middle class created identities as political bosses of Hindu nationalism and participated in anti-Muslim protests as a result of their widespread exclusion from stable jobs. The research was conducted in 2009 by Prem Chowdhry on jobless Jat (middle caste) youth in Haryana who engage in violent political protests on panchayat councils. In a similar vein, Martin Rogers (2008) contends that Dalits who are educated but unemployed on a southern Indian college campus tend to form castes.

Significant evidence of both divided and cooperative modern India is also present, and this literature raises additional questions about how young people perceive and engage with political power and how they practice political change.

These comments align with some of the recent research on youth and public policy. In the 1990s, Anirudh Krishna (2002) wrote of educated but jobless youth in rural West Indian areas who collaborated with individuals from different castes to support the poor in their state negotiations (Gooptu, 2007; Kamat, 2002).

This overview of current research on youth provides a framework for thinking about caste politics in Uttar Pradesh. Were young men organizing beyond the lines of class and caste?

Relation between Caste and Politics

A generation of disgruntled youth has resulted from the “perfect storm” of socioeconomic trends that young men in Uttar Pradesh experienced as they came of age in the early 2000s.

Young people are equipped to handle these uncertainties in a variety of ways. Three social sections can be used to approximate the population of UP. About 20% of people are Hindus from the upper castes, primarily Brahmins and Thakurs. In several regions of the Uttar Pradesh, these castes dominated land ownership, wage labor, and municipal government bureaucracy. In the state’s rural areas, the second bloc of Hindu households belonging to the middle class frequently holds sway over political and economic affairs. In the northwest are Jat households, and in the southwest and east are Yadava households.

Muslims, Dalits, and the less fortunate members of the so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who are classified as castes that are socially and economically disadvantaged despite being legally considered to be higher than Dalits in the caste hierarchy, make up the majority of the remaining population in Uttar Pradesh. Between Muslims and Dalits, there is an elite in the UP. However, Muslims, Dalits, and lower-class OBCs typically have few material possessions and labor under precarious conditions.

The majority of young people are aware that they can now work at last. The hope that private business owners have given to young people is greatly appreciated. They attempted to boost enrolment in private universities, as well as other learning institutions and schools, by persuading youth that they would “finally” be able to create prestigious jobs if they could obtain the appropriate diploma package.

Thousands of Dalits had hoped in 2004 and 2005 that they would be more inclined to join local political groups if the pro-Dalit BSP took over the UP on its own. However, the political dimension of waiting was not as prominent as the Dalit, Jat, and Muslim sentiments about the need to control excessive time and delay.

Young people in Meerut typically congregated in places that were linked to the movement of information and transportation outside of the city. They frequently gathered together at the intersection of the major roads close to the Meerut Stadiums at around eight in the morning and once more at night. These locations provided as a gathering spot for jobless youth looking to widen their social circle as well as a

sort of “perch” from which they could watch the flow of people, goods, and images into and out of Meerut. (Jeffrey, 2010a).

Street corners and tea counters served as gathering spots for people. At CCSU, there were some differences between the men’s dormitories based on caste and religion. The lower caste students claimed that the presence of a specially constructed dorm for Dalits in the Meerut region was crucial in shielding them from upper caste intimidation. Nonetheless, the Jats, Dalits, Muslims, and other castes frequently interacted freely, amiably, and frequently even warmly behind the tea counters.

The desire to go beyond caste and religious boundaries set apart the forms of solidarity that emerged in the Meerut teahouses. The caste’s belief that food sharing or saliva contact could contaminate others was dispelled when Muslims, Dalits, and high school students shared tea and Savory snacks and shared cigarettes orally.

Spaces of Politics

In this study, we examined the significant role that youth play in politics on behalf of the caste system. Initially, our focus was on how political discussions are a waste of time for young people in Meerut and how detrimental this is to their academic development. Through these street corner discussions, we were able to witness a significant shift in the perception of the youth approach during the last election. The youth were politically focused on advocating for nationalism and the caste system’s decrees for the youth. Consequently, the Bhartiya Janta Party capitalizes on this shift while the local party struggles to define its agenda and identity while declining support from the electorate.

In Meerut, in particular, the tea corner plays a significant role in fostering political discourse among young people, helping them learn more about political action and influencing their friends and family’s voting habits.

To defend their rights, students from a wide range of caste and class backgrounds banded together to protest against the university administration and bureaucracies. These demonstrations primarily began at tea stalls in front of the university, where local leaders supported the students and used them in local, state, and federal elections.

Youth mobilization is largely dependent on unemployment, a topic that the current administration is focusing on as well. Students waiting for their degree certificates, which served as the most potent indicators of their suffering in the context of corruption, is the reason this is a hot topic in the minds of young people.

After hearing a student's pleas for help through the various channels, students would call the hostel's residents as well as the nearby university and the surrounding areas, and they would use cell phones to connect with friends. After talking over potential courses of action with his trusted advisors, he frequently went on to plan protests that drew students from a diverse range of backgrounds, including Muslims and Dalits.

In summary, politically driven young men enrolled in Meerut's universities and other higher education establishments played a key role in sparking the nation's student protests: mid-caste social activists,

But by 2020, Meerut City's political climate had significantly calmed down. One reason was modifications to the regulations pertaining to student union elections. The BJP's leadership style forbade student union elections in Uttar Pradesh's universities and colleges. It's time for the political leaders to speak up and hold elections for universities and other higher education institutions.

The rise in the number of middle-class student leaders who subverted internal protests was the most significant factor in the demise of collective student action. Due to the strength of the student body on campus and in the surrounding communities, Jats have historically held the top positions in university unions.

Numerous student leaders speak out against corruption in university and administrative offices; these protests are often covered favorably by friends in local newspapers and television stations, which opens up opportunities for local politics in various political parties. Occasionally, some students even profit from the movements started by the student leaders.

After winning a seat in the union for the past ten years, the majority of student leaders have focused on generating revenue. Examples of this include setting up backdoor admission to CCSU-affiliated colleges and serving as middlemen between the university's administration and for-profit educational entrepreneurs. The current game is over because of the development of information technology. The university administration has made all procedures available online and transparent to everyone, which is a crucial factor. The RTI is also accountable for the decrease in the level of corruption.

Most politically engaged student leaders in recent years were upset about their lack of employment due to the BJP's defeat in the most recent legislative assembly election, which saw it win power independently in Uttar Pradesh. After winning the 2017 election, they claimed, the BJP had "de-radicalized" and its leaders were more focused on gaining power in Delhi than maintaining ties with their core

constituency. “The Ayodhya Mandir Movement gave rise to the BJP as a movement in the 1990s,” a student leader stated. Senior movement leaders circulated throughout UP, disseminating information. One particular source of annoyance was Yogi Aditya Nath’s choice to award local Brahmins, Jats, and Gurjars with district president of the BJP posts and Legislative Assembly (MLA) seats. The majority of students perceived the practice as proof that the wealthiest, upper castes had taken control of the party, despite student leaders defending it and claiming it was necessary to prevent accusations of casteism. The conflict between Thakur and Gurjar over historical identity ownership has become a political headache for the BJP in recent years.

According to practical experience, age has a significant influence on how one thinks about politics. In the last two elections, youth have played a significant role in politics. From this, we can analyze how young people’s traditional political thought patterns are rapidly evolving. Youth have a different perspective on politics, and they have a strong sense of nationalism. We can quickly examine the caste system’s dominance in the last two election decrees to help the local party overcome the political stigma in the eyes of youth and benefit the BJP from this shift.

After studying political discourse, we discovered that, in rural areas, family size also dictates, and that, in our modern society, joint families are growing more common. This is because, in the present, people are more rational and act in their own best interests. Previously, in most joint families, there was only one primary family member who made all of the major decisions, with the other members of the family following his or her lead. There was a system in place for handling political issues. A small number of politically engaged individuals informed the political leader about village issues and cast ballots when elections were held. Social problems in the Indian village change along with the social structure.

Following independence, the challenge was to build roads and invest in rural infrastructure. Community leaders also preferred working in their communities, as evidenced by the RLD’s majority occupation of the Barout seat in parliament, which was dubbed the “Jats dominant party” due to its leaders’ caste affiliation and the fact that the majority of the work completed in this area—roads, schools, colleges, powerhouses, etc.—was done on Jat land.

Since the Jat vote bank replaced the RLD and made room in the BJP, the Jat caste is now dominant in this area and other castes are deprived of developmental work. If we conclude that political awareness is gradually changing and that the Jat vote bank is replacing the RLD and making space in the BJP, then the belief in the RLD is gradually declining. The villager also participates in other sectors, raise

political awareness, and cast their vote based on their participation in politics. Occupation has a significant impact on how politically aware the populace is. Only educated youth in the rural areas dispute based on logic; some respondents do not respond on this basis, and service personnel are also knowledgeable about politics and disputes based on fact.

Currently, respondents' income levels are rising, and caste has less of an influence in rural areas. The respondents from lower castes now own property and are rising in status in rural areas. We see in practice that caste laws are slowly changing due to the involvement of faction groups in grassroots politics and Panchayati Raj, where these factions also work quickly to gain positions in local politics and administration.

Our research on rural politics reveals that caste plays a significant role in local politics. The caste system influences how people vote, particularly in rural areas. It has been noted that the nuclear family in rural areas is changing from a joint to a nuclear family. A major contributing factor to this shift is the growing importance of IT in rural areas.

Some of the respondents actively participated in politics and worked as agents in local politics leading up to the parliament election. Local leaders made contact with these individuals, and these leaders made contact with rural people, organizing them around caste issues and local interests. They also involved the political leaders in personal disputes regarding agricultural land and the route to their fields.

As researchers note in the field during data collection, caste is a significant factor in influencing political perception and participation. Individuals today also believe that caste participation is important to fulfill the interests of the caste. Which caste could easily find the political party for its representation in politics by exerting pressure on it? Recent efforts by the Tyagi caste to free their political representative, Sri Kant Tyagi, from prison have put pressure on the BJP, and the results can be seen in the upcoming Khatouli legislative election at the end of 2022.

In addition, as we examine the historical details of state politics, we discover that the caste system had an impact on state politics in the 1900s, when the BSP ruled over caste politics and empowered the scheduled caste. Over the past ten years, it has been crucial that the caste equation be reset. Some respondents have pointed out that the caste factor has been replaced this time by the caste factor, and the BJP has been successful in influencing voter mindsets in favor of nationalism and replacing the caste factor in Uttar Pradesh.

Respondents' attitudes are changing quickly these days. They think that caste involvement is crucial to the caste's actual development and that caste representatives play a crucial role in politics. They also emphasized that voters only cast their ballots during election seasons and that political pressure must be applied to political parties in order to support the caste's continued growth and representation in politics.

Conclusions

The majority of respondents, who are politically engaged at both the local and national levels, hold the view that human political participation is the key to true development. Politics controls society and determines each person's political standing as well as that of any group or caste. The current era is marked by social movements in local politics. In 2021, BKU organized a KISAN at Delhi's UP gate, providing temporary housing for participating farmers. These movements are heavily influenced by both caste politics and KISAN politics.

This movement strengthened caste politics in Uttar Pradesh and changed the political landscape of local politics. The Jat caste rose to prominence in this movement, led by the son of Mahender Singh Tikait, and put pressure on the central government to rescind three laws related to the KISAN bill.

Newspapers are still a major source of political information for people, even in rural areas these days. In this day and age of globalization and advanced information technology, the villager is not as valuable a source of information about political activity as it once was.

In Indian politics, caste is the most significant factor influencing voter behavior. India's political history reveals that caste still plays a significant role in the country's politics today. Few respondents had a thorough understanding of the population of castes and their accurate representation in politics. Some other marginalized castes and Dalits also blamed the low representation of lower caste representation in politics following independence, when higher castes took control of the political system and extended their dominance to OBC and Dalits as well.

Numerous castes publish magazines to inspire the next generation of members and highlight their accomplishments. Throughout the study, we find that caste correlates with raising caste awareness and shaping the general public's perception of political parties. In the past ten years, caste has become a significant factor independent of political party. For example, in West Uttar Pradesh, the Rashtriya Lok Dal has lost caste support, and Jat voters have shifted to the BJP.

Caste-specific schools have opened in many villages, particularly in lower castes, as a result of the dispute between the RAJPUT and Dalits in Saharanpur. Political leaders have also encouraged the opening of more caste-specific schools. Over the past ten years, the use of radical approaches in politics has rapidly increased. In the present, caste is a significant factor, according to the majority of respondents and associations involved in various types of work, like encouraging open libraries for youth development in rural areas. This is a contradictory approach in that the effects of globalization on youth cause a decline in secular and caste-like factors among them; conversely, the caste association grows within each caste, reawakening the caste and changing how people approach them. The majority of respondents think that caste conferences don't raise awareness among people in rural areas; only 19.66% of respondents agree that caste associations are crucial in raising people's awareness.

These days, it's common practice to host conferences with the goal of educating the public about political perceptions in general and raising common people's awareness of caste interests. Respondents have faith in the caste system, and more people are getting involved in raising caste awareness and ensuring political participation. In the current era of caste association political development, it is important to ensure that the general public and the local populace perceive politics as the key to human development overall and that political participation is necessary for human development in order to create and benefit from beneficial policies. Through conversations with voters during an election, we learn that caste leaders have an impact on people's voting habits. It is common to observe that well-known political figures from a given caste are invited to influence state politics. Movie stars are also frequently invited to encourage support for a particular political party or candidate. Following independence, disparities in caste participation were also observed at the state and federal levels.

In comparison to the population ratio, some members of the higher caste participate in politics more than others, and some members of the lower caste do not participate at all. In many cases, lower caste political leaders hold lower positions, and they are happy with their status. In the recent past, the influence of the TYAGI movement has also affected the political behavior of the caste to vote in favor of the RLD and RLD candidate Madan Bhaiya won the election on the basis of the caste politics. Caste associations are the major instrument to unite the caste vote and make the solidarity among the caste and vote in favor or against the particular party. One significant element was the combined Gurjar and Jat votes in support of Madan Bhaiya based on the caste equation. Madan Bhaiya's victory allowed us to conclude

that caste is a significant factor in Indian politics because the caste has consistently shown itself to be united in support of its political leader.

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