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## CASTE POLITICS IN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OF MAHARASHTRA

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### Abstract:

*India is a democratic country, where people of all religion and caste co-exist peacefully. However due to regional imbalance, economic disparity among religion, caste has made it an important topic of interest for both upper and lower caste. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has strived for special status for Dalits & other deprived castes which were economically, socially deprived owing to the ancient tradition followed for centuries together. Caste has played an important role in the politics of the State of Maharashtra, where political parties are luring people of specific caste for personal gains. Caste politics plays an important role in the outcome of assembly elections in Maharashtra.*

### KEYWORDS:

Caste, Maharashtra, Politics, Political Parties, Reservation.

### INTRODUCTION:

Indian Constitution adopted after independence was turning point in the history of India. Indian Constitution is not just a mere set of fundamental laws that form the basis of governance of our country but it embodies and reflects certain basic values, philosophy and objectives that were held very dear to our founding fathers. This value system is the very much important in the multilingual multiethnic, multi-religious Indian society. Indian constitution play vital role in the inclusion of socially excluded section, mainly Dalits, Tribes, Women and Minorities. Indian Constitution also play vital role in bringing these sections of society in mainstream of socio-economic and political development.

Maharashtra is the state of paramount importance for gaining political superiority and it became more important to win all the elections in Maharashtra for the political parties. Political parties tend to play religious and caste card often during pre election period for political gain. Various parties have been formed on the basis of caste, creed and religion.

Parties like Congress, Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Shivsena, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), Republican Party, Samajwadi Party, Shetkari Sangathana, Shivsangram Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Communist Party, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) etc cater to specific in large for winning particular seats. Political parties assure several promises like development issues, good governance & welfare issues etc. Political parties also rake up issues like lack of development and other issues like corruption etc by former government.

## **CASTES OF MAHARASHTRA:**

Marathas (Warriors Class), Dhangar (Shepherd), Mali (Gardener), Vanjari, Mang, Matang constitute among the main castes of Maharashtra. Brahmins (Priest Class) constitute a small number. Other religions like Islam, Christianity, Jain, Sikhs do constitute a small figure.

People of other state residing in metros, cities and villages in Maharashtra do constitute a large number.

## **ELECTION STRATEGY FOR UPCOMING ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:**

Four politically-influential castes, Maratha, Dhangar (shepherd), Mali (gardener) and Vanjari, are going to play a crucial role in the outcome of the upcoming Maharashtra Assembly elections. They make up around 60 per cent of the state's population.

Apart from their political significance, the agitation by these castes demanding special status and reservation have fuelled polarisation in majority of the constituencies. Western Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha are the regions, where caste is likely to prevail over other issues such as anti-incumbency, corruption and development.

Marathas, who comprise nearly 35 per cent of the population, is the most politically influential caste. It is dominant in Western Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha.

Its significance could be judged with a fact that 191 out of the 288 members in the outgoing Assembly belonged to this caste. Even though community has supporters of all the political parties the party which manages to draw the support of the majority of Maratha voters will emerge the winner.

That is why the ruling Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) have made a provision of 16 per cent reservation for the community in government jobs and educational institutes to lure them.

Marathas have dominated the state politics of Maharashtra since its inception in 1960. Since then, Maharashtra has witnessed heavy presence of Maratha ministers or officials (which comprises 25% of the state) in the Maharashtra state government, local municipal commissions, and panchayats. 10 out of 16 chief ministers of Maharashtra hailed from the Maratha community as of year 2012.

The Dhangars are the second most influential caste with a population of 10 per cent. This caste is mainly dominant in Western Maharashtra and Marathwada. Its leaders are demanding ST status for Dhangars in order to enable the community to avail the benefits of caste-based reservation. According to its leader, Bharat Karande, they would continue the agitation till their demand was met.

The Vanjaris and the Malis constitute a major portion of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). These castes have not demanded more reservation but have staunchly opposed inducting other castes in the OBC category. These castes are dominant in Marathwada and North Maharashtra.

## **PARTY POLITICS ON THE EVE OF ELECTIONS:**

Many political parties like the Congress, NCP, BJP, Shivsena have taken stance of giving OBC reservation to Maratha Class due to its large number as this policy was taken by small parties like Shivsangram Party. Political parties lure the poor and middle class Maratha family who expect gains from such move.

Political parties like Congress, NCP have also assured the Dhangar caste to be allotted Scheduled Tribe (ST) from the earlier Nomadic Tribe (NT) status for a political gain. Similarly assurances were given by political leaders of different parties to a large sect of people for their political motives at large.

BJP has its influence on the upper class Brahmins, Jains and business class, while the Congress party acted as a savior to the Muslims, Christians and other minorities.

On the other hand National Parties like Congress and BJP kept on improving its status as National Parties by acting as a savior to people of other states by safeguarding their rights.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Political Parties also rake the issue of reservation on the eve of elections and fail to implement when they rose to power. They cater to needs of some and temporarily maintain their hold over the election process. Some parties have succeeded in providing reservation to the deprived.

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