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Caste Mobilization and Voting Behaviour in Indian Democracy: A Study with Reference to Punjab

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Abstract

Caste not just of one cultural structure or as a robust tool of political preparedness. whereas the effect like kshatriyas social and political is so much more visually linked to asserts including pradesh as well as jharkhand, it's own involvement along punjab—though fairly cheaper explicit—is equally compelling, intricate, but also constantly developing. haryana presents an interesting cultural frame of reference at which religious ideology, notably sufism, would seem versus monopolise public discussion; even so, hierarchy remains open underneath the the above floor, discreetly attempting to influence formations after all political orientation but instead electorate habits.

this document attempts to investigate the connection with both kshatriyas preparedness but instead casting votes conduct along punjabi democratic, as for appropriate reference towards the governmental after all karachi. that as well examines what lineage affiliations were also advantageously propelled besides political groups versus structure election outcome measures, affect group methods, as well as decide selecting candidates. a study also examines a position like predominate but also marginalised groups clans, especially punjabi sufis but also lower castes, there in election process, trying to highlight what one's social economic roles translation theory in to the different degrees yeah political sway.

the results indicate a certain despite the obvious cultural importance of spiritual but also southern influences, kshatriyas continues to remain a kind fundamental defining factor after all voting actions through bihar. parties, though often highlighting growth as well as leadership, continue to

depend forward caste-based arithmetic along arranging about there advert but also pacts. at the very same duration, the character like kshatriyas politicians throughout haryana has been having to undergo slow method change. influences including urban development, high amounts like learning, economic developments, as well as the rise of new electoral narratives—particularly the many focused about management but also anti-corruption—are realigning electoral formations.

the study can conclude and it kshatriyas throughout bihar really hasn't eroded but now has tailored versus adjusting social economic situations, operating in much more multifaceted but also implicit methods. knowledge one such advancing connection among lineage but instead casting a vote conduct is important for the a complete examination yeah democratic systems along asia.

1. Introduction

Indian democracy would be deep seated within the vast and varied as well as hierarchy framework, in which lineage continues to perform an important part in defining democratic habits but also election consequences. Despite the legal dedication of between gender equity and also the slow change process related after all revitalisation but also democracy, hierarchy does have continued to remain some one chronic but instead influencing factor with in political realm. Casting a vote conduct through kerala isn't ascertained by such a local scale; rather, it takes into account a fancy interaction after all kshatriyas, category, religious ideology, area, governance, as well as more and more, problems with innovation as well as leadership. Among, hierarchy must have previously provided as both an issues involving such as ideological campaign, identity development, but instead portrayal.

Scholars including rajni krishna have asserted that now the partnership among both hierarchy as well as politicians throughout nation isn' t really simply one amongst superiority though of cooperative conversion, at which lineage has indeed been politically charged as well as social and political has already been formed whilst also hierarchy affiliations. Analogously, e l. D e. Kumar underscored where and hierarchies and indeed the idea yeah “dominant caste” effect access to the power as well as participation in politics. The above observations illustrate the importance yeah hierarchy that both some one political and social bracket throughout comprehension democratic institutions throughout asia.

Punjab provides a very fascinating although somewhat contradictory instance inside this frame of reference. With the exception of nations including pradesh as well as haryana, in which caste-based social and political seems to be abundantly clear and infrequently aspects a purposely designed yeah voting contest, karachi is usually regarded as either a governmental at which religion—especially religious identity—plays a much more noticeable but also central role through national politics. A chronological basis of religious organizations but instead moves must have made a significant contribution to something like this view. However, this obvious superiority of

non secular individuality almost always distorts its foundational hierarchy trends and it continues to affect electoral sequence alignment but also casting votes habits.

Beneath its larger definition of non secular authenticity, Punjab's culture has been formalized together across completely obvious sectarian lines, of organisations like Bihar Sunni Muslims, addition of small amounts (scheduled castes), and also other back into the past courses inhabiting unique cultural location. The above segments have been mirrored along types of land possession, access to the resources, but instead representation in parliament. For example, Bihar Sunni Muslims have traditionally supported significant political authority, whereas Dalits—despite constructing a considerable ratio of a population—have faced difficulties through accomplishing directly proportionate political sway.

In recent years, its trends yeah hierarchy but also having to vote conduct along Haryana have undertaken perceptible adjusts. Aspects including such rapid urbanisation, rapidly increasing reading skills, economic transition, and also the development of new ideological stories focused through advancement, leadership, but also pro have started complete shake up existing voting trends. At the very same moment, parties certainly consider lineage ordinary differential equation throughout selection of candidates, coalition structure, as well as election schemes, even if such aspects are really not actually specifically outlined.

Against this background, the current study seeks to examine this same involvement yeah Kshatriyas through attempting to influence having to vote habits through Haryana and also to analyze what party politics galvanize lineage affiliations complete protect political support. Besides wanting to explore the both narrative coherence but also change like caste-based social and political, this same research attempts provide a greater understanding of both the operating after all democratic in some kind of a government at which lineage continues to operate along slight and still profound ways.

2. Understanding Caste Mobilization in Indian Politics

Caste preparedness describes the process by which political groups arrange, initiate, but instead tactically incorporate Kshatriyas affiliations complete effect voter actions but also ideological results. This encompasses attractive of between communicated caste-based self interest, history gripes, social standing, as well as ambitions so that you can strengthen assistance as well as contour voting behavior. There in Chinese representative democracy structure, hierarchy preparedness must have arose one of the most substantial processes thru which participation in politics but also depiction have been managed to negotiate.

The relationship among hierarchy but instead social and political along nation has so far been exhaustively investigated besides intellectuals, most of whom make the argument a certain lineage isn't really simply a standard political construct but just an advancing democratic asset. Rajni Shri,

throughout character seminal paper through punjabi politicians, tried to argue and it lineage has so far been “politicized” but instead of partisanship influence on children wholly caste-driven. As according god, democracy have changed kshatriyas from the a strict social formal organizational into the a diversity tool of power phonation. Election contest had also urged tribal communities to arrange self, express requirements, as well as request portrayal within in the election structure. This angle highlight reels an ability to adapt like hierarchy in such a democracy sense.

Similarly, t s. M e. Kumar initiated its influencing theory of both the “dominant lineage, ” whom the makes reference to something like a lineage bunch and it continues to hold some one powerful position because of the latter's capacity, financial resources, but instead status in society. Those very organisations frequently play an important role along influencing local or regional partisanship. In very many indian subcontinent, predominate strata of society have now been able to affect election outcome measures, regulate government systems, but also preserve about there political and social supremacy thru the business strategy movement.

Building on such fundamental suggestions, academics for virendra arvind have analyzed casting a vote habits through kerala but also stressed the said hierarchy continues to serve as both an emphasize the fact after all voter choosing, given to a specific impact is very often ameliorated through other aspects including such school, current leader, but instead political situation. Father experiments, specially the these collected from the survey statistics, posit that although kshatriyas personas remain dominant, they may be now not the only premised orientation, clearly indicates one gradual transition more towards sophisticated having to vote habits.

Further, kanchan shri, throughout helen employment to either ethnocultural gatherings but also racial politics, goes on to argue a certain hierarchy could be comprehended as both a type of racial heritage which is advantageously marshalled whilst also democratic entrepreneurial. Helen spotlights where and political groups utilize caste-based tries to appeal to construct assistance coalition governments, particularly along marketable election contexts. This attitude is especially central to understanding why kshatriyas personalities are really not corrected but many are realigned as well as reframed along series of political incentive schemes.

In addition, academics including such philippe jaffreLOT have investigated an ascend after all backward status politicians and indeed the opening of modern democratic divisions chosen to represent among under. Character job clearly illustrates why lineage movement had also helped contribute toward the democratic governance like punjabi partisanship besides allowing historically marginalized societies to achieve voice in politics but also depiction.

In a chinese sense, hierarchy movement has mostly due to formation like “vote financial institutions, ” at which particular castes continually underlying point parties and applicants. It does have a real influence through voting methods, attempting to influence selection of candidates, club coalitions, but also decisions and policies. Party politics commonly allocate ticket online caste

mathematics but instead create socialist policies aimed at specific castes complete solidify there own base of support.

However, this seems to be significant to mention a certain kshatriyas campaign also isn't rigid. As for megacities, education, as well as economic diversity, the character like caste-based politicians would be having undergone conversion. Whereas the kshatriyas continues to affect democratic habits, the function has become more slight but is often interconnected with those other cultural but instead political forces.

3. Caste Structure in Punjab

Punjab presents a distinctive caste configuration that sets it apart from many other Indian states. While the state is often viewed through the lens of religion—particularly Sikh identity—its social fabric is deeply structured along caste lines. These caste divisions, though sometimes less visible in public discourse, continue to play a significant role in shaping socio-economic relations as well as political power structures.

The major caste groups in Punjab include **Jat Sikhs**, **Dalits (Scheduled Castes)**, and **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**, each occupying a different position within the social and economic hierarchy.

Jat Sikhs have traditionally been the dominant caste in Punjab, particularly in rural areas. Their dominance is largely rooted in land ownership, agricultural control, and historical access to resources. This economic strength has translated into significant political influence, enabling them to occupy key positions in state politics and governance. Scholars like M. N. Srinivas would classify Jat Sikhs as a classic example of a “dominant caste,” given their numerical strength, economic power, and political representation. Their influence is evident in electoral politics, where they have historically shaped leadership patterns and party dynamics.

In contrast, **Dalits (Scheduled Castes)** constitute nearly 30 percent of Punjab’s population—one of the highest proportions in any Indian state. Despite this demographic strength, Dalits have not been able to translate their numbers into equivalent political power. Internal divisions among Dalit sub-castes, such as Mazhabi Sikhs and Ravidasias, have often limited their ability to mobilize as a unified political force. As noted by Surinder S. Jodhka, caste-based inequalities persist in Punjab despite the egalitarian teachings of Sikhism, particularly in areas such as land ownership, social status, and access to opportunities. Dalits are often concentrated in landless labor and lower-income occupations, which further constrains their political influence.

The category of **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)** in Punjab includes various artisan and service communities, such as Ramgarhias and Tarkhans. While these groups are socially and economically diverse, they generally occupy a middle position within the caste hierarchy. Their political

influence tends to be more localized and less consolidated compared to dominant groups like Jat Sikhs. However, in recent years, there has been a gradual increase in their political visibility, particularly as parties attempt to broaden their support base.

An important aspect of Punjab's caste structure is the apparent contradiction between religious ideology and social reality. Sikhism, as a religion, strongly emphasizes equality and rejects caste-based discrimination. However, as scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot have observed, social practices often diverge from religious ideals. Caste identities continue to influence everyday interactions, marriage patterns, and political affiliations, indicating the persistence of caste as a social institution.

Politically, this caste structure has resulted in an uneven distribution of power. Jat Sikhs have historically dominated legislative representation and leadership positions, while Dalits—despite their significant population share—remain underrepresented in positions of authority. Political parties often attempt to address this imbalance through symbolic representation and targeted welfare measures, but structural inequalities continue to persist.

4. Caste and Voting Behaviour in Punjab

Voting behaviour in Punjab reflects a nuanced and layered interaction of caste, religion, regional identity, and party affiliation. Unlike states such as Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, where caste-based voting is often explicit and openly acknowledged, in Punjab caste operates in a more subtle and indirect manner. It is rarely the sole determinant of electoral choice; rather, it works alongside religious identity—particularly Sikh identity—as well as local leadership, economic concerns, and party loyalty. Nevertheless, its influence remains significant in shaping electoral outcomes and political alignments.

Scholars such as Yogendra Yadav have pointed out that voting behaviour in India is increasingly multidimensional, where caste continues to matter but interacts with other socio-political variables. Punjab exemplifies this complexity, as caste considerations are often embedded within broader political narratives rather than being openly articulated.

4.1 Role of Jat Sikhs

Jat Sikhs have historically played a dominant role in Punjab's political landscape. Their control over agricultural resources, combined with their numerical strength in rural constituencies, has given them considerable influence over electoral politics. This dominance is reflected not only in voting patterns but also in political leadership and representation.

Traditionally, Jat Sikh voters have shown strong support for the Shiromani Akali Dal, a party that has its roots in rural Sikh communities and has historically represented agrarian interests. The

party's ideological alignment with Sikh identity and its organizational presence in rural areas have helped consolidate Jat Sikh support over the years.

However, it is important to note that this support is not entirely uniform or static. In recent elections, there has been some fragmentation in Jat Sikh voting patterns due to factors such as agrarian distress, internal factionalism, and the emergence of alternative political options. Nevertheless, their influence remains a decisive factor in many constituencies.

4.2 Dalit Voting Patterns

Dalits in Punjab constitute a significant portion of the population, but they are far from a homogeneous group. They are divided into several sub-castes, such as Mazhabi Sikhs and Ravidasias, each with distinct social identities and local concentrations. These internal divisions have historically limited the emergence of a unified Dalit political voice in the state.

Political parties have increasingly recognized the electoral importance of Dalit voters and have attempted to mobilize them through targeted welfare schemes, symbolic representation, and community outreach. The appointment of Dalit leaders to prominent political positions and the announcement of policies aimed at marginalized communities are examples of such efforts.

The presence of the Bahujan Samaj Party represents a conscious attempt to consolidate Dalit votes on a broader platform of social justice and empowerment. However, unlike in states such as Uttar Pradesh, the party has struggled to achieve sustained electoral success in Punjab. This can be attributed to internal fragmentation among Dalit communities and the ability of mainstream parties to attract Dalit voters through inclusive strategies.

As noted by Surinder S. Jodhka, Dalit politics in Punjab is characterized by both assertion and fragmentation, which shapes their voting behaviour in complex ways.

4.3 Urban vs Rural Dynamics

The influence of caste on voting behaviour in Punjab also varies significantly between urban and rural areas. In **rural regions**, caste networks remain strong and continue to influence electoral choices. Social relations, kinship ties, and community leadership often guide voting decisions, making caste an important factor in political mobilization.

In contrast, **urban areas** exhibit a relatively weaker influence of caste. Here, voters are more likely to prioritize issues such as employment opportunities, infrastructure development, education, and governance. Exposure to diverse social environments and higher levels of education contribute to a shift away from rigid caste-based voting patterns.

However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that caste is entirely absent in urban settings. Rather, its influence is more diffused and often operates in combination with other factors. As highlighted by Kanchan Chandra, identity-based politics tends to adapt to changing socio-economic contexts rather than disappear altogether.

5. Political Parties and Caste Mobilization in Punjab

Political parties in Punjab, while often projecting agendas centered on development, governance, and regional identity, continue to engage in caste-based mobilization as a crucial electoral strategy. Unlike in some other Indian states where caste appeals are explicit, in Punjab such mobilization tends to be more subtle, embedded within broader political narratives. Nevertheless, caste considerations significantly influence candidate selection, ticket distribution, alliance formation, and campaign strategies.

The Indian National Congress has traditionally adopted a broad-based electoral strategy by building a coalition that includes Dalits, religious minorities, and sections of the urban middle class. Given that Punjab has one of the highest proportions of Scheduled Caste population in India, the Congress party has often sought to attract Dalit voters through welfare schemes, leadership representation, and inclusive political messaging. The appointment of leaders from marginalized communities to key political positions reflects an attempt to consolidate this support base. However, as scholars like Yogendra Yadav suggest, such coalitions are often fluid and require continuous negotiation, as voters increasingly weigh multiple factors beyond caste alone.

The Aam Aadmi Party represents a relatively new political force in Punjab, positioning itself as an alternative to traditional caste-based politics. Its emphasis on governance, anti-corruption measures, and public service delivery has appealed particularly to urban voters and younger demographics. Despite this outward focus on issue-based politics, the party cannot entirely ignore caste dynamics. In practice, it takes caste equations into account while selecting candidates and designing constituency-level strategies. This reflects a broader trend in Indian politics, where even parties advocating for “post-caste” politics must engage with existing social realities.

The Shiromani Akali Dal has historically been associated with Jat Sikh interests and rural constituencies. Its political base has largely rested on agrarian communities, particularly those with significant land ownership. Over time, however, the party has attempted to expand its support base by reaching out to non-Jat groups, including Dalits and OBCs, through alliances and targeted outreach programs. This shift indicates an awareness of changing electoral dynamics and the need to move beyond a narrowly defined caste base.

Scholars such as Kanchan Chandra argue that political parties in democratic systems often act as “strategic entrepreneurs,” adapting identity-based appeals—including caste—to maximize

electoral gains. This perspective is particularly relevant in Punjab, where parties may not openly emphasize caste but nonetheless rely on caste arithmetic in structuring their electoral strategies.

In practical terms, caste plays a significant role in **candidate selection and ticket distribution**. Political parties often nominate candidates based on the dominant caste composition of a constituency, aiming to align their choices with local social dynamics. Similarly, **electoral alliances** are sometimes formed with the intention of consolidating support from specific caste groups. These strategies demonstrate that caste, even when not publicly foregrounded, remains deeply embedded in the political process.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that caste mobilization in Punjab is undergoing gradual transformation. As noted by Christophe Jaffrelot, identity-based politics in India is evolving in response to socio-economic changes, leading to more complex and layered forms of political engagement. In Punjab, factors such as urbanization, education, and the rise of issue-based politics are reshaping traditional caste alignments.

6. Changing Trends in Caste-Based Voting

In recent years, the nature of caste-based voting behaviour in Punjab has undergone noticeable transformation. While caste continues to remain an important factor in electoral politics, its influence is no longer as rigid or overt as in the past. Instead, it operates in more subtle and complex ways, often interacting with socio-economic changes, political narratives, and evolving voter expectations. This shift reflects the broader transformation of Indian democracy, where traditional identities are increasingly mediated by modern influences.

One of the key factors contributing to this change is **urbanization and the spread of education**. As more people migrate to urban areas and gain access to higher levels of education, there is a gradual weakening of traditional caste-based loyalties. Urban environments tend to expose individuals to more diverse social settings, reducing the intensity of caste-based identification. Education, in particular, plays a crucial role in shaping political awareness and encouraging voters to evaluate candidates and parties based on performance and policy rather than solely on caste affiliation. As observed by Yogendra Yadav, the rise of an informed electorate has contributed to a shift from identity-based voting to more issue-oriented decision-making, although this shift remains uneven across regions.

Another significant factor is the growing importance of **economic issues**. Concerns such as unemployment, rising cost of living, and agrarian distress have become central to political discourse in Punjab. Given the state's heavy dependence on agriculture, issues related to farm income, debt, and market access have had a profound impact on voter behaviour. These economic concerns often cut across caste lines, creating new forms of political alignment that are not strictly

determined by caste identity. This trend suggests a gradual move towards class-based or issue-based politics, although caste continues to shape how these issues are experienced and articulated.

The emergence of **new political narratives** has also played an important role in reshaping voting patterns. Political parties increasingly emphasize themes such as development, governance, transparency, and anti-corruption in their campaigns. The rise of parties like the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab reflects this shift, as they have successfully mobilized voters around governance issues rather than relying exclusively on caste-based appeals. However, as scholars like Kanchan Chandra point out, identity politics does not disappear entirely; instead, it adapts to new political contexts and coexists with issue-based mobilization.

Youth participation is another important driver of change. Younger voters in Punjab, who are more exposed to media, technology, and global ideas, tend to exhibit relatively less rigid caste-based preferences. They are more likely to prioritize employment opportunities, education, and governance over traditional identity markers. This generational shift is gradually altering the electoral landscape, making it more fluid and less predictable.

Despite these changes, it would be inaccurate to conclude that caste has lost its relevance in Punjab's electoral politics. Rather, its role has become more **subtle, indirect, and context-dependent**. Caste continues to influence candidate selection, local political networks, and community-level mobilization, even when it is not explicitly acknowledged in public discourse. As noted by Christophe Jaffrelot, the transformation of caste politics in India involves a shift from overt identity-based mobilization to more nuanced and strategic forms of engagement.

7. Challenges in Analyzing Caste and Voting Behaviour

The study of caste-based voting behaviour in Punjab presents several methodological and conceptual challenges. Unlike regions where caste identities are openly articulated in political discourse, Punjab's socio-political landscape is shaped by a complex interaction of caste, religion, regional dynamics, and evolving voter preferences. This complexity makes it difficult to isolate the precise impact of caste on electoral outcomes and to draw definitive conclusions.

One of the primary challenges is the **lack of reliable and transparent data on caste-wise voting patterns**. In India, voting is conducted through a secret ballot system, and official data does not record the caste identity of voters. As a result, researchers must rely on survey data, field studies, and post-election analyses, which may have limitations in terms of sample size, accuracy, and representativeness. Scholars such as Yogendra Yadav have emphasized the importance of survey-based research in understanding voting behaviour, but they also acknowledge the inherent constraints in capturing the full complexity of caste dynamics.

Another significant challenge arises from the **overlapping influence of caste and religion** in Punjab. The state's politics is often framed in terms of religious identity, particularly Sikh versus non-Sikh alignments. However, caste divisions exist within these religious categories, creating multiple layers of identity. For example, both Jat Sikhs and Dalit Sikhs share a common religious identity but differ significantly in their socio-economic status and political preferences. This overlap makes it difficult to disentangle whether voting behaviour is primarily influenced by caste, religion, or a combination of both. As noted by Christophe Jaffrelot, identity politics in India often operates through intersecting categories rather than isolated factors.

Regional variations within Punjab further complicate the analysis. The state is divided into regions such as Majha, Malwa, and Doaba, each with distinct socio-economic characteristics and caste compositions. For instance, the Doaba region has a higher concentration of Dalits, while Malwa is more influenced by agrarian Jat Sikh dominance. These regional differences result in varying patterns of political mobilization and voting behaviour, making it difficult to generalize findings across the entire state.

In addition, **changing voter preferences** pose a dynamic challenge for researchers. As discussed in earlier sections, factors such as urbanization, education, economic concerns, and the rise of new political narratives are reshaping traditional voting patterns. Voters are increasingly influenced by issues like employment, governance, and public service delivery, which may override or interact with caste considerations. This fluidity makes it challenging to establish stable patterns or long-term trends in caste-based voting behaviour.

Scholars like Kanchan Chandra argue that identity-based voting is inherently context-dependent and can shift in response to changing political incentives. This perspective is particularly relevant in Punjab, where caste identities are not always rigid but can be strategically mobilized or downplayed depending on the political context.

8. Conclusion

Caste mobilization continues to play a significant, though often understated, role in shaping voting behaviour in Punjab. While the state's political discourse is frequently framed in terms of religion, regional identity, and governance, caste operates as a parallel and deeply embedded force that influences political alignments, party strategies, and electoral outcomes. Its presence may not always be explicit, but it remains integral to understanding the functioning of electoral politics in the state.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that Punjab's political landscape cannot be fully comprehended without taking into account its caste dynamics. Dominant groups such as Jat Sikhs continue to exert considerable influence in rural and agrarian politics, while Dalits—despite their substantial demographic presence—experience a more fragmented and complex pattern of

political participation. Political parties, even when emphasizing development and governance, consistently factor caste equations into candidate selection, alliance-building, and campaign strategies.

At the same time, the study highlights important transformations in caste-based voting behaviour. Processes such as urbanization, rising educational levels, economic changes, and the emergence of new political narratives centered on governance and public service delivery are gradually reshaping traditional caste loyalties. Voters, particularly the younger generation, are increasingly influenced by issues such as employment, transparency, and development. These shifts suggest that while caste remains relevant, it no longer operates in isolation but interacts with a broader set of socio-economic and political factors.

It is therefore more accurate to view caste in Punjab not as a declining force, but as an evolving one. Rather than disappearing, it has adapted to changing democratic conditions and now functions in more subtle, indirect, and context-dependent ways. As scholars like Rajni Kothari have argued, caste and politics in India are mutually transformative, constantly reshaping each other within the democratic process.

In conclusion, a nuanced understanding of caste mobilization is essential for analyzing voting behaviour not only in Punjab but in Indian democracy as a whole. Recognizing the evolving nature of caste politics allows for a more comprehensive and realistic interpretation of electoral dynamics. As India continues to modernize, the challenge lies not in assuming the disappearance of caste, but in understanding how it adapts and continues to influence democratic participation in new and complex ways.

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