INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the expectations of some social theorists, India’s caste system has shown remarkable persistence in the face of industrialization. This is a stark contrast to the American experiences, where European immigrants relaxed the boundaries of their traditional social networks relatively quickly. Many explanations have been proposed for this persistence, including ongoing discrimination by upper castes benefits derived from social insurance groups, and caste based patronage from government programs. (Craig Jeffrey. 2001) This thesis will examine the relationship between caste persistence and the primary government program responsible for allocating benefits to disadvantaged groups, the reservation system. The reservation system allots a certain percentage of government jobs and seats in higher education institutions to historically disadvantaged castes, tribal groups, and other classes’ identified by state and central governments. (Dharma Kumar 1992) Reservations are similar in function to affirmative action in the United States or positive discrimination in the United Kingdom. The central question of this thesis is whether an individual is more likely to marry within his or her own caste, strengthening the caste group, if that group is eligible for benefits through the reservation system.

HISTORY OF RESERVATION

Reservations for the most depressed groups have existed in some form since the days of British rule. These groups are collectively referred to as Dalits, or untouchables, and Adivassi, or tribal groups, though they are actually composed of hundreds of distinct groups. After India achieved independence, the composition of these two groups was finalized into lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and their protection was enshrined in the Constitution. (Government Of India National Commission for Backward Classes, 2010.) The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, and reserves 22.5% of seats in institutions of higher education and government employment. (Government Of India and Ministry Of Law And Justice. The constitution of India, 2006)

The next major expansion of the reservation system was initiated on the recommendation of the Mandal commission of 1979, which was organized to address the problem of other socially and educationally backwards classes. (Bhagwan Das 2000) These groups, while not burdened with the stigma of untouchability, still suffered from a persistent lack of opportunity. The Mandal
commission recommended the creation of a third category of groups eligible for reservations, Other Backwards Classes (OBC) The commission recommended an additional 1,257 groups that should be eligible for reservations, and estimated the population of these groups at 52% of the total population of India. The commission also recommended that the total number of seats subject to reservation be increased from 22.5% to 49.5%. These recommendations were quite controversial, but were all eventually implemented between 1990 and 2006. (Evan Osborne 2001)

The commission’s recommendations reflect a common understanding of the caste system, as a natural and permanent feature of Indian society. In this view, caste is analogous to race, an immutable, biological fact. Caste classification in itself is morally neutral, and it is only the extreme inequality between castes that necessitates intervention. A British contemporary of Mandal commented on the empowering nature of caste solidarity, remarking that strong caste groups have the effect of “raising the status and prestige of the Caste as a whole and freeing its members from exploitation and victimization by other caste.” (A. P. Barnabas and Subhash C. Mehta. 1965) The Mandal commission does not recognize persistent inequality as a natural result of caste stratification, but rather as a result of structural inconsistencies imposed by years of British rule. “The British rulers produced many structural disturbances in the Hindu caste structure, and these were contradictory in nature and impact.... Thus, the various impacts of the British rule on the Hindu caste system...set the stage for the caste conflicts in modern India.” (B.P. Mandal, The Mandal Commission Report, 1980)

The reservation system proposed by the Mandal commission was not intended to decrease the influence caste, but rather to restore the natural order of the caste system by counteracting the structural inequalities imposed by British rule. Far from denouncing the caste system, the report actually justifies the reservation system by citing its consistency with the historic functioning of the caste system, where certain jobs were reserved for certain castes. The report appeals to a popular legend, in which two characters were punished for abandoning their traditional occupations. “In fact the Hindu society has always operated a very rigorous scheme of reservations, which was internalized through caste system. Eklabya lost his thumb and Shambuk his neck for their breach of caste rules of reservation.” (B.P. Mandal. The Mandal Commission Report, 1980)
The idea that strong caste identification is not mutually exclusive with egalitarian principals was not unique to the Mandal commission. John Harris writes of the people of Tamil Nadu, that “social relationships are still structured hierarchically, but in the minds of individuals, it appears that a form of society can be envisaged in which hierarchy would disappear, and yet caste identities would still persist.” (John Harriss 1979)

The Mandal commission’s proposal for a system of positive discrimination, then was consistent with their underlying beliefs on the nature of the caste system. These beliefs, however, are not universal. Indeed, as shall be explored in the next section, much of the conflict surrounding reservation policy can be traced to different beliefs about the nature of the caste system, rather than simple disagreements on policy prescriptions Characterization of Caste Many economic phenomena spring from path-dependent economic processes, which implies that it is necessary to make a careful study of the historical past of an economic phenomenon to help explain its present. In other words, we must be good economic historians to be good economic theorists. (Rajeeve H. Dehejia and Vivek H. Dehejia 1993) Any attempt to identify the complex interactions between reservations and caste identity must begin with a strong conceptual understanding of caste. In the following section, I will present the major theories concerning the nature of the caste system and its source of its lasting influence in India.

**Horizontal Characterization**

In the years since the Mandal commission report, caste has been increasingly understood as a form of traditional social identity, separate and distinct from race. This view rejects the existence of any fundamental organizing principle, such as race, class, or hereditary occupation. Instead caste groups are defined by arbitrary symbols and rituals that exist primarily to define the identity of each caste relative to outside castes. Dipankar Gupta defines the caste system as “a form of differentiation wherein the constituent units of the system justify endogamy on the basis of putative biological differences which are semaphored by the ritualization of multiple social practices.” (Dipankar Gupta.) The caste equilibrium is thus sustained by the loyalty of individuals to their own caste above all others, rather than through a fixed hierarchical power structure. This view of caste can be characterized as horizontal, as compliance is enforced through mutual threats by peers. An article from the Hindustan Times in 1961 illustrates this horizontal enforcement:
Everyone of the hundreds of sections into which this nation is divided suffers from
discrimination and every group practices discrimination against all others.

*Vertical Characterization*

The vertical approach supposes a strict hierarchy with top-down enforcement, such as that found
in a racially segregated society. Vertical theories of caste include the race-based theory of
Chakraberty or the purity-based theory of Louis Dumont. Biological and anthropological
evidence provide more support for the horizontal formulation of caste over the vertical
formulation. The theory of a racial basis for caste has been thoroughly refuted by modern
biological science. A recent study by Harvard Medical School examined genetic markers across
caste groups. The study found evidence of distinct biological markers from successive waves of
immigrating groups, which is superficially consistent with a racial foundation of caste. The
markers, however, were mixed across castes making identification of specific castes or tribes via
genetic markers impossible. In other words, though distinct genetic groups could be identified,
there was no correlation between these groups and observed caste groups. The authors concluded
that the caste system evolved independently from the immigration of successive genetically-
distinct groups. The same conclusion is reached by several other studies in Biology and
Anthropology. One of the most influential conceptualizations of the caste system was developed
by Louis Dumont in the 1960s. Dumont’s hierarchical characterization of caste is superficially
consistent with the public manifestation of caste dynamics, but does not accurately reflect the
views of non-dominant castes. According to Dumont, castes are aligned according to their
relative purity or impurity, along a single axis. This alignment is known and accepted by all
castes. The exact structure of Dumont’s hierarchy is never stated explicitly, though it is assumed
that all those within the

system are familiar with the structure and know their place within it. Brahmin, the traditional
specialists in religious rituals, is at the top of Dumont’s hierarchy. The idea that Brahmin are the
most pure caste is consistent with most publicly expressed views on the caste hierarchy, but this
particular alignment is only fully accepted by Brahmin. Other castes generally subscribe to a set
of beliefs in which they are as pure or purer than any other caste. One low-caste, the Kuricchan
of Malabar, will ritually purify their homes if it is polluted by the entry of a Brahmin, and others
refuse to eat with Brahmins. Even the Meghavals or Dheds, whose traditional occupation is
carrying carrion, and are thus very low on the purity hierarchy, refuse to dine with castes that are publicly considered more pure. Caste claims to superiority are often based on seemingly arbitrary distinctions, with no clear appeal to purity. The Kaibartta, a traditional fishing caste, consider themselves superior to the Malos, another fishing caste, on the grounds that the Kaibartta “always pass the netting needle from the above downwards, working from left to right; while the Malo passes it from below upwards, forming meshes from right to left.” Sociologist Dipankar Gupta remarks, perhaps with some hyperbole, that “there are probably as many hierarchies in practice as there are castes.” Typically, non-ruling castes attribute their depressed status to historical misfortune or trickery on the part of the current ruling caste. According to the dominant caste theory of M.N. Srinivas, dominant castes impose their private beliefs on those within their territory. The publicly accepted hierarchy, thus, is determined by the ruling group, rather than the ruling group being determined by a publicly accepted hierarchy as Dumont’s theory would suggest. The horizontal view of caste, as a flexible system of self-differentiating groups rather than a strict vertical hierarchy with a well-defined power structure, challenges researchers to explain the persistence of the caste system in the face of industrialization. A 1995 country report commissioned by the US Library of Congress, states, “One irony of Indian politics is that its modern secular democracy has enhanced rather than reduced the political salience of traditional forms of social identity such as caste.” Identifying the mechanisms that have sustained caste identification through industrialization will clarify the theoretical relationship between reservations and caste persistence. These mechanisms are explored in the next section.

Mandal commission report

The Mandal Commission was established in India in 1979 by the Janata Party government under Prime Minister Morarji Desai with a mandate to "identify the socially or educationally backward. It was headed by Indian parliamentarian B.P. Mandal to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination, and used eleven social, economic, and educational indicators to determine backwardness. In 1980, the commission's report affirmed the affirmative action practice under Indian law whereby members of lower castes (known as Other Backward Classes (OBC), Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)) were given exclusive access to a certain portion of government jobs and slots in public
universities, and recommended changes to these quotas, increasing them by 27% to 49.5%. Mobilization on caste lines had followed the political empowerment of ordinary citizens by the constitution of free India that allowed common people to politically assert themselves through the right to vote.

Criteria to identify OBC

The Mandal Commission adopted various methods and techniques to collect the necessary data and evidence. In order to identify who qualified as an "other backward class," the commission adopted eleven criteria which could be grouped under three major headings: social, educational and economic.

Social

- Classes considered as socially backward by others.
- Classes which mainly depend on manual labor for their livelihood.
- Classes where at least 25 per cent females and 10 per cent males above the state average get married at an age below 17 years in rural areas and at least 10 per cent females and 5 per cent males do so in urban areas.
- Classes where participation of females in work is at least 25 per cent above the state average.

Educational

- Classes where the number of children in the age group of 5–15 years who have never attended school is at least 25 percent above the state average.
- Classes where the rate of student drop-out in the age group of 5–15 years is at least 25 percent above the state average.
- Classes amongst whom the proportion of matriculates is at least 25 per cent below the state average.

Economic

- Classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the state average.
- Classes where the number of families living in kuccha houses is at least 25 per cent above the state average.
• Classes where the source of drinking water is beyond a half kilometer away for more than 50 per cent of the households.
• Classes where the number of households having taken consumption loans is at least 25 per cent above the state average.

Weighing indicators

The above three groups are not of equal importance for the purpose, separate weightage was given to indicators in each group. All the Social indicators were given a weightage of 3 points each, educational indicators were given a weightage of 2 points each and economic indicators were given a weightage of 1 point each. Economic, in addition to Social and Educational Indicators, were considered important as they directly flowed from social and educational backwardness. This also helped to highlight the fact that socially and educationally backward classes are economically backward also.

Thus, the Mandal Commission judged classes on a scale from 0 to 22. These 11 indicators were applied to all the castes covered by the survey for a particular state. As a result of this application, all castes which had a score of 50% (i.e. 11 points) were listed as socially and educationally backward and the rest were treated as 'advanced'.

Observations

The commission estimated that 54% of the total population (excluding SCs and STs), belonging to 3,743 different castes and communities, were ‘backward’. Figures of caste-wise population are not available beyond. So the commission used 1931 census data to calculate the number of OBCs. The population of Hindu OBCs was derived by subtracting from the total population of Hindus, the population of SC and ST and that of forward Hindu castes and communities, and it worked out to be 52 per cent. Assuming that roughly the proportion of OBCs amongst non-Hindus was of the same order as amongst the Hindus, the population of non-Hindu OBCs was considered as 52 per cent.

Assuming that a child from an advanced class family and that of a backward class family had the same intelligence at the time of their birth, it is obvious that owing to vast differences in social, cultural and environmental factors, the former will beat the latter by lengths in any competitive
field. Even if a advanced class child's intelligence quotient was much lower compared to the child of backward class, chances are that the former will still beat the latter in any competition where selection is made on the basis of 'merit'.

In fact, what we call 'merit' in an elitist society is an amalgam of native endowments and environmental privileges. A child from an advanced class family and that of a backward class family are not 'equals' in any fair sense of the term and it will be unfair to judge them by the same yard-stick. The conscience of a civilised society and the dictates of social justice demand that 'merit' and 'equality' are not turned into a fetish and the element of privilege is duly recognised and discounted for when 'unequal' are made to run the same race.[

To place the amalgams of open caste conflicts in proper historical context, the study done by Tata institute of Social Sciences Bombay observes. “The British rulers produced many structural disturbances in the Hindu caste structure, and these were contradictory in nature and impact …. Thus, the various impacts of the British rule on the Hindu caste system, viz., near monopolisation of jobs, education and professions by the literati castes, the Western concepts of equality and justice undermining the Hindu hierarchical dispensation, the phenomenon of Sanskritization, genteel reform movement from above and militant reform movements from below, emergence of the caste associations with a new role set the stage for the caste conflicts in modern India. Two more ingredients which were very weak in the British period, viz., politicisation of the masses and universal adult franchise, became powerful moving forces after the Independence.

Recommendations

The report of the commission was submitted in December 1980. The following are the recommendations as stated in the report:

It may appear the upliftment of Other Backward Classes is part of the larger national problem of the removal of mass poverty. This is only partially correct. The deprivation of OBCs is a very special case of the larger national issue: here the basic question is that of social and educational backwardness and poverty is only a direct consequence of these two crippling caste-based handicaps. As these handicaps are embedded in our social structure, their removal will require
far – reaching structural changes. No less important will be changes in the perception of the problems of OBCs by the ruling classes of the country.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In the present study an attempt has is made to assess and evaluate the reservation system as has been promulgated by Indian constitution.

To know the status of cast system in India

To know that the how the effect of castism in political systems

To know the reservation system in India in brief

To know the status of other back words class and their political background

To know the mandal commission report for other back ground class castes

**SCOPE & LIMITATION**

The reservation policy has led too mobilization of the backwards class. it has also changed the very nature of policies by caste to the centre of politics politicalazation and mobilization. No study of politics in India will be complete without looking at the reservation issue in a dynamics way. Although several studies relating to the caste system and its interface with politics of reservation of polity.The manifesto of political parties, campaign strategies content of electioneering reflect an even more keen sence of caste sensibility the mandal issue