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## POLITICAL MOBILIZATION PROCESS OF BACKWARD CLASSES IN KARNATAKA

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### Abstract:

*Though the powerful contradictions are existed between social, economic and political system vs. the backward castes, the mobilization has got fragmented due to internal contradictions like heterogeneous character and social stratification, class differences and political accommodation of few backward castes elite to prevent alternative political platform and to marginalize the majority of backward classes. They often violently agitate for their legitimate share in economic opportunities, educational privileges and political power. Widespread collective mobilization centered around such interests has led to organized social movements with defined ideologies and leadership, which have brought significant structural and organizational changes in the societies from where they originate.*

### KEYWORDS:

Mobilization , Backward , Dynamics And Political , Political Ideology.

### INTRODUCTION

Backward classes have now moved somewhat to the center stage in contemporary politics. In the past, they were pushed outside the central political arena and excluded from the power game of acquiring offices of governance. Now, they can no longer be ignored and taken for granted. Not that they have gained all that they strived for, but their voice cannot be throttled. No political party functioning in parliamentary politics, nor those who affirm revolutionary politics can afford to ignore them. Besides, asserting their dignity and identity, they raise questions on the present socio-economic structure and cultural ethos. The present article is an attempt at analyzing the genesis, growth, dynamics and political, social and cultural consequences of movement among the backward sections of the society in Karnataka. The nature of the politics of backward classes and the dilemmas and challenges that it faces in the contemporary politics mobilization of Karnataka.

### BACKWARD CLASSES MOBILIZATION PROCESS IN MODERN KARNATAKA:

In the initial years of backward class movement in Karnataka the dominant communities such as Vokkaligas and Lingayats primarily benefited from it and secured a lion share in representation and employment. Other smaller backward caste groups could not make any dent into the public resources due to their feeble economic and other structural disadvantages they caught in. However, dalits were soon to drift away from this movement to form an autonomous identity of their own. Later, the non-dominant backward castes and minorities also withdrew from the non-Brahmin movement led by dominant groups especially in 1960's. Attempts were made to bring all oppressed groups together. But, resentment among non-dominant groups failed to bring an immediate result.

In 1972, Devaraj Urs, a leader from tiny Urs community became the Chief Minister. He was the first leader from non-Lingayat, non-Vokkaliga group to occupy this office in Karnataka. Urs gave a new political alignment to marginalized social groups by building a socio-political front led by backward classes, supported by minorities and Dalits in Karnataka. When Sri D. Devaraj Urs became the chief minister of Mysore state, the stage was set for a radical change in the nature of political mobilization of backward classes. The shift from dominance of dominant caste in state politics to the backward class Dalit and minorities' combination has been generally attributed to the ability of Devaraj Urs to organize those politically marginalized groups<sup>1</sup>. As mentioned above the stage was already set. The backward classes were increasingly becoming disenchanted with the political developments, which left them no space to play an important role in self-determination. Secondly, the socio-economic changes that were taking place as a result of democrat politics contributed to the development of political consciousness among backward classes. Thirdly, the land reforms, though brought about in a small measure, introduced earlier during the regime of Kadidal Manjappa, changed the structures of rural economy in terms of land holding. The beneficiaries were mainly peasants from backward classes. It provided them with a leverage needed to organize themselves as political groups.

The decision of Devaraj Urs to appoint backward classes commission and the subsequent implementation of the recommendation of the report no doubt, did bring about significant changes in the nature of caste politics in Karnataka. The backward classes and Dalits became a force to be reckoned with in state politics. No political party could hope to face elections successfully without accommodating these groups hereafter. But at the same time it did not put an end to the dominance of dominant castes in state politics altogether<sup>2</sup>. The Vakkaligas and Lingayats continued to get a significant share in the composition of state legislature and also in the cabinet. This happened for the following reasons.

1. The backward classes remained an amorphous group of various castes and communities without any strong political ideology. They were brought together with only one motto i.e. fighting against dominant castes.

2. Though, caste system was considered as the source for hierarchical social structure resulting in exploitation of castes that found themselves in the lower rung of the structure, they could not find an alternative political platform to fight against the system. Caste was accepted as the primary identity for the backward classes and Dalits to rally around to fight against the evils of the very caste system. There was and still has not been any attempt to resolve this internal contradiction.

3. As Prof. V.K. Nataraj has pointed out that the nature of electoral politics and the primary of caste identity have placed the backward class leaders in a peculiar situation. The emergence of leadership in any caste among backward classes is seen with apprehension by other castes that come under the same category.

The primary of caste identity in politics given the number of caste groups could only result in social coalition of different caste that are supposed to pursue antagonistic interest for gaining political power through electoral politics. Each political party has to work out a strategy of coalition of the combination of dominant castes, backward classes, Dalits and minorities to enter into successful electoral battle.

On the other hand, Urs took initiative in the formation of the Backward Class Federation under the presidentship of his own brother Kemparaj Urs.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, he brought together all marginalized groups in a common platform. In October 1973, a South Zone Conference of Backward Classes, S.C.s, S.T.s, and Minorities was convened in Bangalore. The conference was inaugurated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and presided over by Devaraj Urs. <sup>4</sup> A demand was made at this conference for 'social justice' for these marginalized groups who continued to be outside the mainstream of national progress. <sup>5</sup>

The 'backward class-minority-dalit constituency', built by Devaraj Urs failed in sustaining its pre-eminence in Karnataka politics in post-Devaraj Urs period. In 1980's these depressed groups had to give way for the dominant caste groups to recapture the central position in the regional politics of Karnataka. In between 1980 and 1989, the ruling dominant class leadership tried to undercut the socio-political edge won by Backward Classes over other ground as well. Consequently, even if the backward classes fared well in 1989 elections and succeeded in securing the office of the chief ministership from 1990 to 1994, they failed to leave their impression on state politics.

Of course, the congress party attempted to revive the socio-political alliance of 1970s. Though, in the beginning the party elected a Lingayat Chief Minister, it soon shifted to backward class leadership. In 1990, S. Bangarappa a leader belonging to backward Idiga caste from Shimoga district rose to the position of chief minister and in 1992, M. Veerappa Moily, a leader from tiny devadiga community of coastal Karnataka became the chief minister. But, backward class leadership in Karnataka from 1990 to 1994 could not bring any remarkable change in favour of depressed classes as was done by Devaraj Urs in 1970s. Of course, they continued most of the programmes and policies initiated by Urs regime. But they could not

edge out the interest of the forward classes.

The Janata Dal ministers headed by Vokkaliga leader H.D. Deve Gowda and Lingayat leader J.H. Patel from 1994 to 1999 tried to rectify its tilt towards dominant castes by recruiting more OBC members into their government. Out of 37 members of Deve Gowda ministry there were 7 SCs, 8 OBCs, 3 Muslims and one ST.<sup>7</sup> In spite of such attempts to maintain the social balance, the Janata regime failed to project any front line leader from OBC or Dalit category.

Though in the early days of the formation of government in 1994, the Janata Dal showed a considerate approach towards the backward class constituency, after the Lok Sabha poll in 1996, the dominant communities and castes began to wield pivotal power and influence. This development resulted in the gradual alienation of the non-dominant backward classes, minorities, Dalits from this party. The polarization on caste lines in ruling Janata Dal came to the fore when Laloo Prasad Yadav rebelled against the national leadership of Janata Dal. State level non-dominant castes leaders in Karnataka used the occasion to express their displeasure at the manner in which a section from among dominant castes appeared to control the government machinery at the state level. The clear erosion of support for Janata Dal was obvious from the results of by elections to the state assembly held between 1996 and 1998 and in the Lok Sabha polls in 1998. Suspension of Ramakrishna Hegde from Janata Dal in 1996 and formation of Lokshakti Party by him further reinforced caste polarization in Karnataka. The BJP entered into an alliance with Lokshakti and made significant inroads into the backward class and Dalit constituency leading to political fragmentation among these sections. The data emerging from the surveys conducted by CSDS, New Delhi during 1996 and 1998 Lok Sabha polls brings out this tendency.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the above development the constituency got diluted in terms of its political presence. The backward class leadership, which still wielded some clout, knows that if they were divided the way they were, they would be nowhere in the political scene of Karnataka. Their response came in two forms. On the one hand, they reorganized the Backward Classes Federation under a new name "Karnataka Rajya Hindulida Jatigala Vokkuta", or "Karnataka State Backward Classes United Forum". On the other, they attempted to revive a larger socio-political constituency of backward class, minorities and Dalits, which was a ruling alliance, in 1970's. This front was named as AHINDA.<sup>9</sup>

## II. THE EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF AHINDA IN KARNATAKA BACKWARD

### Class Mobilization:

On 20-8-1998, on the eve of the birthday of Devaraj Urs, a large conference of minorities, Backward classes and Dalits was held in Kolar. Prof. Nanjundaswamy, A.J. Sudhakar, Afroz Pasha, Dr. Govinda Raju, Ramachandra, Dr. Saroja, Lakshmi pati, Dr. Lakshmi pati Babu were the organizers of the conference. C.S. Dwarakanath, a backward class ideologue and Bangalore based advocate also contributed in organizing this conference. A host of Dalit, Backward Class and Minority leaders attended the conference. Important among them were R.L. Jalappa, Siddharamaiah, Dharam Singh, S. Bangarappa and others.<sup>10</sup>

It was in this conference that AHINDA movement was formally launched. The main aim of the forum was to keep the socio-political alliance forged by Devaraj Urs in 1970's alive as an option before Karnataka. Although this forum could not become a formidable force, of course, it has created a stir among sections of deprived groups. This movement, though conceptually strong, could not be carried further in the absence of any organizational base.

The Congress Party came to power in the assembly election of 1996. A prominent Vokkaliga leader from Mandya district, S.M. Krishna became the chief minister. The Backward Classes of Karnataka began to feel that they were denied of leadership position once again. Consequently, in the year 2000 they reorganized the Backward Classes Federation under a new name Karnataka State Backward Classes United Forum. The forum not only attempted to bring all the backward caste associations under one roof, but also intended to provide a platform for all deprived social groups of Karnataka in general.

Emergence of Coalition Politics and Backward Classes Movement:

The result of 2004 elections created a hung assembly in Karnataka. In a bid to keep BJP out of power, the Congress and Janata Dal (S) formed a post-poll coalition and rose to power under the leadership of Dharam Singh, a leader belonging to tiny Rajput community from Gulbarga district. Though, Janata Dal (S) projected Siddaramaiah, a leader from backward Kuruba community for chief ministership. The post-poll developments compelled him to function as Deputy Chief Minister for the second time. It has aggrieved the backward class leadership in general and Kurubas in particular across party affiliations. The dissatisfied leaders of the Congress Party exploited the situation to play their cards against the Janata Dal (S) supreme Deve Gowda who was deemed as instrumental behind this. However, the backward class

constituency taken separately will not be a match to the dominant caste politics in Karnataka.

There are two explanations regarding the motives behind AHINDA. Firstly, it is a challenge to the continuing dominant caste hegemony in Karnataka politics. Secondly, it is a non-political social movement aimed at pursuing the cause of social justice to the oppressed classes. In conclusion, following are the important observations can be made. Firstly, AHINDA, as it is reinvented today is a response to 'catch all' kind of politics pursued by the dominant community leadership in 1980's and 1990's. The marginalized sections of the society are all out to rise to the central stage in Karnataka politics and produce an autonomous constituency of their own. Though such an attempt was made in 1998, due to the organizational constraints the movement was suffering it became a damp squib. However, the Karnataka state backward classes united forum was reorganized this time to become the forerunner of AHINDA movement.

Secondly, in spite of repeated pronouncements about the 'a political' nature of the conventions, its political messages are clearly evident. In all these conventions, Siddaramaiah has been projected as next chief minister comparing him to late backward class leader Devaraj Urs. Even the Congress, JD (U) and BJP leader who attended the convention endorsed this view. Paradoxically, the Congress and BJP did not take action against their leaders supporting Siddaramaiah. But, JD(S) ministers were sacked for their participation in the convention. JD (S) termed of as a 'political conspiracy' hatched by Congress leaders to tarnish the image of Deve Gowda and Dharam Singh.

Thirdly, the AHINDA constituency in spite of its attempts to bring all groups together is not free from fragility, and contradictions. First of all, some prominent Dalit organizations ruled out supporting AHINDA movement launched by certain leaders.<sup>11</sup> It is alleged that there have been several instances where certain politicians used backward classes, Dalits and minorities to further their political interests. Some minority leaders also charge the AHINDA leaders of creating unrest among the people and poisoning their minds on caste and religious lines.<sup>12</sup> There is yet, another suggestion that minority group be dropped from the AHINDA.<sup>13</sup> However, AHINDA leaders categorically reject that suggestions saying that all oppressed sections join hands to fight against injustice.<sup>14</sup>

AHINDA is a recent attempt to mobilize backward class, minorities and Dalits as a viable political group against the stronghold of dominant castes. Although, AHINDA has not come out with a clear-cut ideological stance. It has not yet carved out its political strategy either. Nevertheless, there are certain assumptions on which all those want to build AHINDA as an alternative political groups work on. They are;

- a) All political parties use backward classes only as electoral strategy and not with any real concern to their upliftment,
- b) The electoral politics has hopelessly divided the backward classes,
- c) These developments have helped dominant castes continue their dominance in politics,
- d) The only viable alternative in the interest of the backward classes, minorities and Dalits is to bring them together on a common platform, and
- e) The recent development in politics has provided a conducive atmosphere to build such an alternative.

All these assumptions in turn based on yet another assumption that backward class politics has drifted away from its original path set out during the period of Devaraj Urs. Continue in the present context. The answer appears to be in the negative. First one has to look into the veracity of these assumptions to find out the future course of AHINDA. The question before us is whether all those conditions prevalent during the period of Devaraj Urs continue in the present context. The answer appears to be in the negative. First of all in 1970 backward classes, minorities and Dalits could be brought under one umbrella as they all shared a common goal i.e. putting an end to the political dominance of dominant castes. The situation today is different. It does not mean that the dominant castes have been completely subdued. But their hold over power has significantly been reduced. The altitude of the dominant caste leaders has also undergone a sea change. They have now come to accept the fact that their survival in politics depends upon their willingness to share power with the backward classes.

Secondly, political mobilization of various castes within backward classes has helped some of these castes to throw up leaders from among them. This has had its impact in two ways ;

- 1) There are now number of leaders from backward classes competing not only with dominant castes but among themselves, and
- 2) Gaining political power and effective participation in politics has not been uniform among various castes within the backward class. There is an apprehension that major benefits go only to some castes among them. This has created divisions among themselves.

Thirdly, Dalits have consolidated their hold in a significant manner since 1970. The successful

entry into power politics has created divisions and dissension among its different social groups or sub-castes. The left and right division in one such. The Dalit organization especially DSS being split to various splinter groups exhibiting allegiance to different political parties is yet another. Fourthly, the nature of electoral politics has placed certain constraints among leaders of backward classes, Dalits and minorities, which runs centrally to the aspirations of AHINDA leaders. The success in electoral politics depends upon politically prudent strategy of building a coalition of different castes in each constituency.

The identification of an electoral candidate too strongly with her/his own caste proves disastrous in terms of her/his success in the election. This is true in case of leaders of all castes. This is the reason why the reason language of caste politics has changed radically since 1970. No leader can afford to take the risk of antagonizing any other castes. All these change have placed the leaders of AHINDA in a dilemma. The success of AHINDA demands that backward classes, Dalits and minorities should forge a common alliance. But then the question is how to resolve the two major contradictions between them and among each group. Yet another dilemma is how to build a politically viable alternative group and at the same time remove the constraints of electoral politics. In other word how to construct rhetoric against dominant caste leadership and yet not antagonize the voters belonging to these castes.

#### CONCLUSION:

The developments which took place during 1967 in the Indian politics clearly throw the light on the issues relating to the polarization of Backward classes. For the purpose of understanding the nature of political polarization of backward castes in Karnataka, it is necessary to analyse the changing nature of political power. As a result of mobilization and polarization of backward castes in the northern states in India, the backward caste movement in Karnataka has spread and strengthened. Particularly, the election held in 1967, congress lost in many states. As the congress used to enjoy the majority earlier in these states this was the first time that the Congress lost the power in many states. It was due to the mobilization of people based on castes. It is evident that in north India, the backward caste people were organized and were mobilized by the Socialist Party, Jansangh and other parties based on the issues relating to the welfare of weaker sections.

The polarization of backward castes in north India, in Tamil Nadu and in few other states resulted in bringing a lot of changes in the organization and working of Congress party. These developments also resulted in the split of Congress party. In 1969 there was a split in the Congress party into two Congress (I) and Congress (O); As a result, at this movement realizing the reality the president of Congress (I) contributed very immensely for the political polarization of backward castes in Karnataka.

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