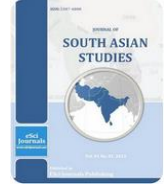




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CASTE POLITICS AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN INDIA: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the nature, distinction and functioning of identity formation of a particular caste, viz. Brahmin caste, relating to various institutions, in North and South India. Identity formation of any community is juxtaposed with the cultural, political and psychological consciousness of other community that is situated diametrically opposite to it. Social movements need identity for empowerment which is required in order to mobilize political claims. Low caste social movements in India are a case in point, although the degree of its perfection has not been same throughout the length and breadth of India. This study does not try to enquire into the path that had already been treated by academicians since the inception of the low caste movements, but attempts to introspect the grid of 'identity formation' of upper castes, particularly the Brahmin caste, in opposition to the formation of the identity of the low-castes in India. The present case study rests on the analysis of lived human experiences by means of on-site fieldwork and some combination of (participant) observation, (in-depth) interviews, and/or document analysis. The result is there for other empirical research to investigate further into other domain of enquiry in social science.

Keywords: Brahmin caste, Comparative method, Mahalwari, Ryatwari, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh(U.P.).

INTRODUCTION

At first sight, caste seems to be a phenomenon, which, if not simple, is at least acquiescent to explanation and description; yet, as the immense number of writings on the subject and their different points of view show, this is not the case. Rather, caste is a complex group of phenomena that is not only connected with, but the basic part of the social organization of most of South Asia. The reason that there is to date no widely accepted theory of its origin, or even a universally accepted description of caste, is, that it has no single origin and no single form. This is equally true for all the castes across the length and breadth of India. On this reading, the present paper tries to put the point across, that (a) the caste/caste group is neither simply a bounded set of institutions that can be unilaterally controlled by any contesting groups, nor a dispersed set of technologies of customs that operate independently of overarching power relations. Rather, the caste is understood as an institutional

ensemble that is structured 'in and through past strategies and struggles' in such a way as to provide different collective political agents – for example, social movements – with 'differential access to the state apparatuses and differential opportunities to realize specific effects in the course of state intervention' (Jessop, 1982; Jessop, 2008). Informed by this perspective, the paper will proceed through comparative historical-sociological analyses and fine grained empirical investigations of the multiplicity of ways in which Brahmin castes in India have sought to build strategies for safeguarding their interest in opposition to subaltern empowerment through the state and political processes. (b) The paper will explore the forms of political skill, knowledge, and consciousness that social movements have generated among the so-called dominant groups, and the extent to which absence of any pan-Indian mobilization from below have enabled these groups to articulate and pursue demands for space and recognition. (c) Finally, by exploring the outcomes of the oppositional arena of interest articulation the paper will seek to gauge the extent to which the mobilization of

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Brahmin caste can be said to have democratized Indian democracy and conceptualize the enablement and constraints that have shaped and continue to shape the trajectories of political space in India.

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A comparative 'method' or 'approach' in political science is a widely debatable matter. The debate is centered on the methodology of the subject which is more concerned with the 'how' rather than the 'why' aspect of the issue or topic of discussion. From the time of Behavioral Revolution in social science till today, social scientists, especially comparativists, put heavier emphasis on methodology with vital stress on scientific aspirations and deep-rooted humanistic tradition. It is a balancing act for any social scientists to maintain the values mooted by the humanistic tradition in one hand and to keep the scientific endeavor in her research process on the other. In order to seek a precise methodology in studying an issue from a comparative view point, many new researchers like us, get completely confuse with the absence of any strict definition of methodology in comparative 'method' or 'approach'. There are some methods used in the social science arena which are known to be from natural sciences'. For instance, experimental method and statistical methods are there to name a few. The poser is there for any social scientist whether those methods can be conjured to construe the domain which is not a laboratory but human emotions which is difficult to construct and organize into a systemic conjecture. The poser was answered long ago in 1960s by Lipzhart that, "the comparative method is not the equivalent of the experimental method but only a very imperfect substitute. A clear awareness of the limitations of the comparative method is necessary but need not be disabling, because, as we shall see, these weaknesses can be minimized. The "conscious thinker" in comparative politics should realize the limitations of the comparative method, but he should also recognize and take advantage of its possibilities" (Lijphart, 1971). For a 'conscious thinker' the choice now narrows down to some of the most pertinent problems of a comparative analysis: First, to facilitate and concentrate upon the range of the specific number of site/sites for the study must be chosen with careful consideration. In this scenario, we have deliberately chosen "a single-site study [that] refers to research carried out in one relatively bounded setting (e.g., a governmental organization, a community)" (Yanow, Schwartz-Shea,

Freitas, 2008). Secondly, the choice of variables, both dependent and independent, is a qualifying factor. It is because the quantification of variables is an important aspect in these kinds of studies as they mark the pattern and nature of the work.

The present study seeks to analyze the nature, distinction and functioning of identity formation of a particular caste, viz. Brahmin caste, relating to various institutions, in North and South India. Identity formation of any community is juxtaposed with the cultural, political and psychological consciousness of other community that is situated diametrically opposite to it. Social movements need identity for empowerment which is required in order to mobilize political claims. Low caste social movements in India are a case in point, although the degree of its perfection has not been same throughout the length and breadth of India. This study does not try to enquire into the path that had already been treated by academicians since the inception of the low caste movements, but attempts to introspect the grid of 'identity formation' of upper castes, particularly the Brahmin caste, in opposition to the formation of the identity of the low-castes in India.

The paper tries to cover both of those above mentioned criteria i.e., site for the study and variables related to it. The choice is an act of conscious decision making. Both Uttar Pradesh (from here on U.P.) and Tamil Nadu have three important factors in common regarding caste-base politics as mentioned below;

- First, U.P. and Tamil Nadu had seen the 'symbolic' act of defiance of the established 'Varnashrama' order with the formal introduction of caste based politics for the last 20-21 years in India (Merhotra, 2006).
- Secondly, in both the states, this act of defiance led to movements which have had a massive social and political mobilization of deprived castes and Other Backwards Castes.
- Thirdly, this was only possible because both these two states have a higher than average share of population that are SC- not that much higher, but certainly higher than the national average. In this specific context, we would like to venture into the political and economic world of the Brahmins.

Apart from that, these two universes specifically, Madurai and Benares share a common socio-economic pattern. These two districts of two different states of India have their own story of decaying small industries

like that of Handloom of Madurai and silk-weaving of Benares which are very much an important factor for this study. The economic decay may have some kind of 'spill-over' effect over the Brahmin caste, which needs further introspection. The most significant point is that, these universes are chosen specifically for their richness in Hindu religio-cultural tradition and heritage. The signs of erstwhile/present dominant castes are available in these two universes in the form of religious institutions (as in temples of these places).

Technique: Keeping all these aforesaid factors in mind, it has been tried to conceptualize the Research design for our study. Hence, the present case study rests on the analysis of lived human experiences by means of on-site fieldwork and some combination of (participant) observation, (in-depth) interviews, and/or document analysis.

Area Study: For this study, six locations have been selected. Among them, four were rural areas (villages) and two were urban locations (towns/cities). The choice of the locations was based on the population profile but they did not constitute as a controlled variable. Demographical profile, literary and academic know-how and some informal consultation with some of the acquaintances were checked with, to reach at the conclusion about the decision regarding the locations. The population of the study was randomly selected and hence not a controlled one. The structure and the pattern of the population of the universe of the study had a definite design in order to achieve certain pre-ordained objectives. The population was routinely interviewed within a span of two weeks in each of the sites without giving any break in the work schedule. This was consciously done in order to maintain two things: (a) the respondents will have minimum time among themselves 'to construct' answer for the interview schedule, and (b) to wind up the work in minimum time possible, as this kind of study often seems to have given birth to many speculations and strifes among the respondents. In order to avoid the above mentioned hindrances, the study had a structured interview schedule consisting of the same questionnaire for the entire group in a specific region, i.e. North or South.

Data Collection through Interviews and Sampling: With the aid of the structured interview schedule, we interviewed over 200 (both from Madurai & Benares district) respondents selected as random sample of different groups we considered important for the

research topic. The time spent in each of the villages and town surveyed was, in keeping with the nature of the investigation, rather short. The time actually spent in interviewing ranged from only around half an hour, in an exceedingly simple and small village, to four hours in a moderately populated village consisting about 1100-1200 inhabitants. The average interview lasted nearly three hours. All interviews were conducted through interviewersⁱⁱ. Interviews were most commonly conducted with the village headmen. Alternatively, some other prominent individual, usually a member of the panchayatⁱⁱⁱ, or the village patwari, or school teacher or members of caste organizations were selected. In some cases, prominent or knowledgeable members of various castes and some remarkably well informed members were being asked to assist in the interview. Their presence and assistance generally enhanced the accuracy and completeness of the responses, without influencing the outcome of the interview process. In a large or dispersed village, the information sought was obtained by interviews conducted separately in different wards or hamlets. In general, the co-operation of the villagers was exceedingly gratifying. The researcher of this study notes how, in the initial stages of the fieldwork, he sought to discern the values held by the residents of the village, their perception of the alternatives available to them, and the beliefs that shaped their behavior. Hence, at the primary course of the interview period, an attitude of suspicion was discernible, but it was dispelled by an official letter giving assurances that the study wished to know no one's name, that we would not inquire about the amount of land owned, that we had no connection with the revenue authorities, and that after completing the interview we would have no intention to re-visit the concerned villages in some time to come. But memories would be hard to erase in some distant time.

DATA ANALYSIS OF STUDY AREAS: TAMIL NADU AND UTTAR PRADESH

While weaving down all the threads those were lying down in the form of primary and secondary evidences, some interesting observations sprang up. Let us look into those observations that were found in the study into two different categories. First one would comprise similarities and the second would be the differences among the two regions of the study area.

Similarities: There are some points of resemblance between the trajectories of Tamil Nadu and Uttar

Pradesh^{iv} which will be viewed from three different dimensions.

Population Demography: From the point of view of population demography, in both the cases, the likelihood of departure from the village is higher for working-age (21-35) men of rural Brahmin population who are settled into urban or semi-urban centers. They are more attracted to secure jobs than youths, and amortized the costs of job searches better than the old men. In addition, when people leave, they usually aim for towns where others have settled before them, thus lowering the costs of job searches and increasing the return from migration. It may be within the district or to some other districts, wherever the livelihood opportunities are better or more attractive. Their most preferable jobs are white-collared employments or professional services. The services may include managerial supervision, clerks or any other administrative jobs. This trend is mostly seen among the middle or low-middle class of the Brahmin population in both the regions.

For the low class Brahmin population, who do not have control over any form of land, it is the unorganized sector which attracts them the most. From daily wage laborer to road side make-shift food stall are quite common for this class. For a decent living, they keep both the options open i.e. both in the rural and the urban areas. It is during the favorable season when they take active part in the agricultural productivity, but their participation mainly revolves around the non-farming activities. For instance, to keep and maintain the stock, to maintain a liaison between the trader and the buyer, supervision over the daily farm cultivators are some of his activities in the rural areas. It is as opined by Currie, "... caste and class as mutually exclusive phenomena, reflecting "traditional" society on the one hand, and "industrial" society on the other" (Currie, 2006). For the female population, it is not the same story. The female Brahmin populations in both urban and rural regions are still bounded by the social customs and rigidities. Although they are provided with educational opportunities but settling outside village periphery for job or job opportunity is strictly prohibited. In both the cases, the female is being prepared for marriage after the completion of education at the higher secondary level or graduation at the most. In case of marriage, low class Brahmin populations of both the rural and urban setting do not have rigid notions about endogamy. Contrarily, the middle class and upper class families of both the

regions are cautious about this social customs. Here, one can find a comparative reflection about the social customs based on class and social status of the families. However there are some exceptions to these situations. But these exceptions are mainly seen in the rich affluent families situated in the urban areas.

Economically: The position of the Brahmin castes of both the region was economically weakened and made insecure after the introduction of the changes in land revenue policy that contributed to the commercialization of agriculture. The gradual removal of intermediary class of Zamindars, who controlled much of the land in the region, gave an impetus to agricultural growth by allowing a greater part of profit to the cultivator. Cultivation became an attractive profession for those who took active part in it. The Brahmin communities in both the regions were never a cultivating community, hence, most of the land and landed property relations started to be managed and controlled by the other non-Brahmin castes. Depending upon the space and time it was observed that this control over the land shifted to another community. In Madurai, this control was mostly acquired by the Vellala and in the Benares it was Thakur or Agarwal (a trading caste/community). The introduction of the Ryotwari system in the South, promoted production for the market and by confirming ownership rights in land; it also paved the way for the development of a 'market' in land related activities. The enhanced productivity of the wet lands and increase in population in those regions meant that there was a growing demand for land which in turn led to the rise in land prices. The dry region of the Madurai district has a different story altogether which can be discussed in any other space and situation. Apart from this shift of control over land, there is another feature which is very important to note regarding the economic context of the Brahmins of these two regions. In both, it was observed by the researcher, that the 'dominant' caste in their respective villages hold economic and political influence over the other castes. The 'dominant' caste, which may be either Brahmin or non-Brahmin, swayed over the rest of the population in the village. Most of the major economic or political decisions which were collectively taken by the village administration had direct or indirect influence of the 'dominant' castes. In effect, rather than acting as individual agents, the residents of both the regions acted as members of families and organized the relationship

between generations so as to invest in the formation of human capital. By responding, thus, to the opportunities offered by the market for labor, they sought to extract income from the towns.

Politically: In both area study regions, upwardly mobile groups made some kind of workable alliances to dislodge the Brahmins from the seat of power by articulating different form of identities. The forms of identities are different for the two regions but both the regions strongly advocated the displacement of the Brahmin elites. They benefited from the colonial policy of reservation of seats both in the bureaucracy and in the assemblies. The colonial authorities were suspicious of the Brahmin role.^v Hence, they tried to empower the lower castes through these kinds of affirmative discriminations. In both the states, they were perceived as the dominant supporters of Congress both in extremist and moderate roles. In order to wane the influence of the dominant role of the Brahmins the state (British authority) tried to re-shape the society in an indirect manner. Even after independence, the role of the Brahmins in seats of power was doubted. The “successful scholars in the position of temporal rulers were able to influence Indian institutions and mores far more than could the stay-at-home traditionalists. In some places they even attempted to carry out the letter of the old Brahman law-books. In all places they established the prestige of a Brahman code of behavior. Even if not followed, it was recognized as an ideal. It is also worth noting that these mighty Brahman seem also to have been the cause of whatever anti-Brahman sentiment there was in the India of the past. And it is no accident that the only areas of modern India where there is an active anti-Brahman political movement are those areas where the Brahmans recently occupied this position of power and wealth” (Ingalls, 1958). In both the regions, the Brahmins failed to develop any caste associations with a magnificent influence to bind the Brahmin population into one entity and develop a strong political ethos necessary for the democratic environment. This failure is attributed to the absence of social cohesion among the Brahmin population.

The Brahmin population attributed this failure to the introduction of the colonial education system and the reservation policy in independent India. The newly introduced English education under the British, admitted people of all sections in society to reap its benefits irrespective of caste, creed and religion. The

introduction of English education had two major implications. On the one hand it introduced new syllabus and subjects of learning vis-à-vis the contents of traditional indigenous learning where Brahmin teachers had a monopoly. The new education sought to create an educated class of Indians who would fill up the lower rungs of the colonial bureaucracy. This was one of the cherished objectives of the colonial rulers apart from using the centers of education for proselytizing purposes. Under the new educational system, all sections of the society began to train themselves in the new subjects. Though people of all castes in the society joined these institutions, the lion's share was appropriated by the Brahmins. Even the members of the traditional Brahmin families took to new educations who earlier were engaged in professional activities like performing traditional rituals and rites. Such a tendency loosened the grip of Brahmins over the indigenous system of education. Hence, after independence, with the introduction of the reservation policy in education, members from the non-Brahmin community got access into the modern education system which opened new avenues for administrative jobs for the non-Brahmin communities/castes. In this manner, the Brahmin lost both the political and the administrative space to ‘dominate’ and maneuver. In every form of seat of power, the Brahmin became insignificant. Be it from municipality election or Parliament election, its dominance was lost. In South, it had been marginalized and in the North, the community had been trying hard to form any sort of political alliance for its survival.

Dissimilarities: The differences between the Tamil trajectory and that of U.P. may be explained from several view points.

Population: Population wise, upper castes, especially the Brahmins, are smaller in number in Tamil Nadu, a region where, correlatively the ‘varna system’ is more ‘incomplete’ than in most of the Indian provinces. In contrast to the situation prevailing in U.P. where the Kanya-Kubja Brahmins are a dominant force to reckon with, there was not a single caste in Tamil Nadu which could be termed as a ‘preponderant caste type’ that constituted one-fourth of any single district population. Unlike many other South Indian states, Tamil Nadu has the least percentage of Brahmin population. From 1871 till 1931, the population varied from 1.3% to 2.17 both in Madurai and Tamil Nadu, whereas for U.P. it is 9-12%. After independence, due to dismantling of caste based

Census operation in India, it became impossible to arrive at an official version of Brahmin population. Till date, there is not a single authoritative work which expresses the variation in the number of the Brahmin population. Hence, it is very difficult to infer the actual strength of the Brahmin caste without having any sort of primary or secondary evidences. The present study observes that the Brahmin population in U.P in general and Benares in particular, is in range with most of the other castes. The present Brahmin population of Benares approximately lies in between 12.0-12.5% which is more or less similar to that of U.P. in general, which hovers around 10%.^{vi} In case of Tamil Nadu, the Brahmin population is minimal and insignificant in comparison to the number of other castes. The crux of the matter is that the percentage of Brahmin population in U.P. is more or less congruent with the other castes while the percentage of the Brahmin population is almost inconsequential in case of Tamil Nadu politics. It is as mentioned in the "early Tamil literature gives no evidence of caste, but the growth of Aryan influence and the development of a more complex political and economic structure produced a system in some ways more rigid than that of the North. By the Cola (Chola) period an important feature of South Indian caste structure appeared, and this has survived to the present day. In the Dravidian country groups claiming to be ksatriyas were few, other than the ruling families, and vaisyas were equally rare. Nearly the whole of the population were Brahmans, sudras or untouchables, and the sudra castes, which formed the mass of the people, were divided into two great caste groups, known as the right and left hands" (Basham, 1985: 151).

Mobilization of the Dalits and the other backward castes: for nearly two decades, Uttar Pradesh has had a movement to mobilize the dalits and the other backward castes of the state. However, UP's lower castes had, before the mobilization began, and still have, the worst social indicators of human well-being - not only compared to the upper castes in UP but compared to much of the rest of India. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Tamil Nadu also experienced a mobilization of the dalits and backwards, but managed to transform the indicators in health, nutrition, fertility and education. In UP the mobilizers of the dalits have focused exclusively on capturing power, the gains of the lowest castes have been entirely of a symbolic nature. If anything, the bursting into the open of caste-based electoral politics in

the last 15 years has merely served to fuel populism in government policies. Symbolic acts of defiance of the established 'manuvadi' order have indeed been dominant in UP, without much tangible benefits for the poor and the oppressed to show for it. If anything, the mobilization seems to have merely benefited a small minority within the lowest castes - in the form of landholdings or reserved government jobs (Mehrotra, 2006).

The average rural Brahmin population in the North India is more than that of the South India. Precisely, the average density in the rural areas of the Benares district is more than that of the Madurai district although both the districts have a prosperous socio-religious town respectively. For Madurai, the average density of the Brahmin population is more in the urban areas than the rural areas. This is continuing as an uptrend. But this uptrend is greater for the Benares district, if the entire population is taken together. The migration of the Brahmin population can be seen on a higher scale for Benares district than Madurai district. This increasing urbanizing tendency of the Benares region is implicitly related to the overall economic condition of the district and the State (U.P.) as well.

Economically: There are some points of comparisons that constitute the basic difference for both the regions. The first is the introduction of the land-reform policies introduced by the British administration. In U.P. and in most of the parts of Central India, the colonial government introduced a new land-reform policy which was known as the Mahalwarisystem.

- **Mahalwari system** was a modified version of zamindari settlement introduced in the Ganges valley, NWFP, parts of Central India and the Punjab. In this system, the rights of the traditional local communities were recognized. Revenue settlement was made by village or estates with Mahals (area) or landlords. In Western Uttar Pradesh, a settlement was made with the village communities, which maintained a form of common ownership known as Bhaichare, or with Mahals, which were groups of villages revenue was periodically revised. The Mahalwari settlement region like Central Province was distributed through several divisions of Meerut, Agra, Rohilkhand, Allahabad, Bundelkhand, Benares, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Faizabad, Kumaun etc. "Under Mahalwari settlement the village itself was landlord, the section on village tenures will have made the

form of ownership intelligibly; so that it need here only to briefly stated that the entire body was settled with a jointly and severally responsible unit; and that for each village or each patti or section, a sharer of standing and respectability undertook the primary liability and signed the revenue agreement on behalf of the whole body. Such a person was called 'lambardar'. The burden of the revenue is distributed among the co-sharers according to the principle of sharing and constitution of the estate. This process called the bachh. In the case of the mahal settlement the assessment are based on more or less directly, on the actual rental value of the lands in the village unlike permanent settlement" (Sarwar, 2012). In Mahalwari region, the local chiefs (Rajahs, Zamindars, talukdars), being of ancient stock or firmly established, were conformed as owner. But most often it transpired that the mastery over village cultivated lands in these regions, traditionally belonged to the undivided community of farmers in general, presented by the village chief. Here, as elsewhere, the group of powerful individuals who became full-fledged proprietors did not include all the cultivators. It consisted of a peasant elite like intermediaries of others settlement area that employed agricultural labor, and whose land were often cultivated by tenants.

- On the other hand, the **Raiyatwari system** was more pragmatic than doctrinal. The arrival of the British administration in South India came along with three specific experiences. (a) the idea of the earlier land related policies in Bengal Presidency which were not at all smooth, rather very much dependent on coercive measures, (b) experience of the existence of the middle classes which were not only unproductive but numerically a minority section of the population, who were most often busy with non-agricultural activities and (c) with the arrival of the British administration, the local chiefs were mostly eliminated or reduced to insignificance. The contact of the administration with each individual farmer implied in the Raiyatwari system, appeared more conducive to the interest of the state, which could itself asses the cultivated area and the income of the tax payer, and which could itself carry out the collection of taxes. This system also had the advantage for the peasant who would be liberated from the oppressive domination of a big landowner.

Hence, even though prejudicial to the landed gentry where it existed, this system perturbed less apparently at least, the customs and social balances of the rural world. The Raiyats of South India were dominant peasants with whom, in each village, the agents of the company had deemed it expedient to negotiate and with whom other categories of subordinate right holders subsisted. Thus, when the commercialization of the crops became the salient feature of the Indian agricultural economy, the individual peasant or the communities of peasants who actually tilled the land, became the main beneficiary of the Raiyatwari system, unlike in the Mahalwari system where the cultivators did not form the main receiver of the accrued gains. In South India, the non-Brahmin castes, especially the cultivating castes, became prosperous with the newly introduced land-policy by the British colonial authority. They became aware of the fact that effective 'Sanskritisation' would only take place through economic well-being. "In fact, empirical studies show that many service caste members own land. Thus, while caste membership is a virtually absolute and enduring ascribed characteristic of individuals seen in terms of the belief system, it is not an adequate index of socio-economic rank in general. In this situation it is hard to believe that Indian villagers are oblivious to other systems if rank, especially economic rank" (Cancian, 2006). The number of prosperous buyers and sellers among the non-Brahmin lower castes in the commodity market increased in leaps and bounds. The Brahmin caste in Tamil Nadu and in South India started to fade out as the dominant land holding community and was being replaced by the non-Brahmin castes that were numerically in a more advantageous position.

This efficacy of turning the government policies (erstwhile British) into their favor was not there for the non-Brahmin low castes of the U.P. As explained earlier, the Mahalwari system encouraged the Brahmin community to withhold the dominance in agricultural pursuits (Metcalf, 1967). They were able to keep the earlier supremacy with the help of the land-reform policy introduced by the British authority. This preponderance of the Brahmin over the land economy in this region lasted till 1960s until the rise of Choudhury Charan Singh who effectively tried to form an alliance between the Jats and other cultivating castes. With the

rise of Charan Singh, a defected member from the INC, the Brahmin community along with the Thakur (another high caste of this region) seemed to lose their control over the land and land related activities which became more prominent in the 1990s (Bayly, 1973). Still, facts remain that there are some kind dominance of the Brahmin caste in the agricultural activities which would bring us to the second point of difference in the economic context.

The Brahmins can create an influential economic lobby in U.P which is entirely missing in Tamil Nadu:

Although this is not as powerful as the sugarcane politics^{vii} in Uttar Pradesh but the landholding pattern of the districts shows that still the majority of the cultivable land, medium and large sized, are in the control of the higher castes including the Brahmins. It is a matter of further introspection that how much control does the Brahmin community possessed over the above mentioned landholding by the higher castes? This would need further research on caste based analysis of landholding operations. But in respect to that of Tamil Nadu, it is much more significant. Tamil Nadu Brahmin community does not hold any significant amount of land, instead, it is the other non-Brahmin castes like, Chettiars and Vellalas who have been controlling the financial and land market economy.

Economic control the Brahmin communities of Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh: Whatever little economic control the Brahmin communities of both the regions possessed, those were diverted into different directions. In U.P., the economic control was streamlined to acquire social and religious dominance, whereas in Tamil Nadu, this dominance was used to make inroads into administrative and educational arenas. In Tamil Nadu, the 'ethnicisation of politics' had made the Brahmins to develop such a mind set. In religious spheres, there were several instances. The agitations for entering the Hindu temple roads in Vaikkam, Guruvayur, Suchindrum served as a prelude to the Temple Entry Movement in Tamilnadu. Due to the initiatives of A. Vaidyanathalyer and N.M.R. Subbaraman, a Temple Entry Conference was organised in Madurai. The unprecedented event of temple - entry at last happened on 8th July 1939. (*Madras Gazetteers-Madura District, 1940*) The temple entry team was led by A. Vaidyanathalyer and L.N. Gopalasamy, accompanied by P. Kakkan, Swami Muruganandam, Muthu, V. S. Chinniah, V.R. Poovalingam and S.S. Shunmuga Nadar which made their first entry

into the famous Meenakshi temple. Temple entry became a reality without violence and bloodshed. After the Madurai episode, more temples in different parts of Tamilnadu - Tiruchendur, Tanjore, Trichi, Courtallam, Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Kanchipuram were opened to the non-caste Hindus. Finally, the Temple Entry Bill got the assent of the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 4th September 1939 and was published for general information as Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act XXII of 1939 (*Madras Gazetteers-Madura District, 1940*). The Act granted the non-caste Hindus the right to enter and offer worship in the Hindu temples. Thus, the Social Movements ushered in an era of prosperity and created a cultural awakening among the people of Tamil Nadu and also brought a new sense of Dravidian consciousness and cultural pride which led to the rise of linguistic sub-nationalism in Tamil Nadu.

Political Centralization and Ethnicization: On the political aspect, the point of differences is centered on the time of emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness. In South, it gained momentum only by the late 19th century. The attack on Brahmins was carried forward by different castes within their own limitations. The attack on Brahmin community was three-pronged viz., economic, social and cultural and the emergence of the non-Brahmin consciousness was not given concrete organizational shape and hence it did not form into a movement. Moreover, the non-Brahmin sections joined hands with Brahmins during the time when they were demanding the introduction of local self-government in most of the places of South India. The rise of egalitarian movements, stemming from the ethnicization of caste was more prevalent in the South. There, the ethnicization of caste did not rely only on caste fusion. This process, fostered by caste associations, prepared the ground for a more radical transformation based on new imaginaries. In Tamil Nadu, the Dravidian identity of the non-Brahmin movement created a space for ethnicization process which provided the lower castes with an alternative egalitarian sub-culture. In contrast, in pre-independence India, the Yadav movement can be classified in the first group of the typology presented here and the Adi-Hindu movement in the second one. However, none of them really challenged the caste system. Obviously, it is not just by chance that both of these have a North Indian origin, because in this area, Sanskritization continued to exert a strong influence and contributed decisively to the divisions of the lower

castes according to the mechanisms of 'graded inequality', to use the words of Ambedkar. "In contrast to the situation prevailing in the South, the mobilization of the lower castes stopped with caste associations. They could not establish their claim on ethnic grounds, which prevented them from shaping large coalitions like the Dravidian non-Brahmin groupings. In fact, they started to move toward the formation of larger fronts only when the state extended its compensatory discrimination policy to what became known as the "Other Backward Classes." The OBCs, then, became, a relevant unit and low castes started to rally around this administrative category in order to defend their quotas in the bureaucracy from the state" (Jaffrelot, 2000). Hence, the empowerment of the other non-Brahmin castes had different settings and nature in North and South respectively. These aspects of the empowerment of the other non-Brahmins were intricately related with the de-empowerment process of the Brahmin community.

De-empowerment and Political Polarization in the Society: the de-empowerment process of the Brahmin caste led to a sharp political polarization in the society which made commentators to term it as a process of 'ethnicisation' of the Tamil society. The Tamil political trail is a fine demonstration of Weiner's idea about Congress' political objective of inclusiveness. This trend has two basic reasons: (a) the lower castes of the Tamil society have freed themselves from Sanskritisation to accept the images of ethnic identity. (b) this ethicised identity is supplemented and shaped by the policies regarding reservations in public employment or other opportunities of livelihood. Tamil Nadu has the highest percentage of reservation categories (69%) which firmly establish the competence of the ethnic identity of the previously depressed classes and shun the variant of Sanskritization. On the other hand, in North India, there was no such major cleavage in the society except for the fact that the political space of the Brahmin diminished due to the importance of the number game in democracy. The North Indian society did not enter into such an ethnicisation process. In North India, none of these processes reached any logical culmination as had been the case in South India. "In North India Caste associations often followed the Sanskritisation path and neither prepared for the group for an ethnic discourse" (Jaffrelot, 2011). "To explain the difference between the Hindi belt movements and those which emerged beyond the Deccan, Rao emphasized that in North India

Brahmins were 'generally backward with regard to modern education and government employment', compared to the Kayasths and the Banayas and that, therefore, a non-Brahmin movement could not crystallize as it had in the South where the Brahmins attracted general resentment because they monopolized elite functions. This is not the only reason, however. The fact that the upper castes were numerous and benefitted from land settlement procedures (the zamindari system) which were much less egalitarian than the raiyatwari system, for instance, reinforced their domination..." (Jaffrelot, 2011).

Democratization: The de-empowerment process in the two different regions had different trajectories. According to Jaffrelot, "in the Hindi belt where savarnas are all represented, the upper castes from about one-fifth of the society with the Brahmins topping 10% of the total population in U.P., for instance. By contrast, in the South of the Vindhyas, the upper castes represent a very small minority of less than 10 percent - with the Brahmins, the largest of all upper castes, culminating at about 3 percent of the society" (Jaffrelot, 2010). The Tamil trajectory clearly looked back to the history of the region. In the Madras presidency during the British Raj the plebeians, mostly the non-Brahmin lower caste members, mobilized early against the Brahmin power and organized social movements such as the Justice Party, which seized power in the 1920s. Consequently, programmes of positive discrimination had been implemented elaborately for the upliftment of the lower castes. After independence, the Congress was obliged to promote a low caste leader, Kamaraj, as replacement of C. Rajagopalachari, a conservative Brahmin, though it was not sufficient for defusing the rising popularity of the Dravidian parties which had inherited some of their legitimacy from the non-Brahmin movement (Jaffrelot, 2010). "The rise to power of KamarajNadar epitomizes this new, accommodating attitude of the Congress party. Kamaraj, who had joined Congress when most of the Nadars regarded the party as Brahmin-dominated, was offered the chance of contesting-successfully-on a Congress ticket to the Legislative Council in 1937 and was elected President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Council in 1940 (Report Madras Presidency, 1940). No other regional branch of the party had such a low caste leader at the helm at that time. These developments attracted Nadars to the Congress Party in large numbers. However, C. Rajagopalachari, a Brahmin, remained the

towering figure of the Congress of Tamil Nadu. He became Chief Minister in 1937 and again in 1947 but Kamaraj succeeded him in 1954 (Arnold, 1977). At that time, Brahmins represented only 5% of the MLAs, as against 17.2% in 1937 (Arnold, 1977), which means that in the early 1950s, the representation of the Brahmins in the Assembly was almost proportionate to their share of the population. In contrast to what had happened in most of the rest of India, the Congress had accompanied a dynamic of democratization in Tamil Nadu” (Jaffrelot, 2011).

Official arrangements in the public employment and education sector: In North India, the process started long after the lower castes became a relevant category. This happened only after the government made some official arrangement in the public employment and education sector. It was soon after the announcement of the reservation policy, as stated by the Mandal Commission, that “the OBCs had become a relevant category for the lower castes because they had a vested interest in it, namely the quotas promised by the Mandal Commission report: many of those who were earlier known as ‘Shudras’ internalized this administrative definition of their identity in the early 1990s simply because they thought they could derive benefits from it. However this category also crystallized because of the attitude of the upper castes who had rejected such reservations in the administration. The cleavage between the upper castes and the lower castes had suddenly reinforced by a collective, open hostility from the former and even by the unleashing of violence” (Jaffrelot, 2010). Till date, the total reservation percentage in U.P. is 50 whereas Tamil Nadu counts for 69. The OBCs had not only gained new assertiveness but had also been empowered to a certain extent. In 1982, they made up 29.7% of Tamil Nadu civil servants and were well represented in the entire administration, except among the IAS elite, the stronghold of the Brahmins (Jaffrelot, 2010). The increase of the quotas granted to the OBCs in Tamil Nadu had already restricted the number of places available to Brahmins, who had either to opt for the private sector, or to migrate to the North or to go abroad (mostly to England or the United States) to forge a career in medicine or engineering. After the introduction of quotas in the 1920s, in Madras presidency, many Brahmins left for Bombay (now Mumbai) (Hebsur, 1980).

Contesting for Political space: Faced with such de-empowerment process, the Brahmin communities in Tamil Nadu formed, although miniscule in size, platforms to establish their demands and raise their voices for the welfare of their community. Such socio-political associations of Brahmin communities are absent in North India which can be attributed to the co-option policy of the political parties in U.P. in particular and in North India in general. Post independence, the Brahmins' supported the Congress for a long time and it was from the late 1980s, that they shifted their allegiance to BJP during the Ram Mandir campaign. But the gradual emergence of OBC and Dalit politics saw the two national parties losing out. With their say in government formation lost, the Brahmins felt disillusioned. Both the SP and BSP (the two most important political parties) held conventions, announced sops, and gave tickets to more Brahmin candidates in the recent past. BSP chief Mayawati inducted many Brahmins, constituting 11percentage of the population, voted for BSP in 2007 (<http://archive.indian-express.com/news/brahminsway-of-behenji/899124/>). Shedding her old apathy against the upper castes, 'Dalit champion' Mayawati had in the run up to the 2007 assembly polls had wooed politically-disillusioned Brahmins, promising them a fair share in power. For a party which once coined the slogan ‘Tilak, Tarajuaur Talwar; inkomarojooteychaar’ (Brahmins, Baniyas and Thakur's, thrash them with shoes), that was a major shift in political strategy as Mayawati distributed several tickets to Brahmins and projected ex-advocate general Satish Chandra Mishra as the Brahmin face of her party. Her social engineering of bringing Dalit and Brahmin voters together saw BSP securing a majority, ending almost two decades of fractured mandate in the state polls. After Mayawati wooed them in 2007, the Brahmins regained their voice (perception that could be inferred from the Interview to both Brahmin and Non-Brahmin population). But the community deserted Mayawati in the 2012 assembly polls, as she failed to groom a second line of Brahmin leaders, other than those belonging to Mishra's coterie. With corruption issues dominating the polls, the community voted for the SP in several constituencies, which saw it returning to power. SP Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, has set eyes on a larger central role after the 2012 win. SP's strategic shift has been most interesting to watch. After co-opting a large part of the Thakur vote in the state, SP had set its sight on the

Brahmin vote as well. The 2014 Parliamentary election had altered all the possible caste-politics equations in U.P. B.J.P garnered 71 seats out of 80 and clearly came out as the single largest party in the state as well as in India. In spite of that it is worth mentioning that caste equations in Indian political system, especially in U.P will not lose its sheen it is because of the fact that every election will not be 2014. The plank of 'development' might touch the chord of urban population but for the rural section the elusive story of 'purity', Sanskritization' (Srinivas, 2006) will remain the same. The 'reverse social osmosis' (Verma, 2010) will continue as long as the policies of reservations are followed.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to give a general picture of the phenomenon and to identify patterns for future analysis. The overarching form of generalization of the present paper tries to bring out the nature of the caste/ caste group in India. Following the results of the analysis, the next step is to focus more thoroughly on the relationship between the political parties and the Brahmin caste. For future research in this arena one can focus upon the reason of absence of an effective pan-Indian Brahmin caste organization. Given the high correlations between the macro level variables it may be difficult to determine their associations independently from the other variables. Brahmin caste which has traditionally been seen to be prevalent in Indian society, with strong social hierarchies and marked social inequalities, receded in the twentieth century as the use of caste in social and political mobilization grew visibly, concomitantly with the weakening of the Brahminical ritual hierarchy. The method of this weakening process did not take place at a same pace within the periphery of Indian state. South and North Indian treatment were different in this case. Indian democratic space has provided different opportunities, different forms of political skills and knowledge to the same group throughout the length and breadth of the country.

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- ⁱ Professionals engaged with the aspect of comparative study in political science. The term is in vogue in U.S.A with the initiation of the Second Scientific Revolution in Political Science during the 1990s.
- ⁱⁱ A single interpreter (himself a villager and already experienced in village survey work conducted under the aegis of the IIT, Chennai) was used throughout the villages of Madurai district. For urban areas, I took the help of another interpreter who was a Saurashtrian Brahmin (they like to call themselves in that manner). For the district of Benares no such interpreter was needed because of my feeble, but effective, ability to converse in Hindi and understand Bhojpuri. Apart from that, there were some friends, especially AlokPratap Singh from Allahabad University, Department of Law, who actually helped me in this regard.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The lowest rung in the three-tier administrative mechanism of the Indian governmental set-up. The other two being the union government and the state government, ranked according to the hierarchy of power.
- ^{iv} These trajectories are not necessarily meant for the locales only which came under our observation, but it can be State specific or region specific. For instance, it may be Tamil Nadu/U. P centered or South/North specific. By Tamil Nadu/U. P specific the researcher means that it can be seen in any part of the States mentioned and by South/North specific the researcher wants to acknowledge the fact that the attribute can be seen in any of the States in the region mentioned. Nonetheless, the vastness of the region has been a hindrance to the researcher to reach a conclusion, if not mentioned otherwise.
- ^v The colonial authority beamed their introspection when Congress started to function as a political unit. It was within the ambit of the Congress the Brahmin took various important roles against the British government. Earlier, the British chose them (Brahmins) as the 'natural choice' for the colonial regime as they (Brahmin) had prominence and access to traditional education over other natives.
- ^{vi} This is not an official version, but most of the respondents who are mostly active politicians cutting across political parties agreed to this fact during the interview.
- ^{vii} It has always held the centre-stage as the successive governments had wooed the strong cane farmers' lobby through the State Advised Price (SAP) by enhancing the rates before the commencement of each crushing season, notwithstanding the stiff opposition from the equally powerful sugar lobby in the State.