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Q8(a)

The rise of caste politics is to be attributed to both regional aspirations and electoral manifestations. Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Federalism

Federalism: Constitutional provisions; changing nature of centre-state relations; integrationist tendencies and regional aspirations; inter-state disputes.

Core demand of the question

- The rise of caste politics is to be attributed to both regional aspirations and electoral manifestations. Comment. (20 marks)

Revision summary

Caste politics is the public organisation of caste for power.

Regional aspirations after linguistic States and in Dravidian and OBC movements gave caste a territorial and dignity language.

Electoral manifestations - adult franchise, **first-past-the-post**, Mandal, and State parties - turned numbers into cabinets.

- **The two causes work together:** region supplies the map, elections supply the incentive.

Caste politics is not the whole of Indian voting, and it can freeze identities that civil liberty aims to equalise.

Introduction

Caste politics in India is the organisation of caste identities for public power. The comment that its rise comes from regional aspirations and from electoral manifestations is right if both are treated as causes that work together, not as rival slogans.

Body

Regional aspirations

- After linguistic States, politics moved into regional arenas where locally dominant peasant and intermediate castes could seek the state that the Congress system had kept more national and upper-caste in its early leadership.
- Dravidian mobilisation in Tamil Nadu joined anti-Brahmin social justice to a Tamil regional self, which is caste politics as regional aspiration.
- Other Backward Classes politics in the Hindi belt, after **Karpoori Thakur** and then Mandal, sought a regional social majority inside Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, not only a national quota.
- Adivasi and Dalit claims in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra mixed region, resource, and caste-tribe lists.
- **Ambedkar** had already tied Dalit liberty to organisation; regional federalism after **Article 3's** new States gave that organisation a territory.

Electoral manifestations

- Adult franchise made numbers count. **Rajni Kothari** described a Congress system that later opened to caste coalitions as the vote expanded.
- **First-past-the-post** rewards geographically concentrated caste blocs and alliance arithmetic more than a single national class party.
- The **Mandal Commission** report's implementation in 1990, the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, and many State parties are electoral forms of caste.
- Reservation in panchayats after the **73rd Amendment** created a local electoral career for caste and gender lists together.
- **Dahl's** polyarchy predicts that excluded groups will organise where contestation is open; Indian elections were that opening.

How the two causes join, and what they do not mean

- Regional aspiration supplies a map and a language of dignity. Electoral rules supply the incentive to turn caste into a party, a ticket, and a cabinet share.
- Neither cause means that caste is only a voting machine. Kinship, marriage, and violence still structure who can use **Mill's** individuality.
- **Walzer's** and **Sandel's** membership help explain why caste is a constitutive identity, not only an electoral label, and why **Rawls's** unencumbered self is a poor description of this field.
- National parties also caste-engineer tickets; regionalism is not the only site.
- **The comment is therefore:** rise of caste politics = federal-regional opportunity + electoral-system incentive, inside a society that **Ambedkar** had already named as graded inequality.

Limit of the comment

- Economic class, religion, and a national Hindu majority politics also organise votes. Caste politics is a major rise, not the only rise.
- Electoral caste can freeze the identity that civil liberty was meant to loosen, which is the standing tension with **Article 17**.

Flow diagram

Regional aspirations -> Caste politics
 Electoral manifestations -> Caste politics
 Regional aspirations -> Linguistic and social justice states
 Electoral manifestations -> FPTP alliances Mandal parties alliances Mandal parties
 Caste politics -> Ambedkar organise

Conclusion

Caste politics rose because regionalised federalism gave locally strong castes a state to capture, and because electoral competition rewarded organised caste numbers. **Kothari**, **Ambedkar**, and **Dahl** explain the two sides. The comment holds as a joint attribution, not as a claim that caste is only region or only a ballot.

Facts & figures

Mandal, 1990

Union implementation of OBC reservation in central services, an electoral and social turning point.

Kothari

The Congress system and later work on caste in Indian politics as an institutionalised cleavage.

BSP

Bahujan Samaj Party as a Dalit-led electoral organisation beyond a single region, still using caste arithmetic.

73rd Amendment

Reserved panchayat seats that made caste and gender electoral at the village scale.

First-past-the-post

Single-member plurality that rewards concentrated social blocs and pre-poll caste-party alliances.

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