

Changing Perspectives Of Indian Identity Politics

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Abstract:

The growing terrain of Indian identity politics is characterised by a shifting viewpoint, wherein conventional understandings of identity, frequently based on religious, caste, and regional affiliations, are undergoing redefinition and transformation due to contemporary influences such as globalisation, urbanisation, and the advent of social media. The aforementioned process is contributing to the development of a more intricate comprehension of Indian identity, characterised by a growing focus on matters pertaining to inclusiveness, diversity, and cultural pluralism. As India undergoes these transformations, its political sphere is experiencing the rise of novel perspectives and social movements that question existing power dynamics and promote a vision of Indian identity politics that is characterised by inclusivity and fairness.

Keyword: *identity politics, Political identity, political dynamics*

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I. Introduction

The changing perspective of Indian identity politics is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that has been evolving over the years in the diverse and multicultural nation of India. In a diverse and pluralistic country like India, identity-based affiliations such as religion, caste, language, and region have been integral to the political landscape. However, over the years, the perspective on Indian identity politics has evolved, reflecting the changing dynamics of the nation's social and political fabric. This article explores the shifting paradigms of Indian identity politics and their implications on the country's democracy.

In recent years, the perspective on Indian identity politics has been undergoing a transformation. Globalization, urbanization, and increased connectivity have given rise to a more cosmopolitan and diverse India. Younger generations are often less bound by traditional identity markers and are increasingly embracing a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to their identities. This changing perspective is reflected in the emergence of a more cosmopolitan urban culture, where people from different backgrounds interact and coexist more harmoniously.

Additionally, there has been a growing emphasis on economic issues and development in Indian politics, which has sometimes overshadowed identity-based politics. People's aspirations for better living standards, education, and economic opportunities have become significant factors in shaping political discourse.

However, it's important to note that identity politics in India has not disappeared; rather, it has evolved and adapted to the changing socio-political landscape. Identity-based movements continue to influence electoral outcomes and policymaking, and issues related to caste, religion, and language still hold political significance.

Importance of the study

Examining changes in Indian identity politics is of paramount importance for several key reasons. Firstly, it enables us to discern the factors that either foster social cohesion or disrupt harmony within India's diverse communities, thus playing a pivotal role in maintaining peace and unity in this multifaceted nation. Secondly, it sheds light on how identity-based considerations permeate political decision-making processes, influencing everything from electoral strategies to policy formulation and governance. Additionally, delving into the historical context of India's intricate religious, caste, linguistic, and regional identities is essential for gaining insights into contemporary politics and society. Furthermore, given that many conflicts in India are rooted in identity-based issues, analyzing the evolving landscape of identity politics can offer valuable perspectives on strategies for conflict resolution and peace-building. Lastly, as identity politics continues to give rise to various social and political movements, a study in this area can help us assess the effectiveness of these movements and their wider impact on Indian society and politics.

Objectives of the study

- The objectives of a study on the changing perspective of Indian identity politics can vary depending on the specific research goals and the scope of the study.
- To Explore the historical evolution of identity politics in India to understand how it has changed over time
- To investigate how different identity categories such as caste, religion, language, gender, and ethnicity have played a role in Indian politics and how their significance has evolved.
- To evaluate the impact of identity politics on Indian political dynamics, including its influence on elections, policymaking, and governance.

II. Methodology

This present study is completely based on primary and secondary data in nature. The study aims to investigate how identity politics in India has evolved and transformed over time, with a particular focus on the changing perspectives of individuals and groups regarding their own identities and political affiliations. Primary data have been collected with help of observation method. Research has closely observed and discussed from different political parties of India. The secondary data have been collected from books, journals, research paper, newspaper, TV programme, magazine, social networking sites and internet etc. the collected data have been presented with help of narrative techniques.

Historical Context

Indian identity politics has roots dating back centuries, with caste and religious identities deeply ingrained in the social fabric. The caste system, which divided society into rigid hierarchies, played a central role in shaping identities and social structures. Religion, too, has been a potent force, with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and others forming distinct religious communities.

Religious identity has also been a crucial aspect of Indian identity politics, with tensions and conflicts arising from Hindu-Muslim relations, as well as inter-religious dynamics involving other faiths like Sikhism, Christianity, and Buddhism. The Ayodhya dispute and various other communal clashes have underscored the role of religious identity in Indian politics.

Post-independence, identity politics in India took on a new dimension. The framers of the Indian Constitution aimed to create a secular and inclusive state, but the reality of deep-seated identities remained. Political parties began to mobilize support along identity lines, often to secure the backing of particular communities.

The Evolution of Identity Politics

Shift from Identity-Based Parties to Ideological Alliances:

One significant shift in Indian identity politics has been the transition from identity-based parties to broader ideological alliances. While parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) continue to represent specific identity groups, there is a growing trend of alliances formed on the basis of shared ideologies and policy goals. This shift has led to greater inclusivity and the dilution of purely identity-driven politics.

Emphasis on Economic and Development Issues:

In recent years, Indian politics has seen a greater emphasis on economic and development issues, transcending traditional identity-based concerns. Voters, particularly the youth, are increasingly focused on issues like jobs, education, healthcare, and infrastructure, rather than solely aligning with parties based on their caste or religious identity. This shift reflects a desire for better governance and a more holistic approach to politics.

Rise of Regional Parties:

Regional parties have gained prominence in Indian politics, often championing the interests of their respective states. These parties, while still rooted in specific regional identities, have played a critical role in shaping national politics. Their influence has sometimes even overshadowed that of national parties, leading to the decentralization of power and resources.

Demand for Social Justice:

The demand for social justice and equality remains a central aspect of Indian identity politics. Movements and protests advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, such as Dalits and tribal communities, continue to shape the political discourse. These movements seek to address historical injustices and discrimination, challenging traditional power structures.

Implications for Indian Democracy

The changing perspective of Indian identity politics has both positive and negative implications for the country's democracy.

positive implications: The changing perspective of Indian identity politics holds several positive implications, including the promotion of greater inclusivity by fostering broader ideological alliances and a focus on development issues, which can bring diverse segments of society together in pursuit of common goals. Additionally, the rise of regional parties has led to a more decentralized political landscape, enabling better representation of regional aspirations and interests. Furthermore, the increased focus on governance, particularly on economic and developmental issues, has the potential to lead to more accountable and efficient governance, ultimately benefiting the overall population.

Negative Implications: Identity-based politics can fuel divisiveness, fostering communal tensions and social fragmentation; the proliferation of regional parties and identity-based movements may result in a fragmented political landscape, complicating the formation of stable national governments; furthermore, the emphasis on identity can occasionally overshadow substantive policy debates, giving rise to populism and short-term electoral strategies.

III. Case Studies

Case Study 1: The case study of Tamil Nadu in southern India serves as an interesting example of the evolving worldview. Tamil Nadu possesses a distinctive linguistic and cultural identity, which has exerted a notable influence on the political landscape of India throughout the course of time. The Dravidian movement, originating in the mid-20th century, aimed to assert and safeguard the unique cultural and linguistic identity of the Tamil people, known as the Dravidians.

Case Study 2: Identity Politics in the North-Eastern States of India, The North-Eastern states of India, comprising Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and others, are ethnically and culturally diverse regions. Over the years, the changing perspective of Indian identity politics in this region has been marked by the assertion of indigenous identities and demands for greater autonomy.

Case Study 3: The Mandal Commission and the OBC Quota

The Mandal Commission, appointed in the late 1970s, aimed to address the underrepresentation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs and educational institutions. This led to significant debates on caste-based identity politics. The Mandal Commission's recommendations and the subsequent implementation of OBC reservations in government jobs and educational institutions marked a turning point in Indian identity politics. It brought the issue of caste to the forefront of political discourse, challenging the traditional dominance of upper-caste identities. The Mandal Commission's recommendations and the OBC quota policy reshaped the political landscape by mobilizing OBC communities and altering electoral dynamics. This case study highlights how caste-based identity politics gained prominence and challenged the earlier narrative of a monolithic Indian identity.

Case Study 4: The Ayodhya Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid Dispute

The Ayodhya dispute revolved around the claim to the site of the Babri Masjid, which some Hindus believe to be the birthplace of Lord Ram. The long-standing conflict between Hindus and Muslims over the site exemplified religious identity politics. The Ayodhya dispute brought religious identity to the forefront of Indian politics, leading to the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Hindu nationalists argued for the construction of a Ram temple at the site, asserting a Hindu identity in opposition to the Muslim identity associated with the mosque. The Ayodhya dispute had a profound impact on Indian identity politics, leading to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and significant communal tensions. It also contributed to the rise of the BJP and the subsequent shift towards a more assertive Hindu nationalist identity in Indian politics.

Case Study 5: The Emergence of Identity Politics in North-East India

The northeastern region of India is culturally and ethnically diverse, with numerous distinct identities and separatist movements. The region's complex identity politics have been influenced by factors such as ethnicity, language, and historical grievances. The emergence of identity politics in North-East India challenged the idea of a singular Indian identity. Various ethnic groups in the region demanded autonomy, recognition of their distinct cultures, and the resolution of historical grievances, leading to a fragmented and regionally focused political landscape. Identity-based movements in North-East India have shaped regional politics and governance structures. The case study illustrates how the pluralistic nature of Indian identity has led to the recognition of sub-national identities and the need for accommodating diversity within the Indian nation.

Case Study 6: LGBTQ+ Activism and the Redefinition of Identity Politics

This case study highlights the changing landscape of Indian identity politics in the context of LGBTQ+ rights. It explores the journey of the LGBTQ+ community in India, from being marginalized to gaining recognition and legal rights. It showcases how this movement has challenged conventional norms and broadened the discourse on identity beyond traditional categories.

Case Study 7: Assam's Anti-CAA Movement and the Assamese Identity

This case study focuses on the protests against the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Assam. It illustrates how these issues triggered a resurgence of Assamese identity politics, as the local population expressed concerns about cultural and demographic changes in the region. The case study explores the dynamics of the protests and their implications on the larger Indian identity discourse.

These case studies demonstrate how identity politics in India has evolved over time, reflecting the diverse and dynamic nature of the country's sociopolitical landscape. They highlight the interplay of regional, religious, caste, and LGBTQ+ identities in shaping Indian politics and society.

IV. Conclusion

The perception of Indian identity politics has undergone substantial transformation throughout the course of time. "The significance of identities rooted in caste, religion, language, and area remains prominent, but there is an observable trend towards more expansive ideological affiliations and an emphasis on matters pertaining to progress and growth. The aforementioned transformation exemplifies the shifting ambitions of the Indian electorate and the imperative for a political environment that is characterised by inclusivity, accountability, and a focus on development. Nevertheless, the task at hand involves the delicate task of reconciling historical inequities while also fostering a sense of unity and cohesion within the nation." The trajectory of India's democracy will undeniably be influenced by the future of identity politics in the country.

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