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Item Type	Article
Authors	Patange, Ramesh
Publisher	Institute for Irenics / Institut für Wissenschaftliche Irenik, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität
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Download date	2026-07-04 07:01:52
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/191313

Journal of Religious Culture

Journal für Religionskultur

Ed. by / Hrsg. von Edmund Weber
Institute for Irenics / Institut für Wissenschaftliche Irenik
Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

ISSN 1434-5935 - © E.Weber – Email: irenik@em.uni-frankfurt.de

No. 20 (1998)

Hindutva and Participation of Castes in Power

By

Ramesh Patange

Weekly "VIVEK" recently conducted a survey of the opinions of its readers. One of the readers wrote, 'I am a devotee of Shri Ram; I belong to a certain caste; the concept of Hindutva may be all right for you; but how is this Hindutva beneficial to my caste?' This question may be regarded as either very basic or childish. It is basic because its answer devolves on the proper concept of Hindutva and it is childish because it displays the ignorance of the reader of the fact that Hindutva encompasses the well-being of all the different section of people.

A person like me, having imbibed the concept of Hindutva in its totality, would be quick to answer that different casts cannot have any special consideration for them. Hindutva is a casteless concept. In fact the removal of caste consciousness and caste identities is the *raison d'etre* of Hindutva. Since Hindutva incorporates the well-being of every single Hindu the question of any special consideration of any particular caste does not arise. Of course this is simple for a person like me who is steeped in the Hindutva concept. It may not be so simple for someone who has come up in the present political environment.

Serious consideration must be given to Hindutva against the background of present atmosphere of caste consciousness. This would narrow and finally eliminate the chasm between ideals and practice. Such a chasm would be a great impediment to the general acceptance of true nationalism.

The mere acceptance of Hindutva as an ideal cannot erase the fact of the existence of hundreds of castes. Movements to eliminate castes have been a prominent part of social activity. Such movements must and will continue for many years. These movements cannot be criticised as ineffective, helpless in removing or decreasing social evils. They had their impact to a greater or smaller extent. The concepts of higher and lower castes, the marginalisation of certain castes, have now become more or less extinct. Untouchability is on the way of elimination. The number of inter caste marriages is on the increase. These gains of the movements for elimination of castes must not be denied.

However, the caste identity and the sense of belonging to castes has continued to remain unaffected and perhaps many continue to remain so in at least in the near future. As the concept of Hindutva is permeating in the society, on the one hand, we find Hindus being mobilised in caste groups on the other hand. We find such mobilisation in the form of sectarian institutions for particular castes such as the Kunbis, Agris, Bhandaris, Tehs, Sutars, Charmakars, Matangs, Lohars, Dhargars, Kshatriyas, Brahmins, etc. These institutions have their programmes like meeting, conferences, etc. where the consideration is mainly for the problems restricted to that caste alone. Simultaneous with caste mobilisation we observe increase in the political awareness through these caste organisation. In the present democratic set up of the political system, this awareness assumed greater relevance than cultural awareness.

Votes are of crucial importance to a Parliamentary Democracy. With this democratic system, the political power in the country with inevitably vest in those sections of the society which were so far never at the centre of power. As the political awareness increases, caste ambitions are definitely going to come to the forefront. A person imagining himself above caste considerations will be treading on very insecure grounds as he finds that he cannot forget castes.

The so called non-conservative movements in Maharashtra have become instruments of bringing social security based on caste consciousness. These groups, believing that they are revolutionising the society have to willy-nilly use castes as their bases because the groups which were denied political or economic advantages so far can get them only on the basis of castes. This is a reality which cannot be wished away, howsoever unpalatable.

With this background of caste aspirations where does a person professing Hindutva stand? It is one thing to profess castelessness as an ideal, and witnessing shifts in power, structure based on castes is another thing. The castes are there and they will demand their share of power whatever you wish. Thus a system must be evolved so that this power sharing does not harm the society.

Emotional issues are now at the centre of the political coming together of Hindus. The aspiration of the Hindus to liberate the birth place of Lord Rama have brought Hindus politically nearer than ever before. Lord Rama is revered and loved by all Hindus. The liberation of this birth place is the aspiration of all castes among Hindus; thus we find Hindus, identifying themselves as Hindus, coming together. There is no doubt that just through the emotional issues of lib-

erating Rama Janmabhoomi, Krishna Janmabhoomi and Kashi the Hindus will show solidarity and will become united. The Hindu psyche will not be swayed by false propaganda.

We have this specter of false propaganda against Hindu unity in the form of allegations that the movement of uniting Hindus on the basis of Hindutva is aimed at benefiting only caste Hindus and will confer benefits only on the upper castes. Had this propaganda been continued to articles in journals alone, it could have been ignored. But this propaganda is being done even in distant localities and hamlets. This will have definite impact on the minds of people. Slogans like "Usher in Bali-rajya, Usher in political power of the masses, Usher in Hindutva of masses" are used to counter the all encompassing Hindutva thought.

Confidence in the notion that power of the proponents of Hindutva is the same flung as power on the masses must be developed speedily amongst the people. We find proponents of Hindutva in the forefront of political movements representing certain castes. Various castes are represented in the " and file political parties of Hindutva view. Yet the thought that Hindutva means the masses and power to Hindutva is the same thing as power of the masses, has not percolated to the lower levels. In some cases this thought has been eclipsed by the false propaganda that Hindutva means the power of the upper castes comparable to the times of Peshwas.

We have hence to be careful and particular to see that Hindutva is projected in the correct sense. We will have to move around the countryside, mix with persons of different castes. We will have to accept the existence of castes as a reality, organizations based on castes as inevitable. We will have to reach the masses through their dialects. We have to create the confidence that castes will have their just and fair share in power. The political and social aspirations of castes must be recognised. Any denial of these aspiration would be a losing proposition to the process of gaining political power. Otherwise, Hindus that are coming together - irrespective of castes - on the emotional issues may not side with the Hindutva proponents in the context of gaining political power. That would further complicate the political situation.

Casteless Hinduism is a social aim, a social ideal. However, things appropriate to the present climate have to be done, otherwise the idealism would meet the same fate as the Gandhian philosophy did when Gandhiji made Hindu-Muslim Unity. The propositions of Gandhiji in economics, social sciences and in particular in the field of Hindu-Muslim unity, all have become not just impracticable but redundant. Dr. Ambedkar started with elimination of castes and accepted the practical approach of capturing power. The backward classes must get their share of political and economic power was the main thought in his political activity. The political awareness present in the backward classes is the direct result of Dr. Ambedkar's work.

The equality that the people in the lowest rung of the society are demanding is not restricted to eating at common tables and intercaste marriages. These two have more or less been achieved by various social movements. Now their de-

mand of equality is in the field of power and economic gains. Proponents of Hindutva now have a difficult task before them: to keep high the flag of elimination of castes and to make the backward classes partners in power. A suitable change of style of working is envisaged.

From Sangh Sandesh, News Magazine of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK), Nov-Dec 1993