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The Role and Influence of Scheduled Caste Leaders in State Assembly and Parliamentary Elections in Chhattisgarh

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the role of Scheduled Caste MLAs in the Chhattisgarh Assembly and parliamentary elections from the birth of Chhattisgarh to 2023, examining voting patterns, caste dynamics, and political party performance in the state's 90 Assembly constituencies and 11 Lok Sabha constituencies. This study examines historical voting behaviour and trends in the Chhattisgarh Assembly and parliamentary elections from 2003 to 2023. It also examines the role of caste-based strategies adopted by major political parties, including the regional political parties. The research concludes that Scheduled Caste MLAs play a significance role in Chhattisgarh's politics and Government formation. If given the opportunity, Scheduled Caste MLAs can win even in general constituencies.

Key Words

Scheduled Castes, Chhattisgarh, State Assembly Elections, Parliamentary Election.

Introduction

Chhattisgarh, rich in forests, minerals and diverse cultural heritage, was born in the year 2000 by separating 11 districts from the state of Madhya Pradesh. When the state of Chhattisgarh was split from the state of Madhya Pradesh, till that time there was a Congress majority Government in Madhya Pradesh. As per the constitutional provisions, the Congress Government got the reins of governance in the newly formed state of Chhattisgarh. The inaugural assembly election in Chhattisgarh were conducted 2003 as per the constitutional provisions, elections were conducted impartially from time to time in 2008, 2013, 2019 and 2024. Chhattisgarh has a unicameral Legislative Assembly with 90 fixed seats. According to reservation rules, 10 of these seats are allotted for Scheduled Castes, 29 for Scheduled Tribes, and 51 for Scheduled Tribes. This makes up 11.11% of the total seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. Chhattisgarh has 11 Lok Sabha seats, of which five are unreserved, four for Scheduled Castes, and one for Scheduled Tribes. As per the Government latest data from the 2011 Census of India, Chhattisgarh's total population is 25.545 million, 198. Scheduled Castes constitute a significant portion of this total population, accounting for 3.274 million, representing 12.82% of Chhattisgarh's total population. According to the Election Commission, Chhattisgarh has approximately 21.1 million voters, and the sex ratio between male and female voters is 1,024. The

percentage of Scheduled Caste voters in Chhattisgarh is approximately 15 to 16% of the total voters in Chhattisgarh. About 86% of Scheduled Caste people live in remote rural areas of Chhattisgarh and 14 percent live in big cities. A large part of Scheduled Castes of Chhattisgarh are found in the central part of Chhattisgarh. They are mainly found in Janjgir Champa, Raigarh, Korba, Bilaspur and, Durg districts. Their main occupation is agriculture. India is a democratic nation and all castes and classes have a say in the democracy.

India is a sovereign democratic republic. In a democracy, every class, caste, and has the right to political representation without any discrimination. Specific Constitutional clauses have been framed to full fill for this purpose. Universal adult suffrage is in practice in India.

Scheduled Castes are defined in Article 366 (24). According to this article, such independent castes are tribal or some part of these castes or castes which are considered Scheduled Castes for the objectives of the Indian Constitution under Article 341. The Scheduled Castes word was used by the Simon Commission in 1927. This group is one of the major deprived social, economic, and political groups in India. Multiple protective provisions have been provided to promote welfares of the schedule castes. However, despite all this, Scheduled Castes still face discrimination, social and political deprivation, and exclusion.

Research Objective

This research paper focuses on the position of leaders in the Scheduled Caste reserved seats in the Chhattisgarh Assembly elections and the role of Scheduled Caste MLAs in the Chhattisgarh Assembly elections.

Research Methodology

This study is primarily based on secondary data gathered Government and non-Government sources. The list of Lok Sabha and Constituent Assembly members was obtained from the websites of the federal Government of Bharat and the state Government of Chhattisgarh, respectively. Demographic data was obtained from the Census of India website. Information on various leaders was collected from local newspapers. Key information was also acquired from various contemporary newspapers.

Analysis and Findings

Chhattisgarh, rich in forest and mineral resources, holds a distinct identity in the country. Our country has a rich democracy, and Chhattisgarh also shares this tradition. The Chhattisgarh State Legislative Assembly is unicameral. The state Assembly has 90 fixed seats, while the lower house and Rajya Sabha have 11 and 5 fixed seats, respectively.

Around 13% of the Scheduled Caste population resides in Chhattisgarh. They are influential voters in almost all the Assembly and Lower house seats of Raipur, Durg and Bilaspur divisions. The scheduled castes are chiefly engaged in agriculture and a huge number of them are employed in Government jobs. In Chhattisgarh, both the common people and the leaders of the Scheduled Castes are conscious of their political rights and reservation. Hence, they support the political party which works in their interest. They are not bound to any one party or any particular ideology. The caste play important role to influence the Chhattisgarh Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. For example, unreserved candidates are often given tickets on unreserved seats. Reserved candidates win on reserved seats, but not on general seats because voters vote based on caste, and on general seats, there aren't enough Scheduled Caste voters to ensure a Scheduled Caste candidate wins. In the Lok Sabha, one seat out of 11 is allocated seat for Scheduled Castes and five seats out of 11 are allocated seat for Scheduled Tribes. In the Legislative Assembly, 10 out of 90 seats are allocated seat for Scheduled Caste candidates.

Table 1: List of state Assembly seats allocated for Scheduled Caste candidates

Sr.	Election	Year	Party	Reserve seat for SC	Numbers of winning candidates belonging to SC	Total Seat	Winning Party
01	1 st	2003	BJP INC BSP	10	04	90	BJP
					04		
					02		
02.	2 nd	2008	BJP INC BSP	10	05	90	BJP
					04		
					01		
03	3 rd	2013	BJP INC BSP	10	09	90	BJP
					01		
					00		
04	4 th	2018	BJP INC BSP	10	02	90	INC
					07		
					01		
05	5 TH	2023	BJP INC BSP	10	06	90	BJP
					04		
					00		

(Source: Chhattisgarh Government data book)

Studying the above table, it becomes clear that five legislative assembly elections have been conducted in Chhattisgarh between 2003 and 2023, in which the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) won four seats each and Indian National Congress (INC) once.

The inaugural assembly election in Chhattisgarh were conducted 2003, in which both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress (INC) won 04 of the 10 seats allotted for Scheduled Castes. The Bahujan Samaj Party achieved two seats. The BJP secured a majority in this first state election and built the Government. Dr. Raman Singh was elected Chief Minister. Scheduled Caste MLAs played a significant role.

Chhattisgarh witnessed its second assembly election in 2008. At the moment, the UPA coalition Government was in power at the central level and the bharti janta party was in power in Chhattisgarh. The bharti janta party get 05 of the reserved seats, the Congress party four, and the BSP get 01 seat. This means that the Bahujan Samaj Party's vote bank shifted to the BJP, and the party lost one seat..

Chhattisgarh witnessed its third assembly election in 2013. At the moment the UPA coalition was surrounded by allegations of corruption, which directly benefited the Bharatiya Janata Party of the Chhattisgarh state and it won a landslide victory in 9 out of 10 seats allotted for Scheduled Castes. Congress gets success only 1 seat and Bahujan Samaj Party loss all seats.

The Bahujan party could not secure a single seat, which clearly means that Bahujan Samaj Party failed to woo its core Scheduled Caste voters. Thus, Dr. Raman Singh was designated as the CM for the third consecutive term.

Chhattisgarh witnessed its fourth assembly election in 2018. The BJP Government had been formed in Chhattisgarh for three consecutive times. From 2003 to 2018, the voters were fed up with the functioning of the BJP and wanted a change. This was the reason that despite the strong position of the BJP at the Centre, the Bharatiya Janata Party lost the 2018 assembly elections by a huge margin. The BJP won two seats allotted for Scheduled Castes and the Congress party won the most number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes till date. The Bahujan Samaj Party made a comeback and won one seat. Shri Bhupesh Baghel was appointed Chief Minister on behalf of the Indian National Congress. Shri Bhupesh Baghel emerged as the first Chief Minister belonging to the OBC community.

The latest assembly election in Chhattisgarh were conducted 2023. Exit polls predicted a Congress Government, but the BJP won by a large margin. Of the 10 seats allotted for Scheduled Castes, the BJP won six, while the Congress party won four. The Bahujan samaj party endured complete electoral futility, failing to acquire even a solitary seat. Which indicates that the Party is unable to expand its support base, and Scheduled Caste votes have now shifted to the BJP.

Table 02: Data of Scheduled Caste seats won by party in parliamentary elections from 2004 to 2024

S. No.	Election	Year	Party	Reserved SC seat	Numbers of winning candidates belonging to SC	Total Seat	Winning Party
01	1 st	2004	BJP INC BSP	1 (Janjgir-champa)	1	11	BJP
					0		
					0		
02.	2 nd	2009	BJP INC BSP	1	1	11	BJP
					0		
					0		
03	3 rd	2014	BJP INC BSP	1	1	11	BJP
					0		
					0		
04	4 th	2019	BJP INC BSP	1	1	11	BJP
					0		
					0		
05	5 TH	2024	BJP INC BSP	1	1	11	BJP
					0		
					0		

(Source: Chh2attisgarh Government data book)

Table 03: List of Lok Sabha seats earmarked for Scheduled Caste candidates

Sr. No.	Name of Constitution Area	Constituency No.
01	Sarguja	01
02	Raigarh	02
03	Janjgir Champa	03
04	Korba	04
05	Bilaspur	05
06	Rajnandganv	06
07	Durg	07
08	Raipur	08
09	Mahasamund	09
10	Bastar	10
11	Kanker	11

(Source: Chhattisgarh Government data book)

Studying the above table, we learn that after Chhattisgarh became a state, in the 2004 parliamentary elections, the BJP was credited with creating the state and won the reserved Janjgir seat.

In all subsequent parliamentary elections, in 2009, 2014, 2019, and 2024, the BJP consistently won the Janjgir Lok Sabha constituency, the only seat reserved for SCs.

Conclusion

India is a democratic nation, and the fundamental spirit of democracy ensures that every class, caste, and community has the right to political representation without any discrimination. This principle is safeguarded through special provisions in the Constitution. India has also adopted universal adult suffrage, which provides equal political participation to every citizen of the country.

In Chhattisgarh elections, many factors influence voter opinion, such as a candidate's religion, language, wealth, conduct, and caste. Caste is a crucial factor among these. Chhattisgarh has not escaped the impact of caste. In Chhattisgarh caste continues to play a decisive role in voting patterns, and the choice of candidates reflects the same caste-oriented approach. Almost all the parties including Bharatiya Janata Party, Bharatiya and Bahujan Samaj Party Indian National Congress field Scheduled Caste candidates only on reserved seats. No party fields candidates from reserved category on unreserved seats. If the Scheduled Caste MLAs are given an opportunity, they can win even in general constituencies. A thorough analysis of the conclusions of the last Chhattisgarh Assembly elections reveals an interesting fact: the state's five Scheduled Caste reserved seats act as political kingmakers. Trends so far indicate that the party or coalition that wins each of these five seats ultimately succeeds in forming the Government in the entire state. Thus, the inclination of Scheduled Caste voters becomes a determinant of the political landscape of Chhattisgarh as a whole. Chhattisgarh's social structure is shaped by ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, and this deeply influences the state's political situation. In this context, the caste factor is becoming increasingly important. It is true that for political success, a person must transcend caste and gain the trust of other social factors. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the role of caste remains fundamental. Especially in the context of Scheduled Caste political leadership, caste unity and identity often pave the way for their political opportunities and progress.

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