Contemporary Okkaligas Political Participation in Karnataka Politics

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Introduction:

This research work seeks to examine the contemporary methods of political participation used by Okkaligas political and social leadership to influence State Government policy. The research has four main objectives. Initially, it seeks to understand the colonial classification of Okkaligas as a Caste. Secondly, it examines to find out if there is any in-cognitive between how Okkaligas are classified as caste during the colonial period and the self perception of people belonging to various 'sub-castes' within the community. Thirdly, it seeks to understand Okkaliga as a prolific organization setting aside their internal factions. It also makes an attempt to know its success and failures and the strategies evolved by its leaders. In particular, it will focus on whether or not the process of Colonisation experienced by Okkaliga intellectuals has impacted on their political representation and behaviors, and how the experience of colonizer fits within the framework of experiential behavior of Okkaliga community.

Statement of the Problem & Signification of the Study

Democracy is based on the notion that all citizens have the right to participate in the managing of political affairs, and that every citizens input is of equal importance. This basic assumption clearly places emphasis on public participation in maintaining a stable democracy. The level of public participation, however, is highly contested, with many theorists arguing that too much public participation would overwhelm and ultimately cripple democratic systems. On the other hand, others who favour high levels of participation argue that more citizen involvement leads to greater representation. Regardless of these disagreements over the utopian level of participation, there is widespread agreement amongst scholars that, at the very least, *some* participation is necessary to maintain democratic systems. The ways in which citizens participate vary greatly and depending on the method used, influence political decision making at varying levels. The method of political participation is key in controlling public influence over political affairs, and therefore is also an integral part of maintaining democracy, whether it be 'thin' (low levels of participation) or 'robust' (high levels of participation). High levels of participation or 'robust' democracy is argued by some theorists to enhance democracy through providing the opportunity for more issues to be represented during decision making.14 The notion of widespread participation was first advanced by classical theorists Rousseau, Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. Rousseau in the development of the concept of 'general will' argued that there should be equal participation by all citizens, and that education was a key component in the raising awareness of civic duty and obligation. [1]

Tocqueville & Mill, while also proponents of popular political participation, feared tyranny of the majority, and therefore sought to devise mechanisms to control participation in order to avert any potential tyrannical tendencies. While Mill advanced control mechanisms such as plural voting for the educated, literacy tests for voter eligibility and restrictions of votes to taxpayers, Tocqueville pursued pluralism through the decentralization of power, and the promotion of public participation through interest groups, voluntary organisations and other associations that allowed for local decision-making. [2]

In contrast to these theories promoting increased public participation, are those that promote limited participation. For proponents of 'thin' democracy high levels of citizen participation can saturate political leaders with demands that they should not and cannot meet, therefore putting pressure on the political system.

Some theorists emerged in opposition to widespread political participation, arguing the realisation that many citizens and voters were socialised through their families, and many had little knowledge of policy, parties & candidates. Democratic elitism therefore favours elections between parties as competing elites. It argues that government is best left for those elites who are knowledgeable about political affairs; those with little knowledge about politics should be discouraged from voting; and stable democracies are those where there is little public participation, favouring public apathy over activism. Despite tensions around the optimum level of public participation, there is widespread acceptance that there should be some level of participation in order to ensure stable democracy, as of course the notion itself is founded on the premise that all citizens are able to input into political decision making. Studies in recent years have therefore moved away from the examination of implications to democracy and have focused on the question of how and why citizens participate politically. Understanding the 'why' and 'how' variables of political participation required some understanding of the notion of political participation itself. Different definitions lend themselves to different understandings of how people participate, or in other words the *forms of participation*. [3]

Castes in India has been a centralized Westerncentric gaze for the European thinkers & even Indian writers like Louis Dumont, Dipanker Gupta, Pauline Kolenda, Rajni, Kothari, & M. N. Srinivas who have interrogated the Indian Society holding the 'Caste framework' as a central paradigm for understanding India & Indian Society. Colonial India & the British rulers of India reconfigured the Indian society on their referential notions of experienced Culture relating the basis of Caste & the Varna systems which were internalized as *manudharma*/ Codes of Manu, the *purushasukta*/hymn of the Primordial being, the *Jataka*/Buddhist Tales, the sacred *Upanishads*/Hindu Philosophy as the reliable construct for the decoding of the Indian social system. Background for the explanation to India & Indians remained the discourses of the texts & the Westerncentric models of explaining India & Indians. According to Louis Dumont, Caste system centralized Indian society, structuring the notion of "Caste," invoking fluid notion of hierarchy, Caste purity, Impurity & Self-reliance. Colonialist construct of Indian Caste system also indicated the Classical analysis of the Indian society on the basis of the appropriated Culture, Religion, Social system that prevailed during the medieval Europe. Indian reflections on Caste system, as an exclusive Indian terrain, as Partha Chatterjee affirms, also bear a similar kind of interrogation of Caste & the Indian reality. Colonial accounts retrospected Caste into itself or the processing of Othering with each other (Castes) sometimes contesting or appropriating the central dilemmas of Caste reality in Indian society.

Welfare politics of the post-Independence India noticed the emancipatory wave for Social justices, Reformatory advocacies, Reservation system, Educational policies & Social Science Research on the self same Colonial frameworks appropriated by the decolonized. Christianity as an antidote for the perplexed Indian reality was successful in locating & identifying the Religion & Caste system of India/Indians

as an inferior standard to the dominant cultural superiority of the Western Christianity as the sole authority & legitimated authenticity of worldview. Added to it is the discursive, hegemonized framework of stating the Religious 'lack' as observant in Hinduism holding pagan worshipping forms like trees, animals & nature.

Evangelical response for Religious Conversions, superimposed the superiority of the Western paradigm, pleading for altering & reshuffling the native Religious experiences towards Christianity. Thus, Christian discursive framework becomes the only alternative for the Indologists & political theorists correlating the Indian & the Western frameworks theorizing the Indian experiences, very much as the internalized Western experience. Indian Society & Culture turns more opaque as it is both unique & distinct from that of the West & its Cultural hegemony.

Hence, no distinctions remained as per the Indian & the Orientalists, between Indian Culture & the Western Culture. Prof. S. N. Balagangadhara, details the seminal arguments on such aspects covering the Colonial interpretations of Caste, the Colonized ambiguities of Caste, arguing for the Cultural retrospection indicating the relevance of every culture(s) deciphering its own specific methodologies of learning & managing the series of cultural meanings. Western cultural theoretical imposition of the Knowledge framework, contests the Religious articulated performative learning of the Asian cultural societies & specifically, the Indian culture in general. Indian ritualistic learning modes form the methodological framework interrogating the cultural realm.

According to Prof. Prof S. N. Balagangadhara, Religion for Western Culture holds the intensity of the Knowledge framework, Ritualistic mode of Learning for the later. Similarly, as he maintains, Colonial theorizing has failed in recognizing the reinscribed cultural differences between the Knowledge frameworks of the West & the East. Thus, India & the West are not similar as he states that India remains a ritual landscape but inevitably not a Religious dominated framework of the West.

With the theoretical framework of the argumentative hypothesis for the post-doctoral fellowship, the research strives to rethink the paradigm of Caste & Political Mobility in India. Colonialist interrogation of Caste & Religion stands complex with Caste mattering very little to the structured Religion in actual practice. Western ethnographical methods of indicating & describing India with the empirical concepts like hierarchy, separation, purity, pollution & the Caste pattern needs a non-Western Social science approach in identifying & describing the problem of Caste & Political mobility in India. Post-Independent India reflected the growth of Caste-politics with the similar hegemonically structured Westerncentric framework. The postdoctoral research interrogates the authenticity & reliability of the Westerncentric assumptions & thereby strives to locate the underlying limitations of such assumptions & meaningful constructs of Caste & Indian Politics.

Research Objectives
This research work seeks to examine the contemporary methods of political participation used by Okkaligas political and social leadership to influence State Government policy. Meanwhile it tries to locate the colonial classification of Okkaliga community, in a whole this research work have four main objectives as it follows;

*   To analyze the nature of organization which specifically motivated the Okkaliga community in achieving political power using the role of Caste organizations pattern in the politics of Karnataka.
*   To find out if there is any in cognitive between how Okkaligas are classified as caste during the colonial period and the self perception of people belonging to various 'sub-castes' within the community.
*   To study the attempt of Okkaliga as a prolific organization setting aside their internal factions. It also makes an attempt to

know its success and failures and the strategies evolved by its leaders.
*   To analyze how Okkaliga sanga as a political organization is different from the self perception of the members of the community.

Hypotheses
In Karnataka politics Okkaligas are highly engaged in political activities. These activities however fall outside of the conventional forms of participation such as voting and move into the area of unconventional activism. And also I hypothesis that over a period Okkaliga community has strong institutional base in the form of Mats. In a whole this research work has three main hypotheses as it follows;

The kind of democratic Politics practiced in India in general and Karnataka in particular has forced different 'sub-castes' of the Okkaliga community to come together to form a common political front.

The organizational strength, motivation and the necessity of Okkaliga sangha emanated from its leaders seeking political power and not from the common peoples consequently the mobilization structure of Okkaligas are controlled from the above.

The colonial model of caste classification influenced contemporary Okkaliga literature more than the common experiences of Okkaliga community in day-to-day life.

Research Methodology
The proposed research is quite broad in its scope. Because I seek to answer not only what the current state of Okkaliga political participation looks like currently, but also why it is in this current state, I will need to employ a number of different methods in order to analyse this topic. For the purpose of collecting statistical data I am going to adopt different kinds of research techniques, published and unpublished study materials can be used. Various government circulars related to the rules and regulations can be studied. Questionnaire will be used for field work to collect accurate information about the origin and political mobilization of okkaliga community

Research Design
The study is being taken mainly on the basis of field work. Studies like caste theories can be taken and observation will be made about the place of okkaliga community in Karnataka political and social life. In the process of our study primary and secondary data is used and again field study method will be adapted to know the origin and the political participation of okkaliga community in Karnataka. At the same time important sources like journals, periodicals, reports of various commissions, government gazette are taken to pursue the study. Interviews with the political and social representatives of the community are used for the benefit of this study.

Research Problem Summary
Okkaliga community has been chosen as a research topic in view of understanding and to ascertain as to whether the accounts given by the colonialist about religion and caste system in the Indian society truly exists or whether the accounts given about the Indian society is false?

The major thrust of this study is to know whether the accounts given by the western anthropologist on caste system and related concepts like hierarchy, separation, purity, pollution and varnashrama system exist in Okkaligas community. Another important question is to identify the major factors that contributed for the growth of political organization of Okkaligas. Since independence each and every caste tried to organize politically through increasing their representation in the legislature and ministry. This study also focuses on the political organization, leaders and its strategies of Okkaliga community in terms of asserting their identity and power in politics.

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