Caste is playing a major role in the process of politics in India. Therefore understanding of Indian politics is possible only with thorough understanding of the complexities of caste system. In this context present paper is trying to bring such an understanding, with the help of pre and post independence development and its positive and negative aspects in the process of democratic politics i.e., inclusive development.

Caste, a uniquely Indian social institution and Indian politics has been subject of intensive study for many years. Many sociologists including Andre Beteille, Rajni Kothari, have highlighted various aspects. According to M.N Srinivas the role played by caste in politics is in close approximation to that of the pressure group. The globalization process will however reduce the influence of caste over the politics. However Andre Beteille holds that while westernization is taking individual away from caste identity the role of caste in politics is taking the people towards the caste identity and thereby strengthening it. Though the idea that caste is a part of a natural and moral order of things, that it is a hereditary quality which once for all defines ones position and occupational affiliation and which is associated with a particular law of conduct.

The use of caste for gaining political benefits is not a new phenomenon and Indian post independence politics continues to use caste and abused in different ways. The British imperialists used religion as well as caste for political division of the nation. Unfortunately, even after independence India could not stop caste as a factor from influencing politics. State politics in India has been particularly the base of political casteism. Caste enters much more directly into the composition of political elites at the state level. For example the mysores cabinet is dominated by Lingayats and Vokkaliga, the Maharashtra Cabinet by Marathas, and some have referred to the Madras Cabinet as a federation of dominant backward castes.

Independent India saw the introduction of universal adult franchise. This brought in a new socio-political transformation; in this new environment, caste got a new dimension in the politics of India. Though the Indian constitution has outlawed caste-based discrimination, the caste system, in various forms does continue to play a major role in Indian society and politics. A striking feature of the Indian democratic experiment has been the increasing use of reservations to achieve greater social justice and equality of opportunity. Much of this has occurred due to the shifting balance of power across demographics. Since the 1950s, political power has been shifting away from upper caste Hindus to the rest, who are far more numerous. From a society where politics once held a marginal public role, India has become an intensely political society. By the 1970s, for instance, many backward castes - located above the outcastes- had gained enough economic and political clout to become a powerful ‘vote bank’. They now aspired to a larger share of administrative and educational opportunities, where they were underrepresented. Some of the largest and best-organized backward castes were the ‘Yadavs in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Jats in Haryana and Punjab, Marathas in Maharashtra, Vokkaligas in Karnataka, and Gounders in Tamil Nadu.’

Role of caste in Indian Politics
Prior to the introduction of the universal adult franchise in India, it was mostly the individuals from the higher caste who were politically active. However, the franchise system in India brought in the importance of numbers in India. Those who were placed in the lower ladder of social hierarchy got an opportunity to assert themselves by using their numerical strength. In many parts of India, caste associations have emerged with the aim of pursuing not only social status and economic interest but political power as well. As a result of this, most of the political parties have had to consider the welfare and development of lower castes.

Negative role of caste in Indian Politics
Like religion some politicians use the issue of caste to divide voters. Many political parties take advantage of the caste sentiments and fracture the society in such a manner that they gain from such divisions. Caste leaders appeal to the sentiments of the voters of their respective caste groups and try to mobilise votes on that basis so as to capture and retain political power. Not only this, politicians have also managed to divert the attention of its voters from issues elating to development etc. by engaging them in caste related issues. It is therefore, clear that the relation between caste and politics has both positive as well as negative sides; however, over the years the negative role of caste has found prominence in Indian politics and considered one of the dangerous unhealthy trend towards our democracy more importantly on Inclusive development.

REFERENCES