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From UPSC perspective, the following things are important : Prelims level: NAMains level: Caste census analysis and impact The demand for a caste-based census in India has once again brought Mandal politics to the forefront. Mandal politics has succeeded in capturing political power in large parts of India and has shifted the political discourse towards a universal acceptance of OBC reservations. However, the movement has weakened in recent years, and the demand for a caste census is seen as a way for Mandal parties to regain their hold in the public discourse. Mandal politics refers to a political movement initiated by historically marginalized Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or Bahujan caste groups in India in the late 1980s and 1990s. The movement sought to secure a greater share of political and economic power through reservation in the public sector for the OBCs who had been historically excluded from such opportunities. The movement derived its name from the Mandal Commission, a committee appointed by the Indian government in 1979 to identify the socially and educationally backward classes of India and recommend measures for their advancement. The Mandal Commission report in 1980 recommended that 27% of jobs in the public sector be reserved for OBCs, a recommendation that was later implemented by the Indian government in 1990. Positive outcomes: Increased representation: One of the main positive outcomes of Mandal politics is the increased representation of OBCs and other marginalized groups in the political sphere. This has led to greater inclusivity and diversity in government and a more balanced distribution of power. Reservation policies: Mandal politics has also led to the introduction and expansion of reservation policies, which aim to provide equal opportunities to marginalized groups in education and employment. Recognition of social justice: Mandal politics has brought the issue of social justice to the forefront of political discourse and has highlighted the need for policies that address historic discrimination and disadvantage. Negative outcomes: Caste-based politics: One of the negative outcomes of Mandal politics is the perpetuation of caste-based politics. This has led to the further entrenchment of caste divisions and has hindered the development of a more inclusive and egalitarian society. Polarization and conflict: Mandal politics has also led to polarization and conflict between different caste groups, as each group seeks to secure its own interests. Resentment and backlash: The policies introduced by Mandal politics have also led to resentment and backlash from certain upper-caste groups, who view the policies as discriminatory and unjust. This has sometimes led to violent protests and social unrest. What is Caste Census? A caste census is basically the counting of people belonging to different castes in a particular marked area. With this two-phase exercise, the Bihar government will try to get numbers of people belonging to SC, ST, and OBC communities and their financial status among other important things. The exercise is termed ‘Jaati Aadharit Ganana’. People belonging to every religion and caste will be covered during the exercise. Arguments for caste census Enumerating the marginalized: A caste census would actually bring to the particular the number of people who are at the margins, or who are deprived, or the kind of occupations they pursue, or the kind of hold that institutions like caste have on them. The caste census opens up to enumerating Dalits who are not Hindus, such as Dalit Christians and Muslims. Data for Policymaking: This information is absolutely necessary for any democratic policymaking. The census will be able to answer real public policy questions and direct policies more effectively towards those who most need state assistance and affirmative action policies. Judicial backing: The courts in India have often emphatically said that it is important to have adequate data with regard to the reservation. Caste offers privilege: Caste is not only a source of disadvantage; it is also a very important source of privilege and advantage in our society. Rids away caste rigidities: Counting of caste doesn’t necessarily perpetuate caste or the caste system. Myths of caste elitisms can be debunked through a caste census. Arguments against caste census 50% breach of reservation cap: It is argued that a Socio-Economic Caste Census is the only way to make a case to breach the 50% cap on reservation and rationalize the reservation matrix in the country. Caste within Caste: Given the differences in caste hierarchies across various regions of the country, a comparative reading along with generating a common hierarchy may be a challenge. Caste over occupation linked predicaments: Caste linked deprivation or adversity may not be as common as occupation linked predicaments, which become easier to compare across states/regions. Anonymity and bias: An intimate and personalised attribute like caste may have its differential exposition between urban and rural residents. Urban residents’ need for anonymity can always bias the reporting on caste. Identity crisis: Recognition and adherence to caste identity is to a large extent shaped by progressive ideals, cosmopolitanism and education, which has its own regional divide in the country between the north and the south. Hurdle to casteless society: The idea of a national caste census is abhorrent when the stated policy is to strive for a casteless society. The Impact of a Caste Census: Analysis In brief Positive impact Accurate data: A caste census can provide accurate data on the caste demographics of India, which is necessary for effective policy-making and affirmative action programs. Better targeting of government policies: The data from a caste census can help the government target policies and programs more effectively towards the marginalized and disadvantaged sections of society. Improved representation: A caste census can help improve representation of underrepresented castes in government bodies and institutions. Empowerment of marginalized communities: A caste census can help empower marginalized communities by giving them a voice and recognition in the political and social systems. Negative impact Polarization: A caste census can lead to polarization and tensions between different castes, especially if the data is used to allocate resources or benefits based on caste. Stigma and discrimination: There is a risk that the caste census data can be used to further stigmatize and discriminate against marginalized communities. Misuse of data: The data from a caste census can be misused by politicians and other groups to further their own agendas, leading to potential conflicts and social unrest. Privacy concerns: Some people may be hesitant to disclose their caste, leading to concerns about privacy and data protection. Conclusion The caste census is seen as a way for Mandal parties to regain their hold in the public discourse and direct policies more effectively towards those who most need state assistance and affirmative action policies. However, the demand for a caste census is a double-edged sword that may create conflicts and shift the discourse from historical injustices to distribution. The Mandal movement faces challenges but remains relevant in the ongoing struggle for social justice. Get an IAS/IPS ranker as your 1: 1 personal mentor for UPSC 2024 Attend Now A student, Rajiv Goswami, attempting self-immolation on 19 September 1990 during the anti-Mandal agitation. Source: AFP The word ‘mandalisation’ has settled in the everyday sphere of Indian political discourse. It is used fairly frequently by politicians and journalists and very occasionally by academics. It is, however, a word of relatively recent provenance and was an Indian catchword in the 1990s. A Google Ngram Viewer plotting picks up this peculiarly Indian term from what must be a relatively small proportion of the Google Book Corpus. This plotting shows that the term’s frequency of usage more than doubled between 1992 and 2000. Recalling that context and considering implications of the rise of ‘mandalisation’ as a catchword throws light on how caste continues to be structured in Indian political discourses. While the origin of the term ‘mandalisation’ is uncertain, it is clear that its currency emerged during the tumultuous agitation popularly known as the anti-Mandal agitation of 1990. This was led by upper caste youth in large parts of northern India in particular, against the Central Government’s decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report (1980). It is also clear that the term has a pejorative connotation, intended to highlight the ‘vested interest designs’ of certain sections of the country’s political class to bring about ‘needless’ fissures and fragmentation in society. The core of the text and the context of the Mandal Commission Report, that the Government of India under Prime Minister V.P. Singh had declared worthy of enactment, was as follows. The Mandal Commission was instituted in 1978 by Prime Minister Morarji Desai. The Commission’s purpose was to look into the problems of access and equity faced by the so-called ‘Other Backward Classes’ [OBCs], also called the ‘intermediary castes’, as distinct from the ‘Scheduled Castes’ [SCs] and the ‘Scheduled Tribes’ [STs] of Hindu society. To explain briefly, SCs and STs are distinct from the OBCs as beneficiaries of affirmative action policies under the Indian Constitution. They mostly fell under the ‘Depressed Classes’ category in colonial census population groupings, among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in the country. After independence, the Constitution stipulated affirmative action policies guaranteeing political representation, preference in promotions, quotas in universities, free and stipended education, scholarships, banking services etc. for SCs and STs. The Mandal Commission was specifically asked to determine the criteria for defining the OBCs, and to recommend steps which could contribute to their social empowerment. The Commission, which was headed by B.P. Mandal, a Member of Parliament of the ruling Janata Party, was preceded by the Kaka Kalelkar Commission (Report, 1955) with a similar purpose. The Mandal Commission Report advocated a policy of affirmative action to ameliorate the social and economic under-development of the OBCs. It argued: To treat unequals as equals is to perpetuate inequality. When we allow weak and strong to compete on an equal footing, we are loading the dice in favor of the strong, and holding only a mock competition in which the weakest partner is destined to fail right from the start. (p.21) The Mandal Commission pinpointed caste as the main factor for backwardness among the OBCs: Caste is also a class of citizens, and if the caste as a whole is socially and educationally backward, reservation can be made in favor of such a caste on the ground that it is a socially and educationally backward class of citizens within the meaning of Article 15 (4) [of the Indian Constitution]. (p.62) The OBCs were therefore pegged as an extension of caste-based disadvantage beyond that recognized for SCs and STs. Sizeable sections of the upper caste population, especially in North India, had already been resentful of the ‘quota politics’ enshrined for SCs and STs in the Indian Constitution. They rose up in anger against what they perceived to be the creation of yet another quota for OBCs. The term ‘mandalisation’ appeared amidst this agitation in news reports and commentary, and soon in book-length commentaries. The furore which the Mandal Commission Report generated in the north was not matched by the south. This was most probably because in areas such as the Madras Presidency, the nucleus of an affirmative action policy favoring disadvantaged castes had been put in place as early as the late nineteenth century. Designated the ‘Backward Classes’, these consisted of subsets of the various non-Brahmin castes at the bottom of the caste ladder. While this list of ‘backwards’ gradually got augmented, by the 1920s the ‘Depressed Classes’, as British census officials named Hinduism’s untouchable castes, claimed an exclusive identity and separated themselves from the larger body. Thus, the province which later came to be known as Tamil Nadu spearheaded the southern initiative on the matter of reservations for backward castes much before the issue was raised, seemingly abruptly, in the north. In fact, it was not as abrupt as it seemed. It was arguably Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the Indian Union, who inaugurated its use. In his very first speech before the Constituent Assembly on 13 December 1946 he referred to ‘Other Backward Classes’, noting that special measures needed to be taken in their favor as also for other marginalized sections of society. An advisory committee of the assembly, under the Chairmanship of Vallabhbhai Patel, debated the question. The committee recommended the establishment of a Statutory Commission to develop guidelines for the alleviation of these classes’ tribulations. However, this committee did not deem it necessary to spell out the precise composition of these classes. Nor was this done even by B.R. Ambedkar, who steered the Drafting Committee of the Constitution. Perhaps they feared that the sum total of these marginalized sections would be of such great magnitude that granting special facilities to them would undermine equality of opportunity for all classes. The caste anchorage of the OBCs came much later in the 1960s. This occurred with the slow but steady breakaway of a socialist faction from the hitherto all-encompassing fold of the Indian National Congress. This socialist faction was led by middle-caste leaders like Rammanohar Lohiya, Charan Singh, and Karpoori Thakur. Whereas the Nehruvian agenda foregrounded the country’s industrial development and its urban bases, the socialist faction focused on the condition of the peasants in the Hindi heartland. Concomitantly, this faction’s leaders cultivated a following among the large, somewhat amorphous, chunks of the rural population. Their following were of neither the poor, landless, mostly untouchable, agricultural laborers, nor the relatively wealthy, upper caste, members of the aspiring professional or bureaucratic families. These were from a stratum of landholding farmers who were reasonably well-to-do. They inevitably belonged to the fold of the non-Brahmin, middle-order castes, a heterogeneous conglomerate of sub-castes, also called jatis, the specificity of whose identification varied from state to state. Spanning Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, some of the numerically predominant among these are the Ahirs, Gurjars, Jats, Keoris, Kolis, Kurmis, Kumhar, Kushwahas, Lodhs, Malis, Nishads and Yadavs (for more details of this background, see Galanter 1978; Jaffrelot 2003: especially Parts 11 and 111). Soon after V.P. Singh declared the decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations on 7 August 1990, upper caste students set up organizations such as the Anti-Mandal Commission Forum, which had its headquarters in Delhi University. In Uttar Pradesh, the Arakshan Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for the Struggle Against Reservations) and the Mandal Ayog Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for the Struggle Against the Mandal Commission) were founded by students from the upper castes and also the middle classes. The shrill, and frequently theatrical, protests staged by these organizations charged the government with compromising standards of ‘merit’ at entry-point into education and employment. The protesters wanted every kind of reservation to be abolished, including reservations for the SCs and STs. This stance led the SC and ST leaders, on the one hand, and the OBC leaders, on the other hand, to call energetically for overcoming the age-old obstacles of ‘graded inequality’ (Ambedkar’s [1979, Vol.5: 101] description of the caste system) and come closer to each other. Some university teachers also came out very openly in opposition to the proposed reservation scheme. The upper caste middle classes were gripped by anxiety at the prospect of losing the hegemony they had exercised, since the days of national independence and even before, on the various organs of the state apparatus. Their apprehensions were substantiated by many social scientists who questioned the authenticity of the data on which the Mandal Commission Report had been based (see Kumar 2023). Segments within the media, including some prominent journalists, worked with opponents of the report, arguing that its implementation would gradually sow the seeds of divisiveness and disharmony in society (see Balagopal 1990). Leaders of political parties, especially those in the opposition, were more cautious about coming out openly against the Mandal Report. They realized that its potential beneficiaries constituted a numerically vast vote-bank. However, they surreptitiously used their mass organizations among students, teachers, lawyers, press personnel and the like, to propagate public opinion against it. The Indian National Congress (INC), traditionally an ‘umbrella’ party, was hard hit by the Mandal phenomenon. A split appeared swiftly within its ranks, both among its cadres as well as its leaders, on the basis of their contending caste affiliations. Divided caste interests accounted for INC’s ambivalence on the issue of reservations for the OBCs, which proved to be its undoing in the long run. The Hindu Right’s deployment of ‘mandalisation’ has sought to downplay the Mandal Commission Report’s positive aspiration for the attainment of social justice. However, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political arm of the Hindu nationalist syndicate headed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), did not suffer from such ambivalence. It correctly saw the move as being detrimental to the integrity of the Hindu fold it claimed to represent. As one of the parties formally supporting the V.P. Singh government, it made its stance explicit by withdrawing its support. More than that, its president L.K. Advani announced he would embark upon a ceremonial journey to the supposed birthplace of the Hindu deity Lord Ram at Ayodhya, in an effort to consolidate the threatened fellow-feeling of the Hindus. This blatant invocation of religious nationalism was wryly described by critics of the Sangh Parivar (i.e., the RSS and its fraternal bodies) as an appeal to kamandal (a sacred symbol of devotion to the Hindu Divine) so as to safeguard the faith from implosion under the pressure of the Mandal effect (check out the Newsclick story □□□□ VS □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□, 12 January 2020). The RSS itself, being less cautious than BJP about legislative politics, was far more upfront in denouncing the disastrous consequences of the Mandal recommendations for Hindu unity. These views were propounded mainly through the RSS official journal Organiser and made the term ‘mandalisation’ redolent of Hindu rightwing dread. The RSS castigated the ‘Rajah’s quota politics’ (V.P. Singh was of aristocratic lineage) in favor of the OBCs as vote-bank appeasement. It lamented the ‘havoc the politics of reservation is playing with the social fabric’ (from Organiser 26/9/1990: 15, quoted in Jaffrelot 2011: 507). Its alignment with upper caste interests became transparent in an article which pronounced that ‘there is today an urgent need to build up moral and spiritual forces to counter any fall-out from an expected Shudra revolution’ (Kamath in Organiser 1/5/1994:20, quoted in Jaffrelot 2003: 454). Given the changing ground realities, especially in the electoral arena, there is no doubt that in post-Mandal India the RSS-BJP have had to scale down their aversion to quota politics. Their derisive label for the politics played out gradually through reservations for specific sections of the population. In government from the later 1990s onwards, BJP opted for selective promotion of social groups on the basis of caste, usually qualified by the introduction of economic criteria intended to reduce the number of beneficiaries. Apart from this, the BJP. has also engaged in an enterprise of what the scholar Christophe Jaffrelot (2003) has called ‘indirect Mandalisation’ (464). This involves making alliances, particularly in the Hindi heartland, with parties which have a substantial OBC presence so as to win elections. In more recent times, the BJP government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has passed a law — One Hundred and Third Amendment Act of the Constitution, 2019 — instituting reservations for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). This, while not caste-based, brings the upper castes too under the ambit of reservations. The constitutional prerogative of reservations awarded exclusively to the historically disadvantaged castes thus stands, once and for all, neutralized. The term ‘mandalisation’ continues to be used in popular parlance. However, its usage in academic discourse has remained rather limited. Perhaps its earliest use within academic circles was in the title of the book by S.R. Maheshwari, The Mandal Commission and Mandalisation (1991). This looked at the fall-out of the Mandal Commission Report implementation as well as the Report itself through a negative lens. ‘Mandalisation’ was to change the face of political India. It ushered in the process of Indianizing the Westminster model and turning it into what I have called the ‘Raisina model’. In place of the polite decorum of British parliamentary practice came the rough and tumble of the Indian streets and pavements, a kind of rural boisterousness. The demos had arrived finally, shoving aside the bhadraloks and the ashrafs, the Oxbridge graduates and the established dynasties. These few examples from contemporary scholarship are perhaps enough to show that the term ‘mandalisation’ has been destined to carry a weight of adverse judgement on its shoulders. The term has appeared in news media occasionally through the 2000s, and especially of late. In 2023, the Nitish Kumar led Bihar Government commissioned a ‘caste census’ in the state, despite several challenges against it in the Supreme Court (see SCO). As a result, the Bihar Government passed a bill raising reservations from 50% to 65%, covering several categories along with the older ones. Thus, caste-based quotas for SCs, STs, ‘Backward Classes’ (BCs), and ‘Extremely Backward Classes’ (EBCs) accounted for 65%, with a further 10% for ‘Economically Weaker Sections’ (EWSs) excluding the above (Wire 9/11/2023). Following the Bihar model, there is now a competitive spree among parties to campaign for conducting state-based caste censuses, and for the inclusion of more and more castes within the BC rubric. Thus, rather unfortunately, the phenomenon of ‘graded inequality’ has begun to mar the initial unity within the ranks of these castes. Egged on by aspiring regional satraps, there are campaigns by many to claim subsidiary status, and the corresponding benefits of belonging to recently instituted categories of ‘Extremely Backward Classes’ (EBCs) and ‘Most Backward Classes’ (MBCs). Notwithstanding this clamor, the central leadership of the Hindutva-oriented BJP remains understandably ambivalent about pursuing this agenda. In the present context, the catchword under discussion has resurfaced occasionally: recalling the peculiar history of ‘mandalisation’ in Bihar (Deccan Herald 4/9/2023); as ‘super-mandalisation’ (Swarajya 3/9/2023); as a ‘re-mandalisation’ (Deccan Herald 18/11/2023). Although mainstream upper caste opinion has gradually, if unwillingly, become reconciled to the irreversibility of ‘mandalisation’ as a social process, the political class almost across the spectrum has woken up to the vote-bank potential of ‘mandalisation’ as a bureaucratic process and publicity move. Further caste censuses and quota legislation may be anticipated. Professor Tapan Basu taught at the Department of English, University of Delhi, Delhi, till his retirement. assertion It ruled the cow belt for two decades but is now headed for oblivion. An analysis of a social revolution that went wrong Dhirendra K. Jha Dhirendra K. Jha | 23 Jul, 2009 The second phase of the caste survey beginning in Bihar and several other political debates have brought Mandal Politics once again in news. What is Mandal Politics and Mandal Commission? About: Mandal politics refers to a political movement that emerged in the 1980s, advocating for the inclusion of socially and economically disadvantaged communities, particularly the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), in government jobs and educational institutions. The movement was named after the Mandal Commission. Mandal Commission: The Mandal Commission or the second Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Commission, was established in India in 1979 with a mandate to "identify the socially or educationally backward classes" of India. It was headed by B. P. Mandal and submitted its report in 1980 and was implemented in 1990. The Commission reported that 52% of the country’s population was comprised of OBCs. Initially, the commission argued that the percentage of reservations in government service should match this percentage. However, this would have gone against the Supreme Court ruling in M.R. Balaji vs State of Mysore case (1963) which had laid down a limit of 50% on. There was already a 22.5% reservation for SCs and STs. Therefore, the figure of reservation for OBCs was capped at 27% which when added to keep the reservation below the 50% mark. The Commission also identified backward classes among non-Hindus. Recommendations of Mandal Commission: OBCs must be provided a reservation of 27% in public sector and government jobs. They should be provided with the same 27% reservation in promotions at all levels of public services. The reserved quota, if unfilled, should be carried forward for a period of 3 years. OBCs should be provided age relaxation similar to SCs and STs. Reservations to be made in PSUs, banks, private sector undertakings receiving government grants, colleges, and universities. The government to make the necessary legal provisions to implement these recommendations. Impact of Mandal Commission: Implementation of Mandal Commission by the government resulted in a widespread protest where students committed self-immolation in protest when the government showed its intent to implement it. The implementation was finally challenged in Indra Sawhney vs Union of India case. In this case the Supreme Court held the 27% reservations for OBCs as constitutionally valid but with certain conditions: The court held that the reservation must be in the four walls of 50% cap and should not be extended in promotions. The concept of creamy layer was also introduced by the court to exclude well-off people from the community. The carry forward rule (by which unfulfilled vacancies are filled in the upcoming year) should not breach 50% ceiling. What are the Merits of Mandal Commission? Increased Representation: The Mandal Commission helped in increasing the representation of SEBCs in government jobs and educational institutions. According to Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, OBC representation against total appointment through direct recruitment was consistently above 27% during 2014-2021. Access to Education: The reservation policy enabled many OBC students to gain access to higher education. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of OBC students in universities and colleges. According to the Ministry of Social Justice during the period of 2014-2021, the enrolment of OBCs in Higher Educational Institutions has been consistently increasing since 2014-15. Social Justice: The Mandal Commission's recommendations were based on the principles of social justice and aimed at providing equal opportunities to all sections of society, especially those who have been historically disadvantaged. What are the Demerits of Mandal Commission? Limited Impact on Upliftment: The impact has been limited to a very few communities. According to the Justice Rohini G. Commission, out of almost 6,000 castes and communities in the OBCs, only 40 such communities had gotten 50% of reservation benefits for admission in central educational institutions and recruitment to the civil services. Politicisation: The politicians have often used the Reservation as their vote bank politics. During 1980s, the Mandal Commission was highly politicized giving a new form of Politics- Mandal politics. Even today, it is used as a political tool. Recently, a politician while campaigning in Karnataka has demanded to lift 50% limit on SC/ST/OBC reservation. Negative Impact on Merit: The reservation policy led to a negative impact on merit as many deserving candidates were left out, and the seats were filled by candidates with lesser merit. Way Forward Periodic Review of Reservation Policy: The policy must be reviewed periodically to assess its impact as directed by the Supreme Court in Indira Sawhney vs Union of India case (1992). Improve Early Level of Education: The government must improve education at earlier levels so that the reservations at higher levels could easily be phased out. Increase Job Opportunities in Private Sector: The government should thrive to increase job opportunities in private sector to reduce dependence on public sector and reservation for employment. Source: TH The upcoming State Elections in India have once again brought the Bahujan, Mandal, and Kamandal politics to the forefront. What exactly are Bahujan, Mandal, and Kamandal politics in India and what are their significance in the socio-political landscape of India? Read this to the end to learn more. The term “Bahujan” is a Hindi word that simply means “the majority”. It connotes the combined population of backward classes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, Muslims, Sikhs, and religious minorities who if grouped together become a humongous demographic and numeric majority in India. Under this notion of majority and minority, the Brahmins and Hindu upper castes become a tiny minority in terms of their overall population while Muslims become a part of the Bahujan majority of over 85-90% of all Indians. Before Independence, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar proposed the idea of unity of all Muslims, Backward and Depressed classes to counter what he termed the Brahmin-Bania dominated Indian National Congress. However after the hasty partition of the subcontinent and departure of Muslim League to Pakistan, this plan became dead. In the post-Ambedkar period, it was Kanshi Ram, the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), who revived the idea of Bahujan-majoritarianism as a transformative political ideology and a tool of social justice to counter the virulent Hindu-Muslim communal politics propagated by a few Brahmanised Hindu upper castes. While propagating this ideology, BSP was able to form government in Uttar Pradesh a few times, but due to disunity amongst Backward classes and Dalits, the Bahujan-Muslim movement could never become the giant it was envisaged to be. In political terminologies, the term “Mandal” stands for the politics of social justice, representation, and empowerment of Bahujans i.e. the vast majority of backward classes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, Muslims, and Sikhs who together make up the huge demographic majority in India. It is derived from the surname of Shri Bindheshwari Prasad Mandal, the former Chief Minister of Bihar and an influential Bahujan backward class leader who chaired the 2nd backward class commission. He recommended a 27% reservation for Backward Classes in government jobs and educational institutions. According to the pre-Independence colonial census, the population of these backward classes was around 52% of all Indians. However, as per recent statistics, Backward classes make up over 60% of Indians. Mandal Commission became a major political theme in India in the late 1990s. Historically, Bahujan-backward classes have been electorally and politically more aligned to Muslims than to the Brahmanical and Hindu-Upper-Castes. This political and electoral unity of Bahujans and Muslims enabled them to rise to political power in the many States of India which were otherwise dominated by a tiny minority of radical Hindu-Upper-Castes. However according to social experts, rabid Hindu-Brahmanical groups often try to break apart this unity of Bahujan-Muslims under the garb of ethnocultural nationalism and religion-based majoritarianism. They tend to exploit the social and cultural differences between Bahujan-Backwards and Muslims on one hand and amongst different Bahujan groups (like SCs and OBCs) on other hand using various diversionary tactics. As noted Sociologist Prof. Harish S. Wankhede puts it, Brahmanised upper-caste elites “exploit the trust deficit between the Dalit-Bahujan groups and mobilize them on distinct cultural fronts”. Further, the Brahmanical groups also exploit the Bahujan-backward association with Hindu-Brahmin rituals and traditions. To overcome this problem, many Bahujan-backwards scholars including Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar encouraged en-masse conversion of backward and lower castes to other religions like Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Dr. Ambedkar himself converted to Buddhism before his death. Some Bahujan and Mandal-oriented political parties of India include Bahujan Samaj Party, Azad Samaj Party, Republican Party, Peace Party, Janata Dal-United, Rashtriya Janta Dal, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Samajwadi Party, Nationalist Congress Party, Shiromani Akali Dal, Hindustani Awami Morcha, etc. Bahujan politics generally tend to glorify the backward, Muslim, and lower caste leaders and social reformers like Kabir, Guru Nanak, Guru Ravidas, Jyotiba Phule, Bhimrao Ambedkar, Periyar, Narayana Guru, etc. Kanshiram, Mayawati, Chandrashekhar Azad, Swami Prasad Maurya, Akhilesh Yadav, Omprakash Rajbhar, Chaudhary Ajit Singh, Jitan Ram Manjhi, Tejashwi Yadav, Asaduddin Owasi, Jignesh Mewani, etc are some famous Bahujan politicians of India. Literally, the word “Kamandal” means the mug used by Hindu-Brahmin saints and ascetics. In political parlance, the word “Kamandal” informally connotes the Hindu-Upper-Caste dominated conservative Hindu-Brahmanical politics that stands for ethnocultural nationalism. Kamandal Politics has been often accused of advancing the interests of minority upper-caste Hindus only under the garb of nationalism and Hindu-Brahmanic religion. It should be noted that Hindu-Brahmanical politics do not use the word “Kamandal” to identify themselves as such. Rather, it is a label used by political analysits, scholars and some Bahujan politicians to identify parties espousing the cause of Hindu-Brahmin cultural nationaism under whatever pretexts. For instance, Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), a leading “Kamandal” based poltical party claims to be committed to the “philosophy of Integral Humanism expressing basic commitment in Indian culture”. According to BJP, philosophy of Integral Humanism looks at the individual not merely as a material object but one who has a spiritual dimension. Further, it means- Commitment to nationalism and national integration Commitment to Democracy Commitment to Gandhian Socialism (Gandhian approach to socio-economic issues leading to the establishment of a samaras samaj free from exploitation) Commitment to positive secularism (sarva dharma sambhava) Commitment to value-based politics Contrary to Bahujan and Mandal ideologies, the Brahmanical and Kamandal politics generally tend to glorify Brahmin and upper caste rulers and icons of ancient India like Chanakya, Gupta empire, Maharana Pratap, etc. They have also been accused of misappropriating some Bahujan personalities like Suheldev, Shivaji, Sardar Patel, etc., especially to further their Islamophobic agenda and to drive a wedge between Bahujan and Muslims as part of their divide and rule tactics. According to Wankhede, Hindu-Brahmanical groups often invent new iconography and social history for different Bahujan-backward social groups aspiring for socio-cultural and material prestige. And “such inventions are not only utilized to institutionalize the social ruptures between lower caste groups but also becomes a potent tool to propagate communal hatred against Muslims”, says Wankhede. Some Brahmanical and Kamandal-oriented groups and political parties of India include RSS, Bharatiya Janata Party, Shiv Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc. Both Bahujan (Mandal) and Brahmanical (Kamandal) politics are based on majoritarianism. While the former is based on caste, tribe, and class-based majoritarianism, the latter is based on ethnocultural, religious, and nationalistic majoritarianism. Bahujan and Mandal politics aim to counter the religion-based majoritarian politics of a few Brahmanical castes with a new class and caste-based majoritarian politics where instead of Muslims, the Hindu-upper castes are portrayed as a dominant and oppressive minority that disproportionately usurps the socio-political and economic rights of other Indians, namely Dalits-Muslims-tribals and backward classes. In other words, Bahujan politics seeks to counter the Hindu versus Muslim debates of Hindu-upper-castes with a Bahujan versus Brahmanical narrative. For instance, recently Swami Prasad Maurya an influential backward and Bahujan leader of Uttar Pradesh countered the incumbent UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s 80-20 remark with his 85-15 reference. Recall that Adityanath, a dominant upper-caste Hindu had recently remarked that the election contest would be an “80 percent vs 20 percent’ fight” in a veiled reference to the Hindu and Muslim population. However, Maurya countered and silenced the Yogi by invoking the “85% vs 15%” remark where the 85% has been interpreted as a reference to the population of the Bahujans i.e. Dalits-Backwards-Muslims in the state while Hindu-Upper-Castes constitute only 15% of the population. Maurya said: “You are giving the slogan of 80 and 20 (percent), but I say it will now be between 15 and 85… 85 toh Hamara hai, 15 me bhi batwara hai (85% is ours and there is division even in the remaining 15%)” causing ripples in political circles of Uttar Pradesh. Thus, the counter-cry of 85 versus 15 is the Bahujan way of challenging the 80 versus 20 discourse of Hindu-Brahmanists. Ambedkarite and Bahujan-backward politicians accuse upper-caste Hindu-Brahmanists and Kamandal politicians of following a policy of divide and rule. In the words of Swami Prasad Maurya, “they follow a policy of divide and rule. They want to make backward castes and Dalits fight each other by tearing them into two parts. But the response to their manipulations is the 85-15″. Recently, RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav, another Bahujan-backward leader leveled similar allegations against Hindu-Brahmanical Kamandal Politics. While talking to reporters over the Hijab-row in Karnataka, he said that there was so much to discuss, like employment and inflation, but the BJP was busy playing the politics of divide and rule. Hindu-Brahmanists often try to woo Bahujan-backward communities by invoking mythical lower-caste leaders like Nishadraj Kevat and Shabri who served the so-called upper-caste divinities like Lord Ram. Also, to stop the conversion of Bahujan-Backwards to other religions, Hindu Brahmanical groups also tend to highlight some good samaritans of Hindu-Brahmin mythology who dealt with lower castes kindly. For instance, while inaugurating a giant 216-feet tall statue of Ramanujacharya, a Tamilian Brahmin scholar, Prime Minister Modi appealed to Indians to seek social reform within the fold of Hindu-Brahmanism and not away from it. However, according to Wankhede, they craft such creative cultural strategies only to legitimize and perpetuate the domination of Brahmanical elites over political and public institutions of the country under the garb of Hindu social harmony. Also, recent developments and statements from Bahujan-backward class leaders show that they have started rejecting the patronization politics of Hindu-Brahmanists. And as Bahujan leader Om Prakash Rajbhar puts it pithily, Bahujan-backwards are no longer content with playing the Kevatraj or Shabari to an upper-caste Lord Ram on a saffron stage, but they want to write their own Epics. All this shows that Bahujan-backward communities seem to have realized that they cannot attain equality of status within the cruel caste-based hierarchies of Hindu-Brahmanism, says noted journalist Seema Chishti. In her words, “these are noises which no conch shell sounds can drown out. It will haunt whoever comes to power in March”. “This could be a time when U.P. sees itself emerging into its own, with its own version of Dravidian modeling, finally being able to hardwire politics with a call for real social and economic change,” she adds further. Also Read| Ramcharitmanas Controversy in UP and Bihar In conclusion, the need for social and political parties to put aside their petty differences for the betterment of the nation has never been more pressing than in Amrit Kaal. India is a vast and diverse country with a rich cultural heritage and a rapidly growing economy. However, it is also a country that is facing numerous challenges such as poverty, inequality, and political division. For India to overcome these challenges and maintain its unity and integrity, it is essential that all political and social parties work together towards a common goal. Setting aside petty differences and focusing on the larger picture of national welfare and development will not only help in ensuring the long-term stability and prosperity of the country, but will also set an example for other nations to follow. It is time for all stakeholders to put aside their differences and work together for the greater good of India and its people. Read more Subaltern Articles–