

A STUDY ON DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR INDIA SECURITY POLICY

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Introduction

A large share of India's working population belongs to the castes designated as "unprivileged" in Indian legislation, belonging to so-called Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Backward Classes. People being classified as such have precedence to certain employment opportunities in the public sector and are allocated quotas in education. Despite these instances of positive discrimination the caste system has in aggregate had detrimental effects for India's internal stability, and the lowest classes face significantly more disadvantages than the rest of Indian society.

The history of the caste system is unclear. This is because it emerged before the use of the written word and there are no annals that may indicate reasons for its appearance. The castes are classified in a strict hierarchical system.

Caste is determined at birth and it is impossible to climb the system, but this does not impede persons theoretically from acquiring senior positions and well-paid employment. There is still awareness that one's caste significantly limits existing options and opportunities, both economically and socially, since the caste decides in practice one's life partner as well. It may be illegal and yet it is a bitter reality of Indian life.

Mahatma Gandhi sought to abolish the caste system and its role in Indian society calling the "caste-less" Harijans children of god. Disputes about the application of the caste system have led to a number of uprisings, resulting in numerous casualties. Furthermore, in 1989 implementation of a program launched by the then Prime Minister V.P. Singh for "backward classes" recommended by a commissioned study triggered a cabinet crisis.

In the industrialized parts of the country this segment of society, calling themselves Dalits or "oppressed", have organized in protest movements. The state of Maharashtra (where Mumbai is located) is a region where Dalit movements have been most active. Spontaneous militant demonstrations occur now and then, sometimes sparked by mobile text messages, making them erupt simultaneously in several cities and towns. The

leftist extremist parties seek to attract the Dalits, among them the criminalized Naxalites movement.

The importance of the caste-system for India's current domestic problems should not be underestimated. The caste system has had a negative impact on the ability of the lower classes to have any influence in the political debate and they have often been disregarded as a nuisance.

This skewed political representation is also reflected in the party system. The Hindu-dominated BJP is rather obviously controlled by the upper castes, but even the Congress party is often said to be run by Brahmins having an un-proportionally strong influence.

The Effects of the Nuclear Tests

Already in the same year (1998) as the Hindu-nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) assumed office after 40 years of straight rule by the Congress Party a series of nuclear tests were carried out.

No advance notifications to surrounding countries were given, and Pakistan followed suit and made a series of nuclear tests of its own. As a result, BJP had essentially (and covertly) redirected India's security policy with far-reaching consequences. Although BJP had a passage in its party programme on its position regarding nuclear weapons, this had passed almost unnoticed and most observers had not taken the issue seriously.

It can, however, be questioned whether the nuclear tests had any strategic value in terms of deterring Pakistan. India's relative strength and comparative advantage in conventional weapons had already increased in the last decade to the extent that it functioned as a credible deterrent in itself. It should also be noted that India's economic strength is many times greater than that of Pakistan, and that each percentage of increase in growth gives comparatively much more room for acquisitions of weapons.

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