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LINGAYAT POLITICAL ELITE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

The term 'Elite' is that in every society there are people who possess in a marked degree the qualities of intelligence, character, skill and capacity of whatever kind. The present study is to draw an outline of 'Lingayat Political Elite' group on the base of some previous empirical studies and inquiries. Of this Elite group, some data are presented on the socio- economic background characteristics, political or professional career and role perceptions of the respondents. This serves as a, ladder to political assent, by providing the activists, an opportunity to learn, the technique and rules of the political game.

KEY WORDS:

elite, lingayat, political, assent.

INTRODUCTION:

In the study of 'Political Sociology', the power occupies a central place and provides the main impetus to the growth of the discipline itself. Many of the social scientists have strived to know the answer for the whole problem of the distribution of power in the society. Vilfredo Pareto was quick to point out that people are no more equal intellectually and morally than they are physically. And, he chose to call 'Elite' those who are the most capable in any particular group. The purpose of the present study is to draw an outline of 'Lingayat Political Elite' group on the base of some previous empirical studies and inquiries. Of this Elite group, some data are presented on the socio- economic background characteristics, political or professional career and role perceptions of the respondents.

CONCEPT OF ELITE:

Italian scholar 'Vilfredo Pareto' with a phrase, "History is a graveyard of aristocracies", introduced the word 'Elite' in social sciences, formulated his idea of the decline and fall of Elite, especially the 'Political Elite'. Theoreticians like Pareto, Mosca and the German Robert Michels hold strong opinions on how Elite should act and how their positions can be justified. The rightful behavior of Elite is still of course, fiercely debated in the public arena, but less so in modern social research on Elite. In modern studies, Elite are defined as the incumbent of top positions in both the public and private sector, like members of parliament or boards of executives. The focus is on the individual characteristics of these incumbents, the extent to which they are interconnected with each other, or the chance that people with certain characteristics are able to obtain such an Elite position. However, the problem of sampling is transferred from individuals with high qualities to institutions. 'Elite' in simple terms, is the "Best" and forms a minority set off for the masses by the possession of some prized quality - be it superiority,

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exclusivity and domination – highly valued by the community. These characteristics are markedly above the level at which such qualities appear in their community/society.

MEANING AND WORKING DEFINITION OF LINGAYAT POLITICAL ELITE:

The community 'Lingayat' which can be split up as 'Linga' plus 'Ayata', which means, One who wears 'Linga', or is associated with 'Linga', is a 'Lingayat'. They worship Lord Shiva in the form of 'Linga', called as 'Istalinga', which Lingayats usually wear across their neck. Lingayats constitute around 30 percent of Karnataka state's population and about 2.5 percent of the country's population. Accordingly for the present study 'Lingayat Political Elite' are those who are the Corporators; Zilla Panchayat Members; Kannada Sahitya Parishat Secretaries; Member of the Parliament (MPs); Member of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Ministers who belong to the Lingayat community. Thus, a Lingayat who is serving the society in any one of these forms in Belgaum District is termed as 'Lingayat Political Elite' in the present study.

BRIEF INFORMATION OF THE STUDY AREA:

The present study is confined to Belgaum District. Hence, it is essential to swot the general profile of the district. Among the 30 districts of Karnataka state, Belgaum is one of the important district and the second capital of the State. The name of 'Belgaum' grew out of a village as 'Velugram' or 'Venugrama', meaning 'Village of bamboo', over a course of at least 3,200 years as seen in a record of the Shilaharas for the first time and 'Venu' stands for bamboo which is abundant in this area where there are thick forests. With the creation of the new district in 1836 with Belgaum as the headquarters (1838), the district was given the name of the headquarters town, which is called in Kannada as 'Belagavi' in records of later years. It was part of Kuntala of the Shatavahana times. According to Provisional 2011 census, the population of the district is 47,78,439 out of which 24,27,104 are Male and 23,51,335 are Female. The Sex ratio is 969. The density of population per sq. km is 356. Belgaum has an enviable heritage and presents much to be discovered. One of the prominent lady warriors, 'Rani Channamma' of Kittur, along with 'Sangolli Rayanna' were the first to start actively and participated in the 'Freedom Movement' of the country. Belgaum was highlighted in the venue of the 39th Session of Indian National Congress in December 1924 under the presidentship of Mahatma Gandhi. Belgaum district is the Headquarter as well as a Divisional Headquarter. For administrative purpose it is divided into three revenue sub- divisions namely: Belgaum, Bailhongal and Chikkodi. The district is having 35 hoblies, 1,270 villages (where Inhabited are 1,255 and 15 Uninhabited), and 22 Towns/ Urban Agglomerations. In the district there are One Municipal Corporation, Two City Corporations, Seven Municipalities and Six Town Panchayats. All developmental activities in the district are undertaken by Zilla Panchayat, 10 Taluka Panchayat Samithies and 485 Gram Panchayats. The district is endowed with good natural resources, healthy climate, irrigational facilities, infrastructural facilities and having reputed educational institutions and health facilities through which the Human Development Index and Growth Development Index in the district have improved. Thus, these facilities have resulted in diverse economic activities and provide tremendous scope for the overall development of the district.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of the study is to reveal the socio-economic and educational background of the respondents and the prime objective is to know the political backdrop of the respondents.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The paper studies the 'Lingayat Political Elite' of the Belgaum district, Karnataka state, India. The present research paper is a part of my Ph.D. thesis entitled: "Lingayat Elite: A Sociological Study". The paper is case study method relying upon primary as well as secondary sources. An interview schedule was prepared with open ended (direct) and close ended (with multiple choice) questions to collect the data from the respondents. The Composition of Political Elite of Belgaum District are: Corporators- 05; Zilla Panchayat Members- 25; Kannada Sahitya Parishat Secretaries- 04; Member of the Parliament (MPs); Member of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Ministers- 11.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The social characteristic of 'Political Elite' ascertains their position in a society's system of social stratification. A number of recent empirical study suggested that, political leaders tend to be chosen from

higher strata of the society. An individual in a society have certain standing in terms of their socio-economic and political background. Social findings reflect some of these features in them. The nature of such conglomeration is not complex, and then it does not have much problem to know the behaviour of these respondents. Single factor influencing the respondents may not throw enough light to know their background fully. In order to make inroads into some of the areas, and to gain further insights, various parameters such as: sex, age, caste, marital status, education, income and professional earnings from one or more members in the family, their occupations and experience in politics and etc. are been considered to know the respondent's background. Thus, the socio-economic, educational and political background of the respondents has been analysed, as they are the proper decision makers of the society and their active participation plays very significant role in the political field for its smooth and successful functioning.

As revealed in the table: 1, concerning sex composition of the total respondents, 75.56 percent are male and 24.44 percent female respondents. Thus, it is clear that, there is more representation of male members, than female members and can be concluded that, there is less participation of women in politics.

TABLE: 1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

		No. of Respondents	%
Sex Composition	Male	34	75.56
	Female	11	24.44
Age Composition	21 to 30 years	09	20.00
	31 to 40 years	16	35.57
	41 to 50 years	15	33.33
	51 to 60 years	03	06.66
	61 years and above	02	04.44
Marital Status	Unmarried	01	02.22
	Married	44	97.78
Family Unit	Joint Family	29	64.44
	Nuclear Family	16	35.56
Educational Qualification	Primary	03	06.66
	Secondary	09	20.00
	P.U.C.	06	13.33
	Graduate	14	31.11
	Post- Graduate	13	28.88
Occupational Background	Agriculture	06	13.33
	Business	06	13.33
	Professional-(Lawyer)	02	04.44
	Social Service	23	51.11
	Household	07	15.59
Monthly Income	Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000	03	06.66
	Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 30,000	08	17.79
	Rs. 30,001 to Rs. 40,000	10	22.22
	Above Rs. 40,001	24	53.33
Earning Members of the Family	One	09	20.00
	Two	10	22.22
	More than two	26	57.78

Survey: Field Survey.

As age is an important feature, which refers not only to the physical maturity of a person but also indicates their experience, knowledge, worldly wisdom and maturity in their role performance. In this connection, an attempt has been made to know about the age group of the respondents. This reveals that a certain age is preferred for leadership in politics. Of the total respondents, 20.00 percent are in the age group of 21 to 30 years. 35.57 percent of them are in the age group of 31 to 40 years, and 33.33 percent of the respondents are in the age group of 41 to 50 years. Whereas, meagre of 06.66 and 04.44 percent of the total respondents are between 51 to 60 years and 61 years and above respectively. Thus, the fact reveals that, majority of the respondents are adults, who belong to the age group between 21 to 30 years and 31 to 40 years. This indicates that, they are preferred for political leadership, who have gained maturity and at the same time are not too old to discharge their responsibilities and duties more effectively.

Concerned to the marital status of the respondents, it is clear from the table: 1 that, 97.78 percent of the respondents are married and the remaining 02.22 percent of the respondents are unmarried. Here, we do not have the respondents who are divorced, widowed and separated or deserted. This shows that, majority of the respondents have given importance to family life, which is the basic unit of the society. As family is the basic unit of human society, the status and prestige of the individual are significantly associated with it. Concerning to the nature of the family of the respondents, 64.44 percent of them live in joint family and, 35.56 percent of the respondents live in the nuclear family. This shows that, the majority of the respondents stay in joint family, which is one of the basic pillars of our Indian society. It also states that, the respondents are still connected to their traditional joint family, which is also an important in the context of leadership, because only those who have money, time and manpower can afford to participate in factional politics.

The development of any country depends on the education of its people. An educated can make the family and the society cultured. Education is the source of enlightenment, which can provide them base for social and occupational mobility, adoption of new innovations and acquisition of new skills. Concerned to the educational qualification of the total respondents, 31.11 percent of them have completed their Graduation; 13.33 percent of them have completed their P.U.C.; 20.00 percent of the respondents are qualified with Secondary level and 28.88 percent are Post-graduates, whereas, only 06.66 percent of the respondents are qualified with Primary education. Thus, the data reveals that, all the respondents are literate and have given importance to education and play vital role in every aspects of life.

Occupational conditions cannot be remoted from the economic conditions; occupation is the source of income. The economic source of man is not only meaningful to his livelihood but also determine his ability to obtain those utilities and services which symbolise higher social values. From the table: 1, it shows that majority of the respondents i.e. 51.11 percent of them are in Social Service, 15.59 percent of them are in Household work, 13.33 percent of the respondents are in Agriculture and Business respectively as their occupational background, and lastly 04.44 percent of the respondents represented Lawyer. The findings reveal that, majority respondents had a well mindset before entering politics as they were in social service, which favours politics. If occupation is the source of income, income is the outcome of an occupation. The income particulars of the members state that, majority of the respondents i.e. 53.33 percent of them have a monthly income of above Rs. 40,001, 22.22 percent of them have a monthly income of Rs. 30,001 to Rs. 40,000; 17.79 percent of the respondents have a monthly income of Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 30,000 and only 06.66 percent of them have an income of Rs. 10,001 to 20,000 per month. Concerned to the earning members of the family of the respondents, 57.78 percent of the respondents have more than two earning members in their family, 22.22 percent of them have two earning members and 20.00 percent of the total respondents have only one earning member in their family. From this, we can say that, majority of the total respondents are economically sound with their monthly income and majority having more than one/two earning members in their family.

The table: 2 shows that, majority respondents i.e. 53.33 percent have 16 to 20 years of experience in politics; 17.79 percent of the respondents have above 20 years of experience, 13.33 percent of them have 11 to 15 years; 11.11 percent of them have 5 to 10 years of experience in politics and, respondents with 1 to 5 years constituted only 04.44 percent. Thus, from the analyses it can be concluded that, majority of the respondents have experience in politics of above 16 years.

Of the total respondents, majority i.e. 71.11 percent of the respondents revealed, social service is the vital motive for joining politics, 51.11 percent for having a very good rapport with the political leaders, 46.66 percent of the respondents said due to their financial soundness, 31.11 percent due to the dynastic tradition from their family members, 24.44 percent of them due to their self propaganda and lastly only 11.11 percent of the respondents said, educational and family background respectively are the vital motives for joining politics. Thus, majority of the respondents have come from the field of social service and as respondents are economically sound and have come with a strong base from their family political background, it can be assumed, that they have a good contact in the political field and this might have motivated them to join politics.

TABLE: 2 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ELITE POSITION

		No. of Respondents	%
Number of Years in Politics	1 to 5 years	02	04.44
	5 to 10 years	05	11.11
	11 to 15 years	06	13.33
	16 to 20 years	24	53.33
	Above 20 years	08	17.79
Vital Motive for Joining Politics	Self- Propaganda	11	24.44
	Educational Background	05	11.11
	Family Background	05	11.11
	Dynastic Tradition	14	31.11
	Social Service	32	71.11
	Financial Soundness	21	46.66
	Rapport with Political Leaders	23	51.11
Margin of Win in the Election	Less than 100	02	04.44
	1,001 to 1, 500	07	15.55
	1,501 to 2, 000	11	24.44
	More than 2,000	25	55.56
Political Party	Congress	11	24.44
	Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP)	24	53.34
	Janta Dal (JD)	08	17.77
	Independent	02	04.44
Role Model	Dr. B. R. Ambedkar	01	02.22
	Shri. Jawaharlal Nehru	01	02.22
	Shri. A. B. Vajpayee	21	46.70
	Shri. H. D. Devegowda	02	04.44
	Shri. S. M. Krishna	04	08.88
	Shri. B. S. Yediyurappa	08	17.77
	Smt. Sonia Gandhi	05	11.11
	Shri. H. D. Kumarswamy	02	04.44
	Shri. Rahul Gandhi	01	02.22

Source: Field Survey.

Concerned to the margin of win of the respondents in the elections, majority of 55.55 percent of the respondents have won with the margin of more than 2,000 votes. 24.44 percent of them have won with a margin of 1,501 to 2,000 votes. 15.55 percent of the respondents have won with a margin of 1,001 to 1,500 votes and 04.44 percent of them have won with a margin of less than 100 votes. Thus, majority of respondents have won the election with more than 2,000 vote margin from their respective constituency to the present position, which shows their popularity through huge margin of win.

Concerned to the political party to which the respondents belong, majority of 53.34 percent of the total respondents are from Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), 24.44 percent of them are from Congress Political

Party, 17.77 percent of the respondents from Janta Dal (JD) Political Party and 04.44 percent of them were independent in political party. Thus it can be revealed that, majority of the respondents belong to Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), which is presently the ruling party in the state (Karnataka).

For shaping the personality of an individual, many factors play an important role and in order to achieve this, people always look for some role model to excel themselves in their chosen field. It is revealed that, 46.70 percent of the total respondents have Shri. A.B. Vajpayee as their role model; 17.77 percent of them have Shri. B. S. Yediyurappa, 11.11 percent of them have Smt. Sonia Gandhi as their role model; 08.88 percent of them have Shri. S. M. Krishna and as their role model. Whereas, 04.44 percent of the respondents have Shri. H. D. Devegowda and Shri. H. D. Kumarswamy respectively. Lastly, 02.22 percent of the total respondents have Shri. Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Shri. Rahul Gandhi as their role model respectively. Thus, as per the analyses, majority of the respondents have BJP leaders Shri. A.B. Vajpayee and Shri. B. S. Yediyurappa as their role models and can be assumed that the respondents are influenced more by their vocations and preaches.

CONCLUSION:

Empirical investigation of the process and outcome of the recruitment of 'Political Elite' has for a long time been considered one of the most intriguing fields of socio-political science. An effort was made to study 'Lingayat Political Elite of Belgaum District: A Case Study'. It is found that, the respondents were heterogeneous group on many counts. They differ in their age groups, caste-composition, educational standard, economic conditions, and political experience and so on. Thus, as per the data revealed by the respondents, they are functioning their duties successfully. All the respondents are literate and socio-economically sound. They are well experienced in politics, who are executing several kinds of developmental works. As executed by the respondents, to some extent, the problem of water, irrigation, roads, electricity, school buildings etc. are pending. For this, the major constraint stated by them was, lack of sufficient Government grants and funds in time for carrying out their responsible developmental works. All these, hold strong objective in for politics. The members participated in various capacities, ultimately coming from the grass root level of PRI i.e.: Gram Panchayat and Taluk Panchayat. This serves as a, ladder to political ascent, by providing the activists, an opportunity to learn, the technique and rules of the political game. And steadily, create a place for them, at the top of the ladder. Hence, this is the leadership from bottom upwards.

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