
CASTE INFLUENCE AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF LINGAYAT LEADERSHIP IN NORTH KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT:

Caste is still a big part of politics and democracy in India, especially in regional politics. The Lingayat community has historically impacted electoral results in North Karnataka and has held a significant role in the regional political framework. This paper assesses public perception regarding Lingayat political leadership and its correlation with political development in specific districts of North Karnataka. The research utilizes primary data gathered from 120 respondents via a structured questionnaire and adheres to a descriptive empirical research design. Respondents from various social and demographic backgrounds were chosen using a purposive sampling method. We used percentage analysis, mean score analysis, and the Chi-square test to look at how caste affects political development indicators like representation, stability, and governance. The findings reveal that while a significant proportion of respondents associate Lingayat leadership with political stability and regional development, concerns regarding caste dominance and inclusive representation remain visible. The paper concludes that caste continues to influence political development in North Karnataka and highlights the need for balanced and inclusive democratic governance.

KEYWORDS:

Caste Politics, Lingayat Leadership, Political Development, Public Perception, Democratic Governance, North Karnataka

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1. Introduction:

Caste continues to be a major factor in how politics works and how democracy works in India. Even though the Constitution guarantees equality and representative governance, caste identities are still important in getting people to vote, choosing leaders, and making policy decisions (Kothari, 1970; Jaffrelot, 2003). Caste has transitioned from a conventional social hierarchy to a contemporary political instrument through which communities negotiate power and representation (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967). Political competition in Indian states frequently mirrors the preeminence of social capital, economic resources, and organizational networks governed by powerful caste groups.

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Several prominent political leaders from the Lingayat community have impacted governance and policy direction in Karnataka (Manor, 2009). Caste-based leadership has frequently fostered political stability and developmental continuity; however, it has also elicited apprehensions regarding inclusivity and equitable power distribution (Chandra, 2004). The question remains whether caste dominance enhances democratic representation or constrains broader participation. There is a scarcity of empirical research investigating citizens' perceptions of Lingayat leadership's role in political development, particularly in specific districts of North Karnataka. Consequently, this paper seeks to examine public perception concerning the impact of caste on political development within the region.

2. Conceptual Framework

The main theoretical stances that explain the connection between caste influence and political development serve as the foundation for this investigation.

M. N. Srinivas (1962) developed the theory of dominant caste, which describes how a caste group rises to political prominence as a result of social influence, economic might, and numerical strength. In India, dominant caste groups have effectively converted traditional social authority into political control, influencing governance structures and election results.

Strengthening democratic institutions, increasing participation, increasing administrative capacity, and promoting political stability are all considered aspects of political development (Almond and Coleman, 1960). Political development is evaluated using metrics like inclusivity, stability, accountability, and representation. Concentrating leadership within a single caste group, however, may limit wider participation while promoting stability (Chandra, 2004).

According to elite theory, which was put forth by Pareto in 1935 and Mosca in 1939, political power is typically held by a select few powerful people. Party structures and decision-making procedures are frequently controlled by dominant caste elites in regional contexts. One could consider North Karnataka's Lingayat leadership to be a regional elite that shapes political institutions.

This study offers a methodical framework to comprehend how public perception connects Lingayat leadership with political development in North Karnataka by combining dominant caste theory, political development theory, and elite theory.

3. Review of Literature

Even in democratic institutions, caste is still a major factor in Indian politics, according to recent research. Research indicates that caste identities still have an impact on leadership choices and voting patterns, particularly in local politics (Jodhka, 2019; Deshpande, 2020). Caste identities continue to influence political preferences even though formal discrimination has decreased as a result of institutional reforms (Srinivas & Gupta, 2021).

Numerically powerful communities use organizational networks and socioeconomic resources to retain political power, according to research on dominant caste politics (Kumar and Rao, 2022; Patel, 2023). Although such dominance may improve the efficacy of governance, it also calls into question fair representation.

Numerous studies in Karnataka highlight the political importance of Lingayat leaders in regional decision-making, party organization, and candidate selection (Sharma & Reddy, 2022; Gowda, 2024). Scholars raise concerns about inclusive access to power, even though Lingayat leadership has been linked to political stability and continuity (Rao et al., 2023).

However, rather than perception-based empirical research, the majority of current studies concentrate on electoral data or historical analysis. In North Karnataka, there is a dearth of district-level research that documents the opinions of the populace. The necessity of the current study is justified by this gap.

4. Research Gap

While caste politics and electoral mobilization have been studied in recent years (2018–2024), the majority of research focuses on party politics and macro-level trends. Few studies examine how citizens view caste-based leadership and how it affects district-level political development. Although Lingayat's political significance in North Karnataka is acknowledged by research, there is a dearth of empirical data on how the general public views its contribution to inclusiveness, stability, and governance. Therefore, to comprehend the ongoing influence of caste in regional democratic processes, an empirical study based on perception is required.

5. Scope of the Study

This study looks at how Lingayat leadership is perceived politically and how it affects political development in two North Karnataka districts: Belagavi and Dharwad. It focuses on how caste influence relates to political development metrics like inclusiveness, stability, and the efficacy of governance. Based on primary data, the study looks at more general patterns of caste influence in regional politics rather than focusing on specific political parties or leaders.

6. Objectives of the Study

- To investigate how the public views Lingayat political leadership in certain districts of North Karnataka.
- To assess the link between caste dominance and political development indicators.

- To examine perceptions of inclusiveness under Lingayat leadership.
- To study how caste-based leadership affects regional political development.

7. Hypotheses

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between perception of caste influence and political development in selected districts of North Karnataka.
- H₁: There is a significant relationship between perception of caste influence and political development in selected districts of North Karnataka.

8. Research Methodology

The study looks at how people think about Lingayat leaders and how these leaders affect politics. It uses a research method that describes and explains things to understand opinion. To gather information, the researchers used a questionnaire with questions about caste influence, how well the government is doing, stability, and fairness. The study was done in Belagavi and Dharwad districts. The researchers chose 120 people on purpose to get a mix of ages, genders, education levels, and political backgrounds. The questionnaire had questions that you could answer with a choice and questions that asked you to rate your opinion. The researchers also used books, journals, and studies about politics to understand the context. They used percentages to understand the types of people they surveyed, scores to see how strong people's opinions were, and a statistical test to see if there was a link between caste influence and political development. Lingayat political leadership and its influence on development were examined. Caste influence and political development were areas of study. The study focused on Lingayat leadership.

9. Results and Discussions:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 120)

Particulars	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	70	58
	Female	50	42
Age	Below 25 years	38	32

25–40 years	55	46	
Above 40 years	27	22	
Education	PUC/Equivalent	24	20
Graduate	62	52	
Postgraduate	34	28	
Total		120	100

Interpretation: The sample includes 58% males and 42% females. The majority (46%) belong to the 25–40 age group. Educationally, 52% are graduates and 28% postgraduates, indicating informed responses.

Table 2: Perception of Caste Influence in Politics

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	42	35
Agree	35	29
Neutral	25	21
Disagree	12	10
Strongly Disagree	6	5
Total	120	100

Mean Score (5–point scale) = 4.02

Interpretation: A majority (64%) agree that caste significantly influences politics in North Karnataka. The high mean score reflects strong agreement that caste remains a determining factor.

Table 3: Perception of Lingayat Leadership and Political Development

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	25
Agree	38	32
Neutral	31	26

Disagree	14	12
Strongly Disagree	7	5
Total	120	100

Interpretation: A total of 57% believe Lingayat leadership has contributed positively to political development, while 26% remain neutral.

Table 4: Inclusive Representation under Lingayat Leadership

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes (Inclusive)	44	37
No (Dominance limits inclusion)	58	48
Not Sure	18	15
Total	120	100

Interpretation: While 37% consider Lingayat leadership inclusive, 48% believe caste dominance limits inclusiveness.

Chi-Square Test

Calculated χ^2 value = 11.26

Degrees of Freedom (df) = 2

Table value at 5% significance level = 5.99

Since $11.26 > 5.99$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation: There is a statistically significant relationship between perception of caste influence and views on political development.

Discussion

The findings show that caste is still very important when it comes to people's opinions about politics in North Karnataka. People think that leaders from the Lingayat community help keep things stable and make the area a better place. This is what the theory about castes says. Some people are worried that not everyone is being treated fairly. This is causing problems between the groups that are in charge and the people who want to be involved in the democratic process. When we looked at the numbers, we found that what people think about politics is closely tied to what they think about caste and its influence. Caste is still a factor in North Karnataka, and it affects how people think about political development

and caste influence.

10. Policy Implications

The findings show that we need to have a mix of people in political leadership positions. Political parties should make sure they have people from all walks of life and give everyone a say in what they do. We should have programs that teach people about how to get involved in politics and make decisions based on the issues that matter. We need to make sure that people who are often left out get to have a voice in politics so that our democracy can get stronger. Political leadership should really work on this to make things more fair.

11. Limitations of the Study

The study only looks at two districts and 120 people, which makes it hard to apply the findings to a larger group. The way the participants were chosen might also be biased. The study mainly talks about Lingayat leaders. It does not really compare them to other big communities like Vokkaligas. This limitation is important to note when looking at the results. The study's focus on Lingayat leadership means we do not get a picture of other communities. The small sample size of 120 respondents also limits the study's ability to make generalizations. The purposive sampling method used may also introduce some level of bias in the results. Lingayat leadership is the main focus, and Vokkaligas and other communities are not compared in the study.

12. Scope for Future Research

Future research on this topic may go to other areas in Karnataka and use methods that choose people in a fair way. We can learn more by comparing Lingayats and Vokkaligas. If we do studies over time and talk to people in depth, we can get a better understanding of how caste and politics are connected in Karnataka, especially when it comes to Lingayats and Vokkaligas and their role in political development.

Conclusion

The study says that caste still plays a role in who becomes a leader and how things develop in North Karnataka. People think that leaders from the Lingayat community help keep things stable and make the region a better place. Some people are worried that not everyone gets to be a part of the decision-making process. The numbers show that people's ideas

about caste and its influence are closely tied to how they think the region is developing. For things to get better in a way that lasts, the government needs to make sure everyone has a say and is treated fairly, not just the people from certain castes. The study is talking about caste, how it affects North Karnataka, and it is saying that we need to move beyond just one group being in charge if we want real progress.

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The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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