

From Caste Solidarity to Caste Nationalism: A Socio-Historical Study of Cooperation, Integration and Collective Mobilisation in India

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Abstract

Caste in India has historically combined hierarchy with collective belonging, mutual assistance, and organised community action. This paper develops a qualitative socio-historical interpretation of the movement from caste solidarity to wider collective mobilisation and examines when such mobilisation may be described as caste nationalism. Drawing on classical and contemporary scholarship on caste, social change, nationalism and democratic politics, the article traces the transformation of caste-based networks through colonial administration, print culture, education, associational life, constitutional democracy, affirmative action and contemporary digital communication. The article uses published aggregate survey evidence only as contextual support for the continuing salience of caste categories and the contemporary contestation surrounding caste enumeration. The central argument is that caste solidarity should not be treated as synonymous with either social integration or caste nationalism. Community solidarity can generate educational support, welfare, political voice and social mobility, but it can also reproduce social boundaries and inter-group competition. Caste nationalism is therefore conceptualised as a more specific and historically contingent form of mobilisation in which a caste community is represented as a broad historical collective with a shared narrative and sustained claims to recognition, representation or political power. The article proposes a conditional analytical model linking social networks, associational infrastructure, collective narratives and political mobilisation, while emphasising the need for case-specific documentary evidence before applying the term caste nationalism.

Keywords: caste solidarity, caste cooperation, social integration, collective identity, caste associations, caste nationalism, political mobilisation, Indian nationalism, secondary data, democracy

1. Introduction

The sociology of caste has traditionally been dominated by questions of hierarchy, purity and pollution, endogamy, occupational closure, discrimination and social inequality. These aspects are still important. However, caste is more than just a system of ranking. It also creates networks for arranging marriages, sharing economic help, building schools, running charities, spreading information, and making political demands. The challenge is to explain how these different sides exist together. A group can be united inside but still exclude others; it can seek equality for its members while keeping outsiders at a distance. So, caste solidarity should not be automatically equated with social integration.

This article looks at how caste solidarity has developed into caste nationalism over time. This does not mean that every caste group becomes nationalist or that caste identity always follows the same political path. Here, caste nationalism refers to a more developed form of collective identity, in which a caste community is seen as a broad historical group with a shared

past, common interests, dignity, and claims to public recognition or power. This distinction matters because everyday community welfare, election deals, and nationalist movements are different.

The main argument is that modern caste mobilisation grew out of the mix between old social networks and new institutions like colonial classification, print media, education, associations, elections, constitutional rights, affirmative action, mass politics, and digital communication. These changes did not simply replace traditional caste with a modern identity. Instead, they changed how big caste became and how people talked about it. A village group could become a regional or national association; a local status issue could turn into a demand for representation; and a push for education could become part of a larger story about group progress.

This research makes three main contributions. First, it clearly distinguishes cooperation, solidarity, integration, mobilisation, and nationalism. Second, it uses both historical analysis and current survey data, rather than relying on fabricated field data. Third, it offers a conditional model that sees two possible outcomes of caste solidarity: joining democratic citizenship or strengthening social boundaries. The data section is careful. Public survey tables can show how important caste categories are and what people think about caste counting, but they cannot prove cause and effect or measure how strongly someone feels about caste nationalism.

2. Research Problem and Questions

The issue is how caste has shifted from a local form of social organisation to a modern collective identity and a basis for political action. The study asks whether caste solidarity promotes wider democratic integration or instead strengthens social division or evolves into a broader form of caste nationalism.

1. What happened to caste-based cooperation and solidarity as Indian society transitioned from local institutions to modern associational and democratic ones?
2. What institutional procedures allowed caste groups to organise outside village and kinship boundaries?
3. What impact have caste reform, education and political representation had on collective caste identity?
4. What was the relationship between caste mobilisation, Indian nationalism, and constitutional citizenship?
5. What do modern aggregate survey findings say regarding the ongoing public importance of caste categories?
6. When are the conditions such that caste solidarity can be seen as caste nationalism rather than ordinary caste politics or concern for community welfare?

3. Objectives

The study has three principal objectives:

- (1) To trace the socio-historical transformation of caste solidarity, cooperation, and associational organisation;
- (2) To examine the relationship among caste mobilisation, social integration, and Indian democratic politics; and
- (3) To conceptualise and to critically evaluate the shift from caste solidarity to caste nationalism.

4. Review of Literature

When citing, present the basic arguments at the point where each scholar's idea or interpretation is introduced, and include full bibliographic entries in the reference list.

4.1 Classical Sociological Interpretations

Early in his sociological work, Ghurye incorporated caste into a broader framework of social organisation and highlighted aspects such as segmentation, hierarchy, restrictions, and civil-religious disabilities. His contribution lies in treating caste as a multidimensional social institution rather than a single ritual principle. Srinivas then turned to questions of change, particularly Sanskritisation and the dominant caste; these ideas showed that caste relations could be dynamic, negotiable, and

linked to land, political power, and local status. In contrast, Dumont's Homo Hierarchicus provided a structural interpretation based on hierarchy and the distinction between purity and pollution. Bêteille later stressed the intersection of caste, class, and power, allowing caste to be analysed in the context of changing socioeconomic structures. (Ghurye, 1932).

Ambedkar's critique is essential to the current argument since it stops the romanticisation of caste solidarity. For him, caste was not simply a collection of communities, but a system of graded inequality maintained through endogamy and social separation; collective organisation by oppressed groups could therefore be emancipatory if it opposed the hierarchical structure, while solidarity among privileged groups could reinforce domination. This distinction matters when examining whether caste mobilisation leads to integration or simply shifts competition between groups. (Ambedkar, 1936).

4.2 Caste, Modernity and Colonial Transformation

Historians have questioned the idea that caste stayed the same until colonialism suddenly changed it; Bayly emphasises the significance of the political and social developments that took place before the colonial period, while Dirks demonstrates how colonial practices relating to knowledge, the act of enumerating people, and administrative classification made caste increasingly clear as a complete political category. The right conclusion, therefore, is not that caste was invented in the colonial period, but that colonial institutions changed the scale, visibility, and political incentives connected with caste identities. (Bayly, 1999).

Modern education, printed materials, migration, and associations provided new opportunities. Community leaders could publish histories, hold conferences, set up schools, and ask authorities for something. These activities promoted broader narratives of common ancestry and shared interests. The identity that emerged was neither entirely traditional nor entirely modern; it was a modern way of organising that used earlier social divisions.

4.3 Caste and Democratic Politics

Kothari's research on caste and politics showed that democracy did not merely eliminate caste. On the contrary, electoral competition led to new situations in which caste could be used as a means of organisation and negotiation. Subsequent studies, especially those concerning the political mobilisation of lower castes and OBCs, have shown that democratic institutions can turn social identities into claims for representation. Jaffrelot's study of the 'silent revolution' is particularly relevant, as it highlights the political ascent of lower and backward castes and the reorganisation of power in North India. (Kothari, 1970).

The literature also warns against the idea of treating caste as a single voting bloc, since caste groups are divided among themselves on the grounds of class, gender, region, generation and political preference. Electoral alliances can go beyond caste lines, and the same caste identity may back different parties in different states. For these reasons, caste mobilisation should be seen as an organisational and strategic process rather than as a simple translation of identity into voting behaviour.

5. Conceptual Framework

5.1 Caste Solidarity

Caste solidarity is a sense of belonging, both in the mind and through organisation, that leads people to recognise their mutual duties. It may involve social support, a sense of cultural identity, help with education, networking in economic matters and working together politically. Hence, solidarity is wider than ritual identity but narrower than nationalism.

5.2 Caste Cooperation

Cooperation is more particular than solidarity since it involves joint action or mutual aid. For example, a caste association that runs a hostel, pays for scholarships, or provides emergency assistance is an instance of cooperation. Although such cooperation can help to build up social capital, it may also be restricted by membership requirements.

5.3 Social Integration

There are two aspects to integration. The first refers to the degree of cohesion within a community, while the second involves participation across caste lines through common institutions and the shared norms of citizenship. A caste organisation might

perform well on the first and poorly on the second. This distinction stops the mistaken idea that greater community solidarity necessarily implies a more integrated society.

5.4 Collective Mobilisation

Collective mobilisation occurs when people's sense of identity and the organisation's capabilities focus on a public claim; such claims can involve education, employment, reservations, political representation, dignity, historical recognition, or cultural rights. Mobilisation gains political importance when organisations build leadership, communication networks, and long-term public strategies.

5.5 Caste Nationalism

Here, caste nationalism is described as an ideal type representing a caste or a community derived from a caste as a wide historical collective which has a common destiny to make political claims. It usually includes three elements: a sense of shared collective identity; a narrative relating to a common history, an injury, an achievement, or a cultural distinction; and ongoing public claims aimed at gaining recognition, representation, resources, or political power. The category must be shown through empirical evidence, not simply assumed because a caste identity exists.

6. Methodology

The research uses a qualitative socio-historical approach, supplemented by a descriptive analysis of available aggregate survey and census data. In its historical aspect, it looks at the evolution of caste organisation over several major periods: the social networks that existed in the precolonial and early colonial periods; the reform and expansion of associations in the nineteenth century; the period of nationalist mobilisation; the phase following 1950 marked by constitutional democracy; the period of mobilisation during the Mandal era; and current digital politics.

The quantitative part is based on published marginal tables from two studies carried out by Lokniti–CSDS in 2024. The first is the Social and Political Barometer Prepoll Study (n=10,019), which provides respondents' broad caste categories. The second is the Youth and Politics Survey 2024 (N=1,290), which includes a question on whether to conduct a caste census. The official catalogue of the Indian Census provides Scheduled Caste data from 2011, and the Government of India has set out the boundaries for caste enumeration in the regular Census, as well as the status of caste data from the SECC.

The percentages are merely descriptive indicators, not evidence of causation. Because the published marginal tables do not include the complete cross-tabulations needed for multivariate analysis, the article does not assert any relationships between caste category, political attitudes, or mobilisation. The analysis thus involves triangulation: historical scholarship sheds light on the processes in question, official documentation confirms the institutional facts, and survey data demonstrate current relevance and contestation.

7. Historical Trajectory of Caste Solidarity

7.1 Local Networks and Mutual Dependence

The traditional caste system was built upon locality, family ties, occupation, ritual practices and customary authority. Although various occupational groups depended on one another, a hierarchy shaped these relationships. It is therefore incorrect to view the traditional system merely as harmonious cooperation, since reciprocal exchange could coexist with unequal status and limited access to resources.

These networks mattered because they had organisational value. Through kinship links and neighbourhood ties, channels were created through which information, marriage arrangements, economic help, and social sanctions could be passed on. These networks could later be used in modern associations. The continuity was organisational, not ideological: modern associations could use the language of rights and education even though they were based on older identities.

7.2 Nineteenth-Century Reform and Associational Expansion

In the nineteenth century, print culture, education, and voluntary associations expanded. Caste groups began to set up sabhas and other organisations to improve their community's status and material conditions. Their activities included establishing schools, hostels, scholarships, publications, conferences, and petitions. These associations mattered because they let caste identity function beyond the direct relationships that existed in the village.

At the same time, when creating associations, people usually worked to present the community in a respectable and unified way. Community histories could highlight heroic ancestors, reinterpret traditional customs, and assert higher status. These initiatives helped achieve what might be termed identity standardisation: internal diversity was portrayed as a single collective identity. This was an important precondition for later political mobilisation.

7.3 Nationalism, Reform and Caste Politics

The connection between caste and nationalism was complicated. Some reformers saw caste inequality as a hindrance to national unity, while others worked to secure their caste groups' access to education and political representation, while backing the wider anti-colonial movement. Ambedkar's case offers a significant alternative: an organisation of oppressed groups could aim to secure constitutional rights and eliminate the caste hierarchy rather than preserve caste as a permanent social structure.

This means caste mobilisation cannot be assigned to one side of the nationalist/anti-nationalist dichotomy; its political significance varies with the claim it makes. For example, a community asking to pursue education might aim at social mobility; one seeking representation might aim at democratic inclusion; and a movement that defines the community as a separate political people might move toward caste nationalism. These are forms that can be identified through empirical observation.

8. Colonial Classification, Enumeration and Political Identity

Colonial census-taking made social categories more apparent to administrators and political figures. The census did not invent caste out of nothing, but it did promote classification, comparison, and competition over status. People could apply for recognition using certain labels, ask for changes in their administrative classification, or use published statistics to back up their claims. As a result, classification became politically important.

The historical process may be seen as a feedback loop: administrative categories generated figures and labels; organisations interpreted these figures; community leaders turned them into claims; and these claims, in turn, led to further organisation. As a result, caste shifted from a local social relationship to a collectively held public identity. Yet the process varied from one region to another and among different communities, so any attempt to generalise it nationwide should be approached with caution.

9. Post-Independence Transformation

The Constitution changed the normative environment in which caste functioned. By introducing equality before the law, abolishing untouchability, and providing political safeguards and affirmative action, it created new institutional avenues for historically disadvantaged groups. Rather than eliminating caste identity immediately, democratic institutions encouraged groups to make claims based on caste through the common language of citizenship and rights.

This created an important paradox: the constitutional project was intended to eliminate caste discrimination, yet affirmative action inevitably required the state to identify and classify groups. Caste thus stayed visible in an administrative and political sense even though caste hierarchy had become normatively unacceptable. This tension lies at the heart of contemporary caste politics: one can recognise group disadvantage only by identifying groups, while the ultimate aim is equal citizenship.

10. Mandal Politics and Collective Mobilisation

The controversy over backwards-class reservation increased the public significance of caste categories. The fact that people had mobilised on questions of representation, employment and access to education showed that caste identity could form a wide political coalition. However, the Mandal period also showed the limitations of simple caste unity since the OBC groups include many communities with different regional backgrounds and unequal access to power.

The importance of Mandal politics for the present study lies not merely in the fact that caste became more political, but in the fact that caste developed a richer vocabulary for democratic representation. Groups began to present themselves as deserving recognition because they had suffered historical disadvantage, were numerically strong, or were underrepresented. This represents a shift from competition based on status to one based on rights, even though the two aspects can coexist.

11. Contemporary Data Analysis

11.1 Broad Caste Identification in the 2024 Prepoll Study

The 2024 Lokniti–CSDS Social and Political Barometer Prepoll Study gives the following general caste classifications for the 10,019 people surveyed. Because the source refers to these as survey responses, they should not be treated as estimates of the population as a whole. The most frequently reported category is OBC at 46.1%, followed by General/Others at 24.3%, SC at 16.3%, ST at 7.7%, and Don't Know at 5.6% (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).

Category	N	%
SC	1,634	16.3
ST	768	7.7
OBC	4,621	46.1
General/Others	2,438	24.3
Don't know	557	5.6
Total	10,019	100.0

Source: Lokniti–CSDS, Prepoll Study for the Social and Political Barometer 2024, page 30.

The table is important for two reasons. First, caste classification remains a significant self-reported social category in a current national survey. Secondly, the large proportion of the OBC group shows that broad administrative categories play a central role in today's political discussions. Yet these figures do not prove that 46.1% of India's population is OBC. This is because the survey sample, weighting method, and question phrasing differ from those used in a census enumeration. More importantly for this article, the table does not ask respondents whether they cooperate with caste organisations or identify with caste nationalism.

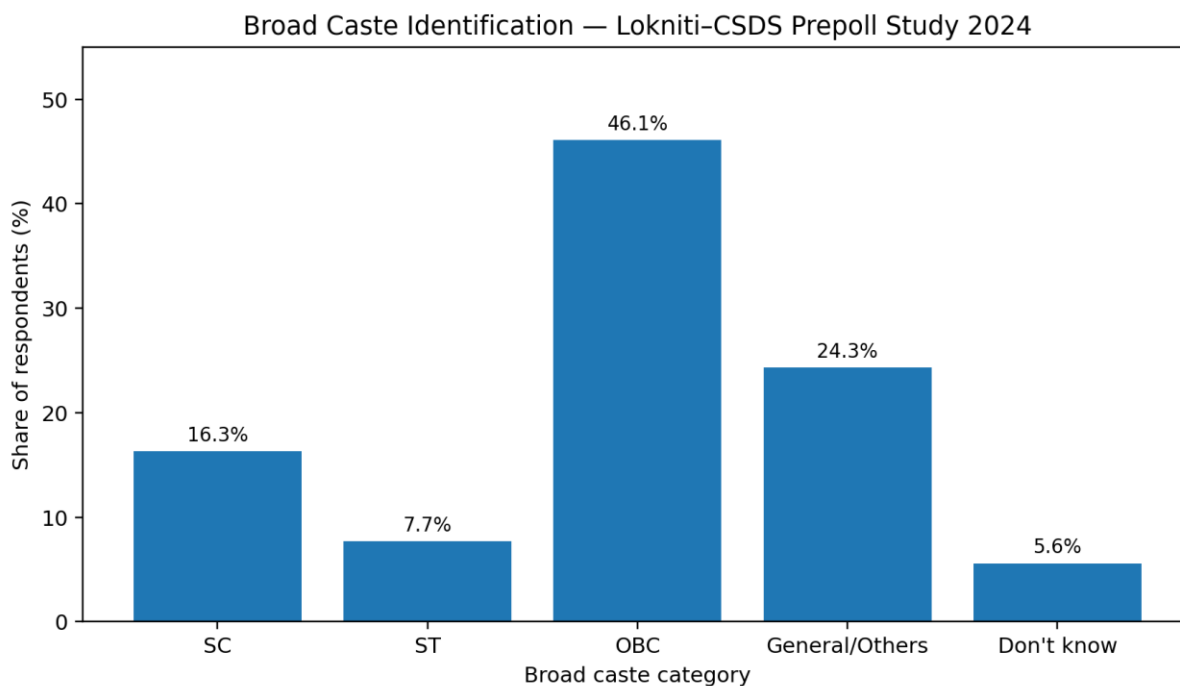


Figure 1. Caste category identification based on the Lokniti–CSDS Social and Political Barometer Prepoll Study 2024 (sample size N=10,019). Source: Lokniti–CSDS (2024).

11.2 Caste Census as a Contemporary Political Issue

The 2024 Lokniti–CSDS Youth and Politics Survey questioned the respondents as to whether a caste census should be carried out in India. Of the 1,290 people surveyed, 622 (48.2%) stated that it should take place, 596 (46.2%) thought that it was unnecessary, and 72 (5.6%) did not know. The close balance shows considerable disagreement rather than a single, uniform viewpoint among youth (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).

Response	N	%
Should happen	622	48.2
No need	596	46.2
Don't know	72	5.6
Total	1,290	100.0

Source: Lokniti–CSDS, 2024 Youth and Politics Survey, page 6.

The result is analytically important because enumeration involves more than a statistical exercise; numbers can become political tools when different groups use them to debate representation, the targeting of welfare benefits, or public recognition. However, supporting a caste census does not mean supporting caste nationalism; such support could come from calls for evidence-based policy, greater transparency, affirmative action, or academic research. This distinction supports the article's main point that political meaning can be deduced only from a combination of organisational behaviour, discourse, and institutional claims.

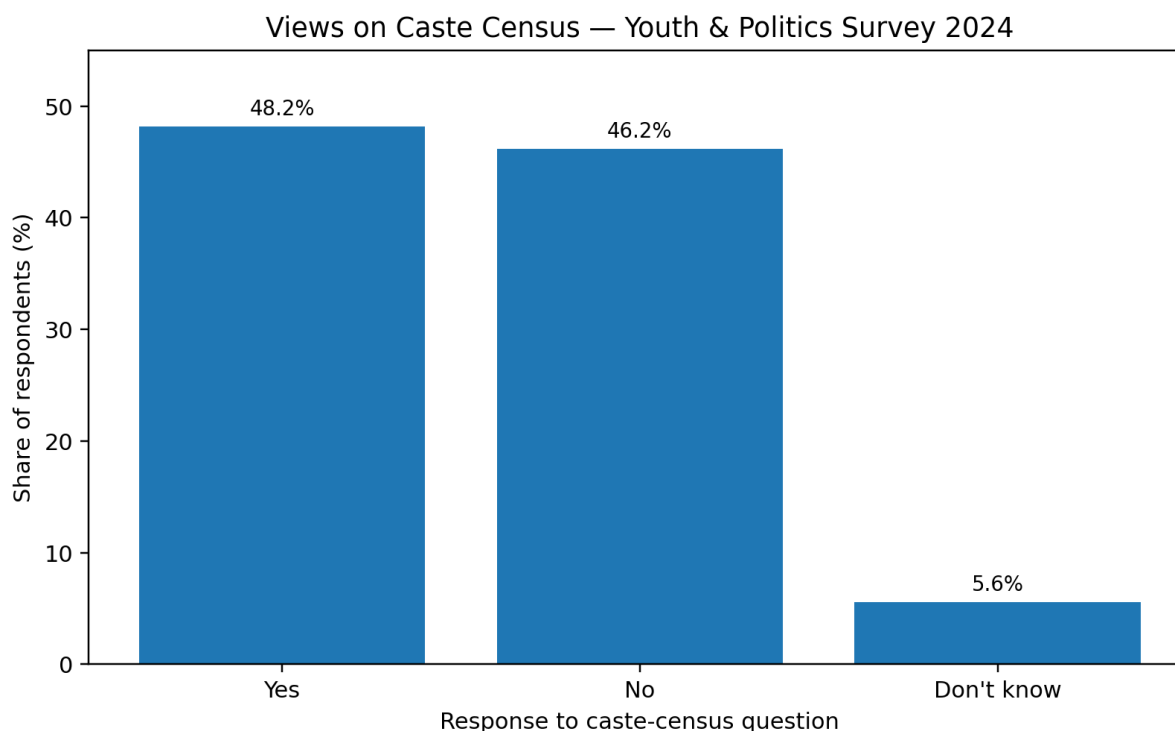


Figure 2. The views of young people as to whether a caste census should be carried out in India (sample size N=1,290). Source: Lokniti–CSDS Youth and Politics Survey 2024.

12. Official Data Boundaries and the SECC Question

The Indian Government has clearly separated the regular Census counting of people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from the more general counting of caste. A statement by the Ministry of Home Affairs in July 2022 indicated that the SECC 2011 data, without reference to caste, had been finalised and made public, whereas the Census had not included the population broken down by caste except for SCs and STs since independence. The statement also mentioned that there was no plan at that time to release the SECC caste data (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022).

Researchers should observe this institutional restriction if they are to conduct research responsibly. Researchers sometimes cite exact all-India caste proportions obtained from unofficial or reconstructed SECC tables. These figures must not be treated as official Census estimates. In the present article, the 2011 Census is used for official documentation of SC/ST populations, while more recent broad-category figures are clearly stated as survey results. This distinction safeguards the argument's validity and avoids turning sample statistics into false claims about the population.

13. Caste Cooperation and Social Integration

Caste-based cooperation can build positive social capital. Community organisations can offer scholarships, provide hostels, provide emergency aid, establish professional networks, and share information on government schemes. For communities historically excluded from formal institutions, such organisations can link them to education, employment, and political participation. The integrative value is greatest when community resources increase people's involvement in broader institutions rather than promoting social isolation.

Bonding social capital, however, may also be exclusionary; a network that builds trust among its members can prevent outsiders from gaining access. Endogamy, competition for status, and political gatekeeping can maintain these boundaries even as material well-being improves. It follows that the issue is not whether caste solidarity is good or bad in the abstract. The sociological issue is rather what kind of solidarity is being created, who is included, who is excluded and what relationship the organisation has with wider civic institutions.

Dimension	Integrative potential	Exclusionary potential
Education	Scholarships, schools, mentoring	Preferential access limited to insiders
Welfare	Emergency aid and mutual support	Membership-based exclusion
Political participation	Representation and voice	Inter-group competition
Cultural identity	Preservation and dignity	Boundary hardening
Social mobility	Networks and opportunities	Status competition
Digital mobilisation	Information and participation	Polarisation and hostility

14. From Solidarity to Caste Nationalism: A Conditional Model

The evidence points to a possible transformation rather than a universal sequence. The first stage involves an inherited or reconstructed social identity. The second is solidarity, meaning members begin to see themselves as sharing common interests. The third stage is organisation, taking place via associations, conferences, publications and welfare institutions. The fourth stage is the development of a collective narrative: a shared history and a common symbolic vocabulary are created. The fifth stage consists of political mobilisation focused on recognition, representation or access to resources. Caste nationalism in its stronger form is only suitable where this kind of mobilisation presents the caste community as a wide-bodied historical people with a collective political future.

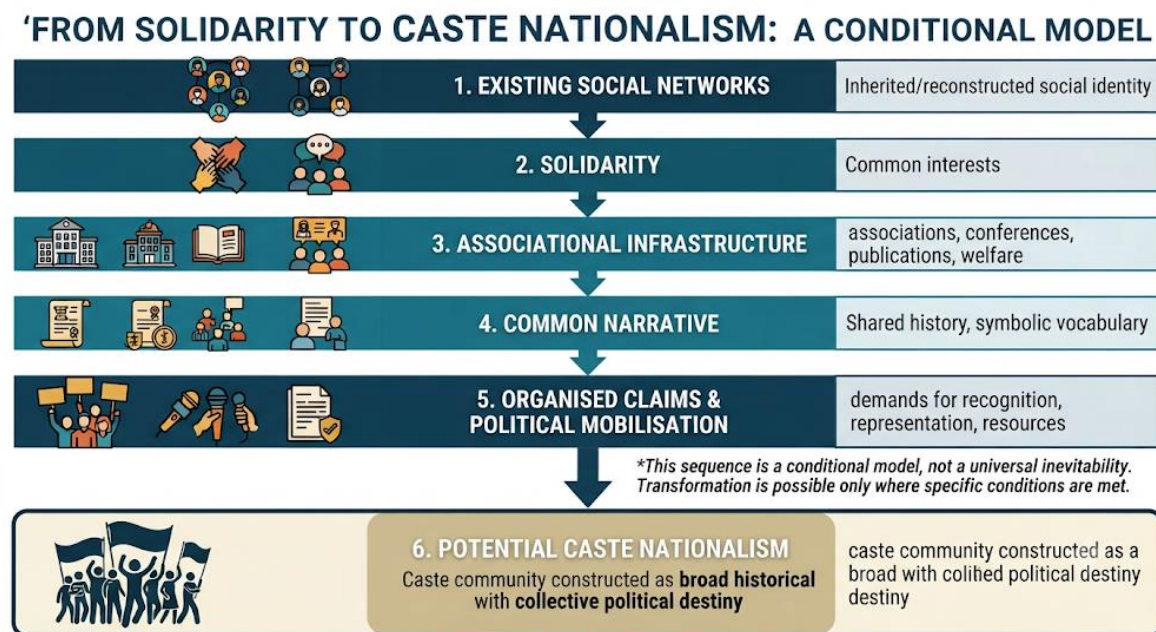


Figure 3. AI-based source: <https://gemini.google.com>

Social networks lead to solidarity, which in turn leads to the development of associational infrastructure, resulting in a common narrative, then to organised claims, and finally to political mobilisation, with the possibility of caste nationalism emerging.

Since each arrow represents a conditional situation, a caste network can remain a welfare association, a community organisation can break down and become a cross-caste political coalition, and a political movement can openly reject caste hierarchy and aim to abolish it. On the other hand, a movement might establish firm cultural boundaries and demand political supremacy. The historical task is thus to determine which pathway took place in each instance.

15. Caste Nationalism and Indian Nationalism

Caste nationalism and Indian nationalism are not necessarily in opposition nor do they always go hand in hand. A caste organisation can take part in national politics while maintaining its own group identity. The key issue is the relative importance of different identities and political claims. Where caste mobilisation aims to secure equal citizenship and representation within a constitutional nation, it can be compatible with democratic nationalism; but if it portrays the caste community as an exclusive political nation whose interests take precedence over equal citizenship, tensions arise.

It also helps explain anti-caste mobilisation. A movement initiated by a community that has historically been oppressed might rely on a strong sense of collective identity in order to break down caste domination. Even if caste is the category that organises the movement, its collective identity should not be called caste nationalism simply because of that. What matters is the direction of the statement: emancipation from hierarchy differs from one caste holding political supremacy over the others.

16. Gender, Class and Internal Differentiation

Caste solidarity is never going to be evenly distributed among all members of society; women and men may have different experiences of community institutions; those who are economically well off are likely to have more influence within organisations than those who are less wealthy; urban professionals will tend to have different interests from people in rural areas. A caste organisation can therefore establish a single public narrative while still having considerable internal inequality. Caste nationalism should be aware of these internal differences.

Gender is so important since the reproduction of caste is closely linked to marriage, the family, and control of women's sexuality. Stories about community honour can strengthen collective identity while also limiting women's autonomy. On the other hand, women's educational and welfare organisations can turn caste networks into opportunities for mobility and social change. Future empirical research therefore ought to disaggregate data by gender, generation, and class for leadership, membership, and outcomes.

17. Digital Transformation of Caste Mobilisation

Digital communication has changed the speed and geographical reach with which collective identity can be achieved. Through platforms such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube channels, and others, communities can share their history, announce gatherings, raise money, and organise political campaigns. As a result, the cost of organising dispersed networks is reduced. However, the same infrastructure can also spread misinformation, promote stereotyping, and strengthen antagonistic boundaries.

The distinction the article makes between solidarity and nationalism becomes more important in the digital environment. One digital group might just organise a scholarship scheme, another could create a common historical narrative and get supporters involved in political claims, and a third might employ inflammatory material to treat outsiders as enemies. All three involve caste identity, but only the second and third necessarily lead to political mobilisation, and only in some cases will the stronger criteria for caste nationalism be met.

18. Discussion

The evidence from the socio-historical perspective indicates that contemporary caste politics should be seen as having transformed rather than vanished altogether. Traditional networks did not simply continue unchanged; instead, they were reorganised through modern institutions. Education turned community-based investment into human-capital strategies. The spread of printed materials helped form larger imagined communities. Associations provided a way to institutionalise leadership. Elections turned identity into assets that could be used in negotiations. Constitutional rights changed how claims were made. Reservation made group classification significant for public policy. Nowadays, digital media enables collective narratives to be spread quickly across geographic areas. Yet the historical developments do not point to a straightforward advance. The same organisational structure can lead to both welfare and to exclusion. The same political claim can secure representation for a marginalised group while also increasing competition with another group. The same historical narrative can restore dignity or create a mythologised sense of superiority. Hence, a proper sociology of caste nationalism must integrate an analysis of institutions with a study of discourse and with attention to the consequences. The current data support this careful view. The 2024 pre-poll survey reveals that major caste categories remain important in how people identify themselves, while the youth survey shows considerable disagreement over caste enumeration. Neither finding shows that caste is disappearing, but neither proves that caste consciousness is uniform either. The empirical situation is one of salience together with contestation. This combination is exactly what a democratic sociology of caste should anticipate.

The paper thus suggests three analytical tests for future research. The first is the organisational test: does a group have institutions sustained over time that go beyond kinship and locality? The second is the narrative test: does it develop a broad collective history and identity? The third is the political test: does it make sustained collective claims on the basis of that identity? Caste nationalism should only be recognised in cases where all these dimensions are present and where there is evidence of an explicitly collective political project.

19. Limitations

- The study relies on secondary and aggregated data and does not include original field data at the individual respondent level.
- The historical evidence differs greatly from one region and caste group to another; important local variations can be hidden within a single national trend.
- Future research ought to use association archives, speeches, constitutions, membership data, and interviews to examine the proposed mechanism.

20. Conclusion

Caste solidarity in India has undergone major organisational and political change. Local networks and community organisations came into contact with the colonial classification system, modern education, the culture of printed materials, voluntary associations, and democratic representation, creating new types of collective identity. Following independence, constitutional rights and affirmative action have further ensured the political importance of group recognition. The mobilisation of the Mandal period showed that caste identity can be used to make wide-ranging democratic claims, while today's digital platforms have increased both the speed and the extent of collective mobilisation. The central conclusion is not that caste solidarity inevitably becomes caste nationalism. Rather, solidarity creates organisational resources that may be directed toward welfare, social mobility, democratic representation, anti-caste emancipation or exclusionary identity politics. Caste nationalism is the more specific outcome in which a caste community is represented as a broad historical political collective with claims to recognition and power. Identifying it requires evidence of a common narrative, organisational continuity, and sustained political mobilisation.

The 2024 survey evidence shows that caste remains important in both social and political terms, and that ongoing debate over caste enumeration shows classification remains politically controversial. It is therefore incorrect to say that caste has vanished or that caste nationalism is widespread. A more reasonable conclusion is that caste has been modernised, politicised, and reorganised. To understand social integration, democratic representation, and how collective identity is changing in modern India, we must grasp this transformation.

21. Declarations

Ethics approval was obtained because the study uses publicly available documents and published aggregate survey tables and does not involve recruiting any new human participants.

Consent for participation: not applicable.

The data used here come from published Lokniti–CSDS reports and official Census and Government sources listed below. Microdata at the level of individual respondents have not been used.

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Appendix A. Data Notes

Data source 1: Lokniti–CSDS Social and Political Barometer Prepoll Study 2024, page 30, question Z7. N=10,019. Reported shares: SC 16.3%, ST 7.7%, OBC 46.1%, Others/General 24.3%, Don't Know 5.6%.

Data source 2: Lokniti–CSDS Youth and Politics Survey 2024, page 6, question Q8. N=1,290. Reported responses on caste census: Yes 48.2%, No 46.2%, Don't Know 5.6%.

Official data note: The Government of India has stated that the Census has not enumerated caste-wise population other than SCs and STs since independence, and that the SECC 2011 caste data were not proposed for release in the cited 2022 statement. Accordingly, this paper does not present any unofficial all-India caste percentage as an official census figure.

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