

VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE

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Kolkata-700063

NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: Caste in Indian Politics

Course Title: Politics in India: Structures and Processes

Paper: CC-2-4

Unit: 2

Semester: II

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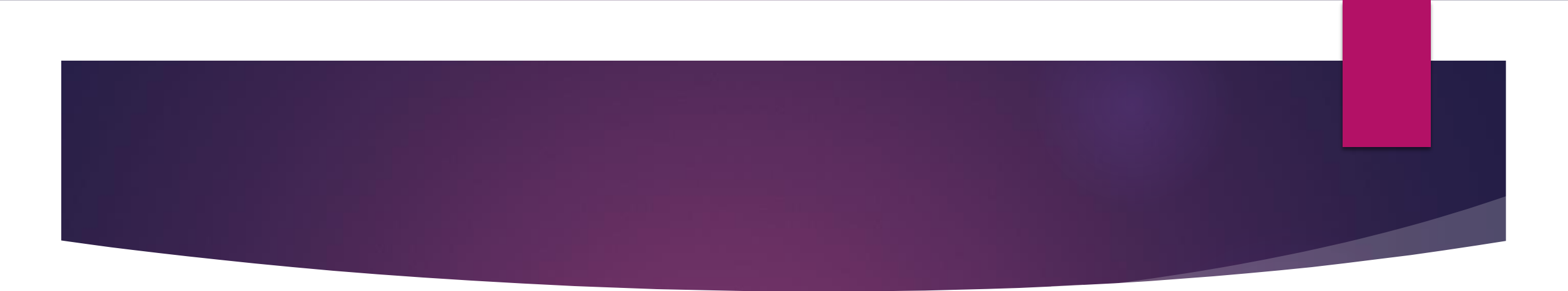
Name of the Department: POLITICAL SCIENCE

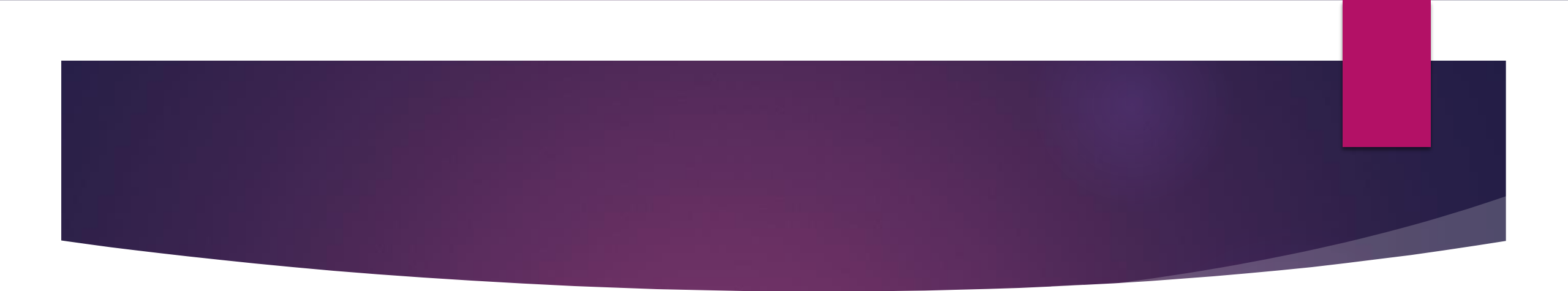


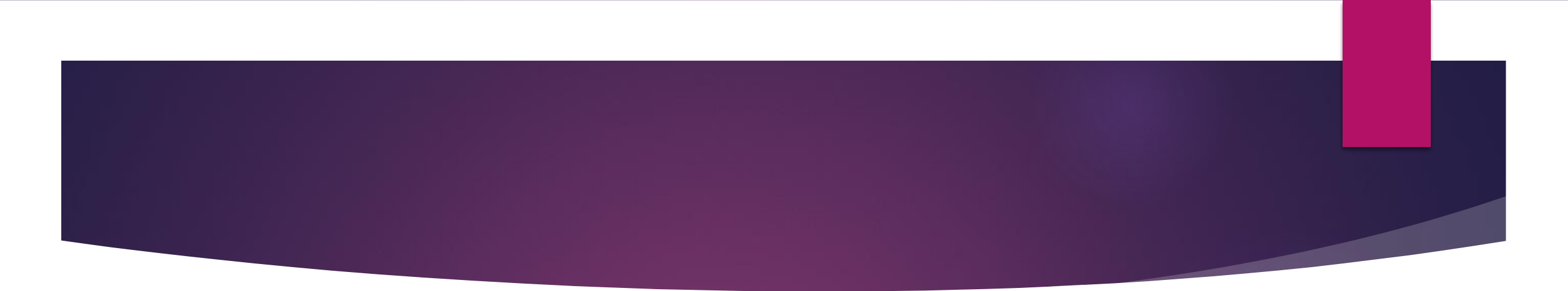
ROLE OF CASTE IN INDIAN POLITICS

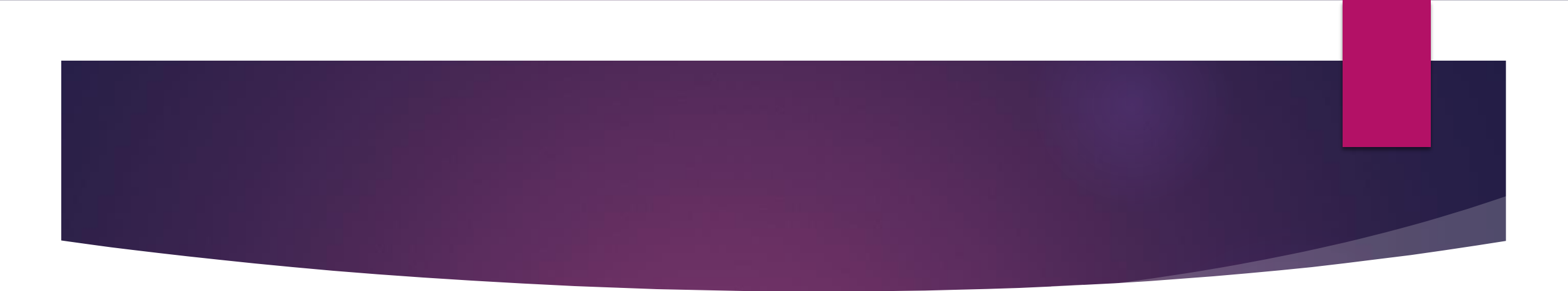
What is Caste?

- ▶ Caste is the term used to describe the complex system of social divisions that pervades life in India. Caste is an ancient hereditary system that developed alongside and became intertwined with Hinduism. Caste determines whom a person can marry, specifies what kind of work Social and economic divide she can do, and even controls still exist across India what he can eat or touch. Since the great majority of Indians are Hindu, the caste system has played an enormous role in the history of India, and it continues to exert tremendous influence on modern Indian culture and politics

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- ▶ Where does this system come from? The earliest known mention of caste is found in the Aryan's Vedic hymns, perhaps dating from about 1000 B.C.E. In a famous passage, the metaphor of the human body was used to describe Indian society. The brahman, or priestly, caste represents society's head; the kshatriya, or warrior, caste are its arms; the Vaishya caste—traders and landowners—are the legs; and the sudra caste—the servants of the other three—are the feet. This metaphor stresses the idea of hierarchy as well as that of interdependence.
 - ▶ The Four Varna These four castes—brahman, kshatriya, vaishya, and sudra—are the classical four divisions of Hindu society. In practice, however, there have always been many subdivisions (Jatis) of these castes

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- ▶ Inevitably, there were certain people who failed to live up to their caste dharma. Such people and their Untouchables children were considered outcasts from Hindu society. They had to live apart from other castes and were given the jobs that no one else wanted to perform. Because of their contact with things considered unclean or polluted, the outcasts were believed to be deeply tainted. They came to be thought of as "untouchable" because people believed that their touch—or even the sight of them—would compromise a brahman's purity. The untouchables were not admitted into Hindu temples and instead formed religious sects of their own.

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- ▶ Independence and Untouchables after India became an independent nation in 1947, its new constitution outlawed the practice of "untouchability." The constitution also established affirmative action programs to ensure that the scheduled castes would have access to higher education and better jobs. Because of these programs, there has been a marked improvement in the status of the scheduled castes.
 - ▶ Why does the system persist? Today, the caste system continues to be the main form of government in villages throughout India. In large part, its continuity depends on two central Hindu concepts: caste dharma and karma. In Hindu society, caste dharma is considered to be a divine law. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, caste dharma is "the duty one has to perform" and "the law of one's being." Many Hindus believe that this obligation tends to enhance the spiritual development of the individual. Because of it, each person learns from an early age to overcome selfish desires and instead focus on group goals and ideals.

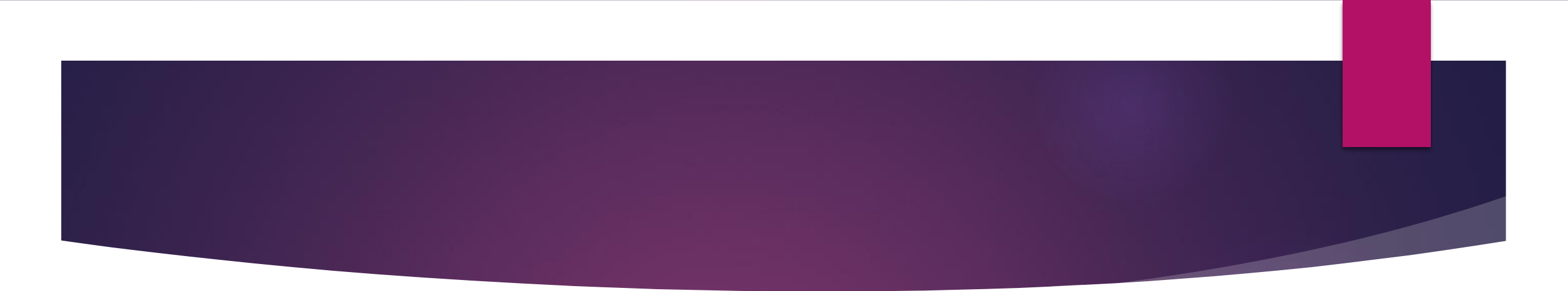
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- ▶ Why does the system persist? The caste system also returns certain practical benefits to the individual. Being a member of a jati gives each person a sense of identity and of belonging to a well-defined group within society. The members of a jati have much in common. They share a job special tying abide by the same rules concerning diet and religion .Because of the rules of endogamy, each jati is also an extended family, for most members are related by blood.
 - ▶ In 1950, the writers of The independent India Constitution adopted a policy of reserving jobs Reservation in the government and seats instate-funded educational System institutes for the "scheduled castes and tribes," as the people marginalized by the caste system were then known. India sets aside 22.5% of its government jobs for the lowest castes, and an additional 27% for what are called the other "backward" castes, the next step up in the caste system.

Caste in Indian Politics

- ▶ Caste has influenced the policy-making of the government, for example the policy of reservation in favor of certain castes. The programmes, policies and declarations of political parties are made, keeping in view the caste factor. Even different positions within a political party are distributed in terms of caste configurations. Caste plays a very important role in elections and voting. Political parties select their candidates on the basis of caste composition in the constituency. The voting in elections and mobilization of political support from top to bottom moves on the caste lines. The caste factor also influences the formation of the council of ministers and making appointments to various political positions in the government. Caste also functions, as a pressure group in politics. Political bargaining is also done on the caste lines. Caste organizations have emerged to organize caste members for collective bargaining with each other. The administration has not escaped the influence of the caste in India. The postings, transfers and appointments of public officials are influenced by caste considerations. Even the behavior of public officials in carrying out administrative duties gets influenced by caste considerations. The political leadership in many political parties emerges and survives in politics on the basis of the support of certain caste groups. There are many political experts who consider the increasing influence of caste in politics as a negative tendency, not helpful in the development of democracy.

Caste Politics in Different States

- ▶ Bihar occupies the first position where caste basis predominates over its politics. The recent politics in Bihar is articulated in terms of the backward vs the forward.
- ▶ In Kerala also caste considerations have played an important role. It is generally held that four major groups are contending for a dominant place in the political life of the states; Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims. Ezhavas number 26.4 percent followed by Christians with 21.17 percent, Muslims number 19.5 percent and Nairs with 12.5 percent. Each of them dominates a particular region of Kerala. Malabar area is exclusively dominated by Muslims, the Christians dominate Ernakulam and Kottayam districts, Nairs from the dominant community in Trivandrum district and Ezhavas are particularly strong in palghat. In Andhra Pradesh caste politics is reflected the Kammas and Reddys. The important castes in the state are the Brahmins, the Reddys, the Kammas the Harijans, the Velamas, the Rajus and the Kapus, Reddys and the Kammas are politically dominant and numerically strongest in the state. In

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- ▶ Haryana jats form the dominant political force as they constitute about 23 percent of the total population. The jats are followed by scheduled castes constituted of Chamars weavers and sweepers. Even Brahmins occupy powerful positions in the state disproportionate to their population due to their class and literal superiority. In other states like Karnataka the battle is mainly between two dominant castes Lingayats and Okkliga. In Maharashtra the caste politics is played amongst three main castes Marathas, Brahmins and Maha. In Punjab the conflict is one of religious communities not of caste the Hindus and Sikhs.

Bibliography

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