**Question: Explain the role of class as voting behavior in Indian politics.**

**Introduction**

If the caste system is the unique feature of Hindu society in India, the class system is universal one, found in everywhere. Some time the word ‘class’ is used to denote a group of people having same profession – the doctors, engineers, advocates, teachers, artists, students etc. In material life the class is also used to denote the quality of goods as good, better and best. But class in social context is used to explain the social stratification of the people. Economy is the main criteria to determine the classes or class statuses in the society. Class system is based on wealth, occupation, education etc.

**Meaning**

Social class is a segment of society with all the members of all the ages and the sexes who share the same general status. MacIver said that social intercourses are limited by the consideration of social status by distinction between higher and lower, there exist a social class. A social class is a group of people of similar status, commonly sharing comparable levels of power and wealth. In sociology, social classes describe one form of social stratification. When a society is organized by social classes, as opposed to by castes, it is theoretically possible for people to attain a higher status than the status with which they started. This movement is possible because social classes are not based on birth but on factors such as education and professional success. For example, someone born into a low-income family can achieve a higher status through education, talent, and work, or perhaps through social connections. A society organized according to social classes, then, allows for some social mobility.

 **Definitions**

1. *“A social class is a category or group of persons having definite status in society which permanently determines their relation to other groups”.* ---- P. Gisbert.\
2. *“A social* is *the aggregate of persons having essentially the same social status in a given society”. --------* Ogburn and Nimkoff.
3. *“A social class is any portion of the community marked off from the rest social status” ------* MacIver and Page
4. *“Social classes are aggregates of individuals who have the same opportunities of acquiring goods, the exhibited standard of living”. -----* Max Weber

Thus, from the above mentioned definitions as quoted by the scholars we can say that class is a social stratification where people care classified on the basis of their property and skill.

**Class and Voting Behavior in India**

1. **The First Backward Class Commission:** Regarding the third category, the Other Backward Classes (OBC) Commission was set up in January 1953 and submitted its report on March 31, 1955. It listed 2, 399 castes as socially and educationally backward. The Commission, which consisted of 11 members under the Chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar, was a dead letter. Five members submitted notes of dissent. The Chairman, who did not submit a note of dissent, repudiated it, saying that reservation would deprive the country of its best talent and would lower standards.
2. **The Second Backward Classes Commission:** The Second Backward Classes Commission was set up in December 1978 under the Chairmanship of Mr. R. P. Mandal, Member of Parliament, and hereafter to be known as the Mandal Commission. The Commission consisted originally of five members and a Secretary, Mr. S. S. Gill from the Indian Administrative Service. A sixth member, Mr. L. R. Naik, was added at a later date. The Commission submitted its report on the last day of 1980. A point to be noted is that all members belonged to the OBC, which led to some critical comments from the press, alleging that the Commission was a ‘packed house’ and therefore could not be objective. However, the Commission was appointed by the Janata government.
3. **Determining Criteria:** The Mandal Commission faced two major issues. The first was to decide on the extent of the population which comprised Other Backward Classes and on what bases. This narrowed itself down to the question of whether the determining factor was poverty or caste. It was argued by some, including the Congress Party, that the criterion should be poverty and not caste. They based themselves on the fact that the relevant Article of the Constitution speaks of classes. However, noting that poverty is not necessarily an indicator of backwardness, the Commission decided on the caste indicator. After going through a complicated calculation, the Commission came to the conclusion that the OBC constitute 52 percent of the population.
4. **Role of some states Government:** In 1972, the Gujarat Government constituted a commission for the socially and educationally backward classes under the chairmanship of justice A.R. Baxi to identify socially and educationally backward groups of people who deserve special concession as were already given to scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). The commission submitted its report in 1979recommending caste as a unit of identification for incorporation also in socially and educationally backward classes. In 1977 Bihar introduced a caste-based reservation policy for Other Backward Classes.
5. **Reference to Supreme Court:** The question regarding the extent of reservation a society is prepared to tolerate is a matter of negotiation between political parties. At this stage, several controversial issues in the Mandal Commission's recommendations were referred to the Supreme Court by government. The Supreme Court ruled that reservation for the OBC should be pegged at 22 percent; thus the total reservation amounted to 49 percent of the whole population. The balance of 51 percent was available for open competition. The Supreme Court also ruled that reservation should only apply at the initial state of entry into service. In addition, the Court decided that conversion does not remove the stigma of caste. It had been the policy of the government to assume that if a person is converted to a religion, which does not recognize caste, such as Christianity, Islam or Sikhism, he or she no longer stands in need of reservation.
6. **Lack of Follow-up:** It is extraordinary that nearly 20 years after its publication, the Mandal Commission Report has not been discussed in parliament. Perhaps this is because it has become an election issue. On the eve of a General Election the party in power declares its intention to implement the Report as bait for getting the vote from the lower castes. The result has been violence, rioting, arson and self-immolation on an unprecedented scale. This happened for the first time in the capital Delhi in 1981 and in Ahmedabad and Baroda in 1985. The reaction of the upper classes was immediate and extreme. Academics, professionals, and students came out on to the streets. The self-immolation deaths which were triggered off by the Delhi riots spread to all parts of India. The overall result has been that reservation quotas have been fixed for Central Government and corporate employees, and for admission to professional institutions.
7. **The ‘Creamy Layer’ Issue:** In some countries, there is an attempt to ensure that affirmative action is targeted only to that part of the status group that suffers the greatest economic deprivation. In India, for example, one of the benefitted groups (the so-called backward classes) is defined so that those who are economically at the top of a backward class (the ‘creamy layer,’ as it is called) are excluded from preferences. In these contexts, the relationship envisaged between the group and the individual members of the group becomes quite complicated, and to some extent the application of affirmative action needs to be justified at the level of the individuals.

**Conclusion**

Thus, since independent till now the classes or backward classes are playing significant as voting behavior in Indian political process. Whereas in the early phase, the central question was whether a caste is a class, the contemporary concern focuses on empirical identification of units for the measurement of social and educational backwardness. The central question of inquiry is now whether a caste should be accepted as socially and educationally backward classes or should be go beyond caste. This has pushed the caste-class debate to a new horizon in Indian political process.