

Dalit- Bahujan Politics in Uttar Pradesh : The Road Ahead



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Abstract

Determined to achieve political power on its own BSP decided to widen its social base by opening its gate for the upper caste and formed a rainbow alliance with the Brahmins in particular for the 2007 assembly election. Though it was a successful attempt and party got emphatic victory with 206 seats on its own but this tenure of Mayawati marred her image of a strict administrator which she had earlier carved out for herself in her earlier tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. As I have already mentioned, in her last tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh where she had to share power with many upper castes cabinet ministers state witnessed major cases of corruption with active involvement of ministers and bureaucrats. Controversy erupted over her decision to build statues of herself and the party symbol 'Elephant'. It was widely seen as a waste of public money. Public interest litigations (PIL) were filed in the Supreme Court accusing Mayawati of wasting public money to propagate her political agenda and recently Supreme Court has tentatively asked Mayawati to return the money spent on these statues. According to me Dalit- Bahujan politics today has reached a point of stagnation in states like Uttar Pradesh. At a time when most of the other political leaders are using the strategy of interacting with the masses Mayawati, still comes and read out her statement hence failing to connect with the voters.

Keywords – Dalit, Bahujan, Politics, Uttar Pradesh, Road AheadA

The Dalit- Bahujan politics in Uttar Pradesh marked a decline in 2012 when incumbent Mayawati led BSP government was ousted from power after a defeat in state legislative assembly election. The number of seats won by BSP was reduced from 206 in 2007 to 80 in 2012. Two years later in 2014 Lok Sabha general election party performed its all-time low when it failed to open its account in Uttar Pradesh where it has substantial

base. The party's fate did not improve in 2017 assembly election either where it was confined to 19 seats. What came as a more surprise is out of 86 reserved seats (84 for the schedule caste and 2 for schedule tribes) party managed to win only 2 seats.

BSP to ensure its political survival was forced to enter into electoral alliance with its one time arch rival Samajwadi Party (SP) for the 17th Lok Sabha election under which they contested on 38 seats in UP and managed to won 10 but that was largely a benefit of the alliance that BSP got.. Quite naturally question arises why suddenly the Dalit Bahujan politics which was thriving in the first decade of 21st century suddenly found itself in a survival crisis in the second decade. One obvious reason for this is that the core voter of the party which constitutes Dalit in general and Jatav/ Chamar in particular are turning away from it. CSDS post poll survey shows that Jatav support to BSP decrease from 85% to 69 % in 2014. The growing disenchantment of the Dalits from BSP was evident in 2012 assembly election itself. Oliver Heath and Sanjay Kumar in his article attributes this to Mayawati's controversial decision of Constructing statues of herself and other leaders when she was in power during 2007 – 12, this they argue could not attract much of the Dalit youth and they opined that it would have been much better if they could have get some tangible benefit during her rule. Heath & Kumar highlights one of the major schemes that Mayawati launched during her tenure as Chief Minister of UP from 2007- 12 was "Uttar Pradesh Mukhya Mantri Mahamaya Garib Arthik Sahayata Yojana". This scheme was intended to provide a direct financial support of Rs 300 per month to poor families. Although it was Dalits who was supposed to be the main beneficiaries but both upper Caste and Yadavs also benefitted from it. Overall this policy did not make any tangible impact and only around half of the population was aware of it and around 8 % benefitted from it. Heath & Kumar while trying to find out the possible reason for Dalits turning away from BSP found that Performance effect played a major role in it.

The educated youth who are settled in urban areas were unsatisfied with the quality of governance provided by Mayawati. Here it is important to mention that since its inception BSP has centred its Politics on the Swabhimaan (self-respect) of the Dalit-Bahujan and issues like employment opportunities for the Dalits have remain secondary to it. Over the years as a result of affirmative action provided by post- independent Indian state, deepening of democracy and rise of an independent Dalit- Bahujan politics under the leadership of Kanshi Ram there emerged a class of educated and aspiring Dalit youth who want more economic and political opportunities for themselves and according to many it is this aspect which Mayawati and BSP have failed to recognise. Jignesh Mevani a politician and Dalit activist who successfully led the Dalit agitation in Gujrat after the unfortunate incident of Una, a city in Saurashtra region where a group of Dalit youth carrying the carcasses of animals were brutally flogged by cow vigilante group also opined that mainstream

Dalit political parties have confined themselves to bashing Brahmanism and Manuwad. According to him now Dalit- Bahujan politics has to link itself with the pressing challenges that lies in front of the country be it unemployment, communal tension, or increasing interference in academic sphere by government of the day. Until and unless Dalit Bahujan politics take these issues, they will not able to channelize the aspiration of emerging Dalit youth.

In the midst of electoral decline of Dalit- Bahujan politics in Uttar Pradesh. I will try to highlight some of the possible ways that Dalit- Bahujan politics may adhere to in order to counter the growing challenges.

Bhim Army: A ray of hope (?).

The Dalit Bahujan politics in Uttar Pradesh witnessed a new phenomenon in the form of Bhim Army, an organisation which was formed by a Dalit youth named Chandrashekhar Azad and his friends. It emerged in the year 2015 against the growing atrocities of Rajputs against the Dalits in Saharanpur district of Western Uttar Pradesh. Speaking about its emergence Azad in an interview with *India Today* said that he formed Bhim Army after witnessing continuous discrimination at the hands of Upper Caste Rajputs and notwithstanding repeated complaints no one from the administration came to rescue them. The organization came in to prominence after the Saharanpur violence of 5 May, 2017 when members of Rajput community entered the hamlets of Dalit community while carrying out the procession of Maharana Pratap, a medieval Hindu king. This resulted in conflict between the two communities which led to wide scale arson of Dalit houses and death of one member of the Rajput community.

The situation got aggravated on 9 May which resulted in further violence when district administration denied permission to Bhim Army to conduct a Mahapanchayat in Saharanpur in support of the victims of the Dalit community. The organization showed its strength by organizing a huge rally on 21 May 2017 at Delhi's Jantar Mantar where thousands of Dalit youth participated. Chandrashekhar, who prefers to call himself 'Ravan' as a mark of protest against RSS/ BJP idea of Hindu Rashtra was born in Dhadkuli village in Saharanpur district of Western Uttar Pradesh and became popular face of Dalit assertion in his village and nearby locality when he put a board mentioning 'The Great Chamar of Dhadkuli welcomes you'. Today as various media report suggests Chandrashekhar along with his organization Bhim Army is increasingly getting popular among the Dalit youth of Uttar Pradesh who are increasingly getting disillusioned by the stagnated Dalit-Bahujan politics of mainstream political party.

In an interview with *India Today* Chandrashekhar said that he is committed to take forward the hard work done by Dalit emancipators like Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram who have dedicated their life to build an independent Dalit Movement in the country in order to ensure that their marginalized brethren gets their

due right in the independent state . Showing his allegiance to the ideas of B R Ambedkar that only education can lead to emancipation of Dalits, Chandrashekhar claims that his organization runs around 800 schools in the region of Western Uttar Pradesh in order to make children from Dalit- Bahujan community aware about their rights and also to make them familiar with the ideals of towering personality of the community like Phule, Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram et cetera.

Labelled as a 'B' team of BJP by Mayawati, Chandrashekhar said that he has differences with Sarvjan politics of BSP. According to him Mayawati by including upper caste leaders on a large scale is diluting the Dalit - Bahujan politics from real intention of Kanshi Ram which was to transform the Bahujan '*from a community of beggars to community of givers*' by getting access to political power but Sarvjan politics of Mayawati is increasingly making the Dalit- Bahujan subservient to Upper caste.

Back to Bahujan

BSP which emerged in the Political plank of Uttar Pradesh with the radical idea of dismantling the Brahminical power structure which have denied the Bahujan community (SCs STs and OBCs) their due right has moved from Bahujan to Sarvjan politics in mid-2000. The party for a very long time after its formation had not allowed any upper caste to contest election on its ticket. However, as a result of electoral compulsion party has to open its door to the upper caste and shift its political tone from Bahujan to Sarvjan. Mayawati took all political pundits by surprise by organizing a Brahmin Maha-rally at the famous Ambedkar Maidan (ground) of Lucknow on 9 June 2005.

Vivek Kumar, Professor in the centre for the study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences in JNU in his book '*India's Roaring Revolution: Dalit Assertions and New Horizons (2006)* have explained this shift as a calculated and pragmatic strategy rather than any change in party's ideology. He explained that it was the time when Brahmins who constitute around 10 percent of UP population was politically vulnerable especially after both Congress and BJP lost political power and other major upper caste Rajputs has been accommodated by Samajwadi Party by giving Amar Singh, a Rajput an important position in the party. Brahmins in UP at that time was in need of a political party behind whom they can rally and they found one in the form of BSP who also by this time realized that apart from their core vote which constitutes around 21%, they need support of another social group in order to form government on its own. This was the time when BSP projected Satish Chandra Mishra, Ramvir Upadhyay and Brijesh Pathak as the Brahmin face of the party and organised many "Brahmin Jodo Sammelan" (Brahmin Mobilization Conferences) in the state. In order to woo Upper caste at the grassroots level BSP formed Bhaichara Badhao Committees (increase fraternity) at the assembly level (Kumar 2006: 170-172). This social engineering of Mayawati (Dalit-Brahmin equation) gave fruitful result and party attain majority on its own in 2007 assembly election.

Though through her social alliance of forging rainbow alliance with the Brahmins of Uttar Pradesh Mayawati was able to occupy the reins of power in 2007 but it was this tenure where she lost a sense of connectivity with her core voters. Unlike her previous tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh where she had successfully carried out radical programs for Dalits like Ambedkar Village programs which aimed at providing minimum basic facilities in the Dalit hamlets, successful implementation of SC/ ST atrocities act and reserving 25% post of police station in charge for officers from SC and category. She had failed to carry out any such radical measures for Dalits during her tenure 2007. In general, BSP rule between 2007 to 2012 was marked by poor governance where multi crore NRHM (National Rural Health Mission) scam took place in which two of her cabinet minister Babu Singh Kushwaha and Anant Kumar Mishra was forced to resign after their alleged involvement in the scam. Kushwaha was later arrested in the case (Iqbal 2011). Similarly, Mayawati failed to control the farmers protest against the enforced land acquisition in the Jat dominated Bhatta Parsaul in 2011, a village in Greater Noida which lead to violence on a large scale which resulted in the death of two policemen and two farmers. This incident became a big news at that time (Singh 2011). In addition to this many of BSP leaders and supporters during this period was found involved in heinous crime of rape and murder. For example, one of her MLA, from Naraini constituency of Banda district named Purshottum Naresh Dwivedi, a Brahmin, was accused of raping a seventeen-year-old Schedule Caste girl. Initially it appears that Mayawati government was trying to shield the accused MLA. However later when pressure from opposition parties, media and other social groups was mounted Mayawati was forced to suspend the MLA from the party and subsequently he was arrested.

In politics it is generally said that public perception matters a lot and Mayawati during her 2007- 12 tenure appeared as a mazboor (compromising) chief minister and many political scientists believed that dominance of upper caste leaders resulted in Mayawati lost her grip over many of the ministers and MLAs hailing from upper caste background.

Mayawati growing proximity with upper caste leaders also irked many prominent leaders from Dalit – Bahujan community and resulted in them quitting the party. For example, R.K. Chaudhary, a prominent leader of the Pasi community, who was one of the founding members of the party, quit BSP in 2016 accusing Mayawati of compromising with the ideology of Phule, Ambedkar and KanshiRam. He also accused BSP chief of listening only to the sycophants (an indirect reference to Satish Chandra Mishra) and not giving due importance to grassroot workers hailing from Dalit- Bahujan community who over the years have worked tirelessly to achieve social change through BSP led Dalit- Bahujan politics (Rashid 2016). Similarly, other prominent leaders like Swami Prasad Maurya and Nasimuddin Siddiqui have also either left or has been sacked by the party when they have tried to raise their voice against Mayawati's continuous denial of party's core ideology.

Ajay Gudavarthy argues that BSP shift from Bahujan to Sarvjan politics have resulted in party losing her radical image of a crusader of Dalit- Bahujan interest with whom it was once associated with. Similarly, Vivek kumar who has worked extensively over BSP led Dalit- Bahujan politics argues that the dominance of Upper caste leaders in the party has gradually created a sense of insecurity in the minds of newly educated Dalit youth who were aspiring to get political opportunities in the party but when party failed to accommodate them they shifted their allegiance to other available options.

BSP continuous decline since 2012 legislative assembly election of Uttar Pradesh clearly reflects that Sarvjan politics have not yielded them any significant gain. Moreover, Sarvjan politics has organizationally weakened the party. In today's Uttar Pradesh with upper caste solidly rallying behind BJP, BSP should think of going back to Bahujan politics and this can only be done by developing a second-generation leadership from this community which BSP under Mayawati have failed to do. Kanshi Ram sensing political acumen in Mayawati have trained her in Dalit- Bahujan politics at an early age but its irony that Mayawati after being at the helm of BSP for almost two decades have failed to develop any sort of leadership in the party. In 2017 she had appointed her brother her younger brother Anand Kumar as the vice-president of the party. However, in the midst of growing allegation of nepotism she removed her brother from the post of vice-president.

However, Mayawati still seems to be pursuing her Sarvjan politics. According to Prof. Badri Narayan Mayawati's politics has today become vulnerable especially at a time when today RSS and its various organizations have commanded a sizeable dominance among certain dalit castes like Bhangi who are now known as Valmikis. My own understanding on the basis of secondary readings which I have gone through is over the years various dalit scholars have neglected the differences that exist between various dalit sub-caste. It's a fact that its chamars and pasis who have mostly benefitted from the dalit-bahujan politics that took place in Uttar Pradesh in the last two decades. As a result of which hindutva forces have managed to bring other dalits with them. It is a challenge for BSP to circumvent hindutva politics growing ascendancy among dalits and for that to happen party organizational apparatus has to be opened for other marginalised dalits. The kind of challenge that hindutva politics have created for BSP can be gauge from the fact that it was one of the main reason why neither she nor her party hit the streets against CAA when all other opposition parties leaders were seen addressing public gathering. In today's polarised politics she don't want to be seen with muslims. Dalit social thinkers like Anand Teltumbde and Sukhdev Thorat have continuously raised the issue of continuous decline in amount and delay in the disbursement of post matriculation scholarship for Dalit students. This scholarship was started by Ambedkar and notwithstanding its limitations it continues to be a major catalyst in the development of higher education of Dalits. But irony is these questions of material benefits has not been raised by established dalit Bahujan parties like BSP.

Conclusion

Dalit – Bahujan Politics in Uttar Pradesh since its inception in late 1970s under the able leadership of KanshiRam has witnessed both success as well as a period of stagnation. One of the biggest achievements of KanshiRam was that he had managed to carry out an independent Dalit – Bahujan politics in a state which for most of the period after independence has witnessed the rule of upper caste. In June 1995 KanshiRam realized his dream when he ensured that his protégé Mayawati, a Dalit woman was for the first time sworn in as Chief Minister of India's largest state i.e. Uttar Pradesh. This rise of Mayawati to the post of Chief Minister was hailed as 'miracle of democracy' by then Prime Minister of India P.V. Narsimha Rao as only democracy can lead to this miracle where a woman from the one of the most marginalized community can ascend to power.

All the three governments that BSP formed before 2007 was a coalition government where other partner was BJP but still Mayawati, was able to successfully carry out her own agenda and implemented programs aimed at improving the lives of the Dalits and make them more assertive. In fact, this increasing assertiveness among the Dalits was one of the most significant aspect of Mayawati's 25-month rule in the state during 1995 to 2003 in three different stints. Earlier the Dalits who often used to fall prey to the wrath of upper caste now started to retaliate to them in their language. They have developed the courage to reach out to Police Stations and other government institutions in time of need. Badri Narayan in his book '*The making of the Dalit Public in North India*' have also mentioned about the impact that Mayawati ascendancy to power have created in the minds of Dalits where he highlights how many of the rural women who have never seen Mayawati but still connects with her and saw her as their emancipator a 'Dalit ki Beti' who is committed bring positive changes in their life.

Determined to achieve political power on its own BSP decided to widen its social base by opening its gate for the upper caste and formed a rainbow alliance with the Brahmins in particular for the 2007 assembly election. Though it was a successful attempt and party got emphatic victory with 206 seats on its own but this tenure of Mayawati marred her image of a strict administrator which she had earlier carved out for herself in her earlier tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. As I have already mentioned, in her last tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh where she had to share power with many upper castes cabinet ministers state witnessed major cases of corruption with active involvement of ministers and bureaucrats. Controversy erupted over her decision to build statues of herself and the party symbol 'Elephant'. It was widely seen as a waste of public money. Public interest litigations (PIL) were filed in the Supreme Court

accusing Mayawati of wasting public money to propagate her political agenda and recently Supreme Court has tentatively asked Mayawati to return the money spent on these statues.

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Dalit- Bahujan politics in today's Uttar Pradesh is increasingly failing to counter the resurgent Hindutva groups which according to Ajay Gudavarthy is following the strategy of de- Brahminised Hindutva by incorporating large number of Dalit- Bahujan leaders in their fold.

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