

Dynamics of caste politics in Uttar Pradesh: Understanding the Political Trends

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Abstract

Since ancient times, caste has played a significant role in Indian society. Its influence can be seen in all facets of society, including social, political, cultural, and economic. Caste is king in Uttar Pradesh, as the state is often seen as the political kingmaker in Indian politics. This illustrates the significant role of caste in politics. Numerous political parties have been established based on the ideology and support base of castes. Caste and political dynamics are evident. From a political perspective, the state's dominating castes, including the upper castes and untouchables, are significant.

Post 1980, the appearance of small castes became the major driving force behind caste politics. Different national and regional parties in the state of UP employ various tactics to mobilise the electorate in their favour and secure power. Their ultimate goal is to have as many winning candidates from their party as possible, thereby achieving a certain number that will enable them to form their government in the state. And if they fail to achieve the required numbers, parties go for post poll alliance to come to power. With the changing trend in Uttar Pradesh, the electorate is becoming more aware and giving their welfare an upper priority rather than considering the caste of a candidate. And this is true in most cases.

Aim of the Study- To critically examine the evolving dynamics of caste-based politics in Uttar Pradesh and analyse the political strategies and electoral trends of various political parties shaped by caste identities.

Keywords- caste, electoral politics, national and regional parties, electorate, government, power.

Introduction

Among the states of the Indian Union, Uttar Pradesh has always enjoyed an important rank in the field of politics. Many prominent national movement leaders have come from UP, and the state itself has seen many struggles against foreign powers. Uttar Pradesh has provided the majority of the Prime Ministers to the country and has the largest number of seats in the Parliament. Uttar Pradesh politics affect the national politics, whereas political happenings in other states are confined to their borders.

In a democratic country like India, candidates from different political parties or those who are independent possess the right to contest elections. Political parties give tickets to the appropriate person from a particular constituency. In this process, political parties engage in a competitive struggle to garner the support of the electorate. Politicians in the urge to win elections employ different tactics to manipulate the voters and win their votes.

In recent times, caste has become a major factor in the mobilisation of the masses to fulfil their ultimate goal of winning elections. After 1980, the emergence of small castes has led to a major shift in the electoral politics of India. As a result, the caste has occupied a prominent space in the electoral discourse of different political parties. Caste has always been a major factor in determining the destiny of people and political parties in Indian democracy, notwithstanding the dishonest justifications and obfuscations made by the contemporary

elite. To their advantage, political groups prefer to keep the caste issue raging. If the flames start to flicker during elections, fresh wood is added to rekindle the fire.

Aim of the Study- To critically examine the evolving dynamics of caste-based politics in Uttar Pradesh and analyse the political strategies and electoral trends of various political parties shaped by caste identities.

Research Methodology- This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the complex relationship between caste and electoral politics in Uttar Pradesh. The methodology integrates both descriptive and analytical methods to trace historical developments, analyse electoral outcomes, and assess the evolving political behaviour of the electorate in caste-based politics.

Historical Events

The politics of Uttar Pradesh is much divided based on caste and religion, which remain the dominant factors in determining the electoral outcome. The United Provinces (currently Uttar Pradesh) Provincial Assembly was elected in the year 1946 and was replaced by the UP Legislative Assembly in 1952. In UP, the dominance of the Congress party era continued uninterruptedly till 1967. The first state assembly, which was created post-independence, was in the year 1952. At that time, there were a total of 430 seats; out of which the Congress Party won the maximum with 388 seats in hand, and thus formed their government in the state.

Since independence, the process of democratisation was underway, especially in Uttar Pradesh and progressed on the lines of increased awareness about caste and communal identities. The Congress party dominance was replaced by a multiparty system, leading to the emergence of the BSP, the SP and the BJP. These were not definite parties as there were continuous breaks and desertion among different party members. The movements on the basis of identity were operated in the electoral field, assembling people into social groups, leading to clashes, bloodshed and political instability. Although social divisions along the lines of caste created social enmity, it posed a greater challenge to the dominance of the upper castes.

Up Politics And Caste As The Dominant Factor

The phrase "Vote and beti (daughter) within caste only" frequently echoes during canvassing and hustings in Uttar Pradesh. The government essentially launched a war on the centuries-old caste structure when the nation gained independence in 1947. Even though caste is still prevalent, its influence on daily life is waning due to the rise in intercaste marriages. Elections and politics have also given it new facets and a new course.

In actuality, castes have evolved into lobbying groups that function similarly to the American Black, Jewish, and Roman Catholic lobbies. The caste divisions among the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), and Vaishyas (landowners and commerce) have been maintained by Indian democracy.

The middle castes did not get any space in the Varna Vyavastha (caste system) introduced by Manu. The middle castes, such as Ahir, Jat, Kurmi, Lodhi, Ladaria, Kewat, etc, have strongly indulged themselves in electoral politics and demanded their share. Members of a particular caste want someone from their caste to get elected because when a candidate from

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their caste becomes powerful, he has the means to do a lot of favours for them. Favours can be in the form of employment opportunities and contracts. In the year 1967, in Uttar Pradesh, under the leadership of Chaudhari Charan Singh, the Ahir, Jat, Gujar, and Rajput emerged as a powerful political force and were called "AJGAR". In the next decade, the Muslims too got fascinated by this group, and it came to be called "MAJGAR".

Elected in 1946, the United Provinces (as Uttar Pradesh was once known) Provincial Assembly remained in office until 1952, when the UP Legislative Assembly took its place. Nonetheless, Congress's hegemony over the state continued unabated until 1967. Eighty-three of the 430 seats in the first post-independence assembly, which was established in 1952, were double-member seats. 388 of them were won by the Congress, and Govind Ballabh Pant, who was already the Premier of the Provincial Assembly, remained the chief minister until December 1954, when he relocated to Delhi to serve as the Union Home Minister. Dr Sampurnanand, a freedom fighter and Sanskrit scholar, succeeded him.

After the Congress won the 1957 elections with 286 lawmakers, Dr Sampurnanand served as chief minister till 1960, when he was replaced by C.B. Gupta in a political coup. Dr Sampurnanand said in the election for President of the UP-Congress Committee that if his nominee, Munishwar Dutt Upadhyay, lost the contest, he would resign as chief minister. Upadhyay fell to C.B. Gupta. In the 1962 elections, the number of Congress legislators in the state fell to 249. The Jana Sangh, with 49 members, displaced the Praja Socialist Party, which had 44 MPs in 1957, as the second largest party in the House.

During the shakeup, the Congress, under Jawaharlal Nehru, enacted the Kamaraj Plan, which required several Congress chief ministers to retire and take on organisational responsibilities. Gupta was one of them. However, to demonstrate his power over Congress MPs, Gupta offered Sucheta Kriplani, a freedom warrior and the widow of the stalwart Acharya J.B. Kriplani, who had left the Congress due to disagreements with Nehru, for the position of chief minister. She was chosen chief minister in 1963, much to Prime Minister Nehru's dismay.

The Congress party fell to 199 seats in the 1967 elections for the fourth Vidhan Sabha, falling well short of a majority in the 425-seat Assembly. While Gupta narrowly lost the Ranikhet Assembly seat by 72 votes, Sucheta Kriplani chose to run for the Lok Sabha and was elected. The BJP's forerunner, the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, took home 98 seats. There were now 425 seats in the House instead of the previous 430.

On March 10, the Vidhan Sabha was established. Charan Singh entered the race for the coveted position of chief minister but eventually pulled out. Following his election as chief minister by the Congress Legislature Party, Gupta garnered the backing of 37 independent lawmakers. Four days later, the new cabinet took the oath of office. Charan Singh declined to participate. Singh served as the Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forests, and Fisheries in the previous administration.

By the planned agenda, the House convened on April 1. Jagdish Sharan Agarwal, the Speaker, was seated. The motion of gratitude to the governor was being discussed in the House. Jharkhande Rai (CPI) proposed a change to the motion in the afternoon. Wearing his famous Gandhi hat, Charan Singh got up from his chair and declared that he and sixteen other House members were leaving Congress to start a new party named the Jan Congress.

There was a vote on the amendment. Charan Singh spoke to the House before the vote and said he was disappointed with the party he had spent forty-five years helping to create. With 215 members voting in favour and 198 against, the amendment was approved. Chief Minister Gupta got up from his chair to ask the Speaker to adjourn the House and acknowledge the

government's defeat. Additionally, he declared his cabinet's resignation and his intention to present it to the governor right now. The leader of the joint opposition, Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD), at the time, was Ram Chandra Vikal, a former Congressman who had been admitted back to the House as an independent. He extended his offer to Charan Singh, applauded the Chief Minister's action, and commended him for upholding democratic values. The Gupta regime was in power for just 14 days. For the state's first non-Congress government, the road was clear.

Meanwhile, Gupta was waiting for a word from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the CM's office. It is recommended that the chief minister enlist the help of the independents and ask for an indefinite adjournment of the House. Gupta told Indira Gandhi that he was en route to the Governor's House to tender his resignation, having already made the announcement. Nanaji Deshmukh of the Jana Sangha was instrumental in this effort. Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, a seasoned communist, too, had this dream.

When Charan Singh was sworn in as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, the Bhartiya Jana Sangh experienced power for the first time. Subsequently, Charan Singh renamed his party Bhartiya Kranti Dal (BKD) from Jan Congress. During his time in power, he experienced numerous difficulties. Two government members resigned and courted arrest after the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), an SVD partner, launched an Angrezi Hatao movement. A few other parties also left the government, and Singh resigned and suggested dissolving the Assembly in February 1968. Within the following few years, the 16 lawmakers who had joined him in leaving Congress also broke away from him. Later in his political career, his biggest drum-beater turned bitter critic, Raj Narain, gave him the nickname "Chair Singh." Others referred to him as the "king of defectors." He was viewed as a destroyer of parties and administrations.

The state held elections in 1969 following a year of the President's control. The BKD's membership grew from 11 to 98, a significant rise. These seats were gained in part at the expense of its former SVD coalition partners, particularly the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), whose membership dropped from 44 to 33, and the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, whose membership was cut in half from 98 to 49 seats. With 211 votes, the Congress came just two votes short of a majority. Gupta was unable to finish even the first year of his tenure as chief minister. After Indira Gandhi persuaded the Congress to split vertically, Gupta lost the majority and resigned.

In February 1970, Charan Singh reclaimed power by forming a coalition with the Congress (I) of Indira Gandhi. Within eight months, new issues arose. 14 Congress (I) ministers, led by Kamalapati Tripathi, refused to quit when Singh requested them to. Governor B. Gopala Reddy requested that Singh step down after Singh suggested firing the ministers. Tribhuvan Narain Singh (Congress O), the leader of the SVD administration assembled by non-Congress (I) parties, was sworn in after 17 days of the president's authority.

After only five months in office, Tribhuvan Narain Singh was forced to quit after becoming one of the few chief ministers to lose an Assembly by-election (from Maniram in Gorakhpur in March 1971). He was followed by Kamalapati Tripathi of the Congress(I), who served as chief minister until June 1973, when the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) revolted and forced him out in response to demands for improved wages and working conditions. Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna (Congress) was sworn in as chief minister in November 1973, following several months of the President's rule.

With the Congress (I) winning 215 seats in the House of 425 at the 1974 Assembly elections, Bahuguna was able to hold onto the seat. In November 1975, Bahuguna quit because he had

angered Sanjay Gandhi, the youngest son of Indira Gandhi and the man in charge of the Congress (I) at the moment.

For fifty-two days, the Assembly was in suspended animation. The replacement of Bahuguna was Narayan Dutt Tiwari. About 15 months later, Morarji Desai's Union administration ousted Congress state governments, including Tiwari's in Uttar Pradesh, after the Janata Party defeated the Congress in the 1977 Lok Sabha election.

Before the Congress was defeated in 1977, Bahuguna had already left the Congress to join the Congress for Democracy (CFD), which was led by Jagjivan Ram and formed an alliance with the newly established Janata Party. Bahuguna had visited Congress (O) mainstay C.B. Gupta during the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. This meeting has a fascinating past. It has to do with Gupta's shocking loss in 1974 from the Lucknow Cantt. The assembly seat, which was once regarded as his territory. As a candidate for Congress (O), Gupta had only received 9,068 votes. As a dark horse, Congress candidate Sardar Charan Singh (not to be confused with Chaudhary Charan Singh) received 25,242 votes and won the seat; he even lost his security deposit and finished fourth.

The loss of Gupta's security deposit in 1974 was the biggest blow of his life. He believed that Bahuguna had deceived him covertly. However, political whims had brought them together, and in 1977, they fought a joint war against Indira Gandhi.

The Congress state administrations, including Tiwari's in Uttar Pradesh, were removed by Morarji Desai's Union government following the Janata Party's victory in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. Elections were held in June after the dissolution of the sixth Assembly and a brief 54-day period of presidential authority. The newly formed Janata Party secured 352 of the 425 seats, but a dispute arose over the chief ministership between the Charan Singh-Madhu Limaye group and Party President Chandra Shekhar, who wanted to appoint Ram Dhan, a Dalit MP from Lalganj (Azamgarh), along with his friend and one of the three Young Turks, to the chair. Other Backwards Class (OBC) leader Ram Bachan Yadav was proposed by Raj Narain, but Limaye recommended the more experienced Azamgarh MP Ram Naresh Yadav. After failing to reach a decision, the MLAs ultimately supported Ram Naresh Yadav, who later won the Assembly by-election from Nidhauri Kalan in the Etah district.

Yadav's ministry, which lasted from June 1977 to February 1979, included the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, which had amalgamated with the Janata Party. The minister of health was Kalyan Singh. Mulayam Singh Yadav, a youthful socialist leader who was in his late 30s at the time, served as minister of cooperatives.

Following the notorious police atrocities in Narayanpur (Deoria), Ram Naresh Yadav resigned in February 1979, and Banarasi Das took over. Fascinatingly, the Charan Singh-Madhu Limaye combo, backed by Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, chose Banarasi Das, a dependable lieutenant of Gupta's for decades, while C.B. Gupta put Raj Mangal Pandey forth as the chief ministerial candidate. Bahuguna remained vague. Journalist Ramesh Chandra Srivastava, often known as Pahelwan, was able to locate Bahuguna in Delhi and provided the names of lawmakers who backed Pandey. Madhu Limaye, a seasoned socialist politician, arrived in Lucknow a few hours later in a government plane from Bihar. Carrying Pandey's list of followers, he was able to persuade the majority of them to change their allegiance. Pandey and his companions were taken aback. Pandey did not win the Janata Party Legislature Party elections. And shortly after regaining power, in February 1980, Indira Gandhi dismissed Banarasi Das's Janata government.

The Congress won 309 of 425 seats in the 1980 assembly elections. The Raja of the Manda principality, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, took the oath of office as chief minister. Akbar Ahmed 'Dumpy' was the chief minister that Sanjay Gandhi had proposed, but Indira Gandhi

was hesitant to entrust such a significant state to a political newcomer. In this respect, she heeded the counsel of Sanjay Singh, another friend of Sanjay Gandhi. His uncle-in-law, V.P. Singh, a former deputy minister in Indira Gandhi's administration, was recommended by Sanjay Singh. A one-year temporary arrangement was proposed, following which Dumpy, as his friends called him, could be appointed chief minister. However, after a few months, when V.P. Singh became a seasoned politician and Sanjay Gandhi perished in an aircraft crash, things changed.

Numerous claims of fictitious police confrontations and significant breakdowns in law and order, such as the notorious Behmai massacre in 1981, in which the bandit Phoolan Devi massacred 20 Rajputs, were made against V.P. Singh's administration. Justice Chandrashekhar Pratap Singh, a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court, resigned in 1982 when dacoits killed his brother. Shripati Mishra took his position. Mishra served for around two years before his party ousted him in August 1984, giving N.D. Tiwari a second chance to serve as chief minister. In the 1985 elections, he guided the Congress to victory, capturing 269 seats.

However, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi replaced him within months with Vir Bahadur Singh, a Rajput, in keeping with the Congress history of snipping the wings of regional politicians. From September 1985 to June 1988, when N.D. Tiwari regained power, and Singh served as chief minister. However, under Tiwari, the Congress only managed to win 94 seats in 1989, suffering a historic defeat. With external backing from the BJP, the Janata Dal, led by V.P. Singh, became the single largest party in 1989 and formed the central government. The BJP won 57 seats, while the Janata Dal won 208. At the time, UP had two candidates for the position of chief minister. To replicate the situation at the centre, Mulayam Singh Yadav, a former minister in the SVD and Janata governments, was selected over Ajit Singh and formed the government with the outside backing of the BJP.

The BJP withdrew its support from the Mulayam Singh Yadav administration in Uttar Pradesh following the arrest of the BJP head and Bihar head Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav's declaration in October 1990 that Lal Krishna Advani's Ram Temple rath yatra should end. The Congress supported Chandra Shekhar, who left the Janata Dal, after V.P. Singh resigned as prime minister. With external backing from the Congress, Mulayam Singh Yadav also threw his weight behind Chandra Shekhar's camp in Uttar Pradesh. Following the Congress's withdrawal of support, both governments fell, but Mulayam Singh Yadav became a well-liked leader among UP Muslims in the alliance of Jawaharlal Nehru and Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna in the years that followed.

Ayodhya and Mandal soon became the focal points of UP politics in general and elections in particular. Caste distinctions were more pronounced. One vote bloc was discovered, consisting of Muslims, Dalits, and OBCs. The BJP took 221 seats in the 425-member House in 1991. To oppose the Mandal forces, Kalyan Singh, a member of the Lodh Rajput community (OBC), was selected as chief minister. During his term, he made cheating in school board exams a crime, imprisoned offenders, including four lawmakers and dismissed a minister for disobeying his orders. After the controversial building in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992, Kalyan Singh was fired together with other BJP chief ministers Shanta Kumar (Himachal), Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (Rajasthan), and Sunderlal Patwa (Madhya Pradesh).

In the 1992 elections, Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav forged a calculated Dalit-OBC political alliance with the BSP. In their separate contests for 256 and 164 seats, the SP and the BSP won 109 and 67. Mayawati was named the ruling alliance's coordinator, and Yadav was sworn in as chief minister. In the Assembly, the SP-BSP combination lacked

a majority. V.P. Singh and P.V. Narasimha Rao were persuaded by Kanshi Ram to back the coalition that would install Mulayam Singh as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. They had a bad experience with him, so they were hesitant. On Kanshi Ram's promise, nonetheless, they consented. A few independents and tiny parties also backed the ruling coalition.

To establish the BSP as a national party by 1996, Kanshi Ram began making lengthy trips throughout the nation. The alliance in Uttar Pradesh did not continue, and in May 1995, the BSP left, reducing the government to a minority, despite Kanshi Ram's best efforts. After becoming ill, Kanshi Ram was sent to a hospital in Delhi.

Governor Motilal Vora had previously received a letter from the BJP promising support should the BSP assert its claim to form the government. Mayawati created history when she took the oath of office by granting the Dalits a say in a state where they make up roughly 21% of the population. Since then, Mayawati has emerged as the most well-liked Dalit figure in India, holding a prominent position on the national political scene. But the Mayawati administration also failed, and the Assembly was disbanded.

The BJP won 174 seats in the 1996 Assembly elections, falling 39 seats short of a majority. The president's control was reinstated in the state when the Assembly was placed in suspended animation. The BJP and the BSP, which had 67 MLAs, agreed in April 1997 that each party would have a chief minister for six months on a rotating basis. Mayawati had the first six months, but after stepping aside to make room for Kalyan Singh as agreed upon, she became agitated and withdrew her support, claiming that her successor had rescinded her instructions in the Dalits' best interests. In response, the BJP orchestrated splits within the Congress and the BSP.

The BJP government led by Kalyan Singh received backing from the new parties known as the Janatantrik BSP, led by Chaudhary Narendra Singh (Kanpur), and the Loktantrik Congress, led by Naresh Aggarwal (Hardoi).

With Lok Sabha elections well underway, UP Governor Romesh Bhandari swore in Jagdambika Pal of the Loktantrik Congress to replace Kalyan Singh's cabinet in a dramatic event on February 21, 1998.

Mulayam Singh feared that the Kalyan Singh administration would use widespread booth capture, rigging, and violence to guarantee his defeat in the Sambhal Lok Sabha seat. He faced off against D.P. Yadav, the BJP candidate. Even Dr. M.S. Gill, the Chief Election Commissioner, received a letter from Mulayam Singh pleading with him to guarantee a free and fair election in his district.

In the Gangeshwari Assembly segment of Sambhal, Kalyan Singh was speaking at a small public gathering in the village of Rahra on that fateful day. At the meeting site, the Rahra police station's station house officer (SHO) was on duty. From the police station, one of his coworkers hurried over and whispered something in the SHO's ear. Consequently, he confided in the PSO. The PSO went up on the improvised stage and informed the chief minister that the governor had fired the government. Singh hurried back to Lucknow in shock. To facilitate Mulayam Singh Yadav's easy manipulation of the polls with the aid of thugs, Jagdambika Pal ordered the director general of police to remove more police officers from the Sambhal constituency as soon as he took office. To avoid such a situation, Kalyan Singh had sent in extra troops.

Before the Allahabad High Court's Lucknow bench, the BJP contested the Kalyan Singh government's removal. The governor may request a trial of strength on the House floor, but the bench, which included Justices V.K. Dixit and D.K. Seth, ordered the reinstatement of the Kalyan Singh government.

Justice Dixit's home served as the venue for the hearing. Justice Dixit felt that Pal's attorney should be given more time to make his case, even if he did not have a problem with Justice Seth's cryptic ruling awarding status quo ante in favour of Kalyan Singh (Pal had not yet taken oath). The hearing was postponed until the next day at nine o'clock. Meanwhile, Vajpayee, a well-known BJP leader, began a fast-unto-death at midnight at his New Delhi home.

According to the Supreme Court of India's order, Kalyan Singh won the floor test three days later. The composite floor exam was conducted by Speaker of the House Kesari Nath Tripathi. Perhaps for the first and only time, the Speaker was flanked on the podium by the chief ministerial candidates' booths. Roop Chaudhary, a BJP lawmaker, disputes this, claiming that no one should be allowed to stand at the same stage as the Speaker. Within the House sat both 'principal ministers'. Pal received only 196 votes on the Speaker's motion, which was not secret, whereas Kalyan Singh received 225 votes. The 43-hour chief minister's name was even removed from the state's list of chief ministers by the Supreme Court of India. Within three weeks, on March 17, 1998, UP Governor Romesh Bhandari left Raj Bhawan after President K.R. Narayanan expressed his disapproval to then-prime minister P.V. Narsimha Rao on the Governor's flagrant and egregious abuse of his authority.

The BJP took home 57 of the 85 Lok Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh in the 1998 election. However, the Party's state-level representation in the Lok Sabha dropped to 29 in 1999 under Chief Minister Kalyan Singh. Kalyan Singh liked to brag about looking after the three of them—Kalraj Mishra, Lalji Tandon, and Rajendra Gupta (Sitapur)—but he was unsure about Rajnath Singh. The octogenarian Ram Prakash Gupta was forced to succeed Kalyan Singh as chief minister as a result of the lobbying against him. Kalyan Singh allegedly refused to step down to make room for Rajnath Singh, the Union Surface Transport Minister at the time.

Kalyan Singh was forced to leave the chief minister's official house on the eve of Diwali. After that, he left the BJP, which cost it considerable OBC support, particularly from the Lodhs. He became bitter in his resentment of Vajpayee. In the UP Legislative Council's biennial elections on May 5, 2000, Kalyan Singh orchestrated cross-floor voting, which resulted in the defeat of Sunil Shastri, Vajpayee's personal favourite and the BJP's official candidate. Furthermore, Kalyan Singh did not hold back when telling the winning candidate, Siraj Mehndi (Congress), a Shia Muslim from the walled city district of Lucknow, that backing him would not benefit Mehndi because the issue was about making amends with Vajpayee.

Ram Prakash Gupta's tenure as chief minister was also short-lived; within months, his party's critics launched a whisper campaign accusing him of having a memory impairment that prevented him from recognising even his cabinet colleagues. Consequently, in October 2000, Rajnath Singh took Gupta's post. Singh worked on the BJP's social engineering strategy throughout his 18-month tenure as chief minister. Singh established a committee led by Hukum Singh to split the OBCs, and the committee recommended that Jats in the state were more backwards than Yadavs. Jats in Uttar Pradesh were granted OBC classification under his government. However, the BJP lost the 2002 Assembly elections, falling to third place with just 88 seats won.

Mulayam Singh Yadav also became the most visible anti-Congress figure in Uttar Pradesh since Charan Singh, after defeating the Congress at the centre in the days after Vajpayee's second administration collapsed in 1999.

After the BJP offered the BSP support, Mayawati was elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for the third time, following a period of President's rule from March to May 2002. Vinay Katiyar succeeded BJP State President Kalraj Mishra, who resigned. Sloganeering was

done to defend the partnership, but issues continued to arise, and Mayawati resigned in August 2003.

With the backing of BSP dissidents, Mulayam Singh Yadav took the oath of office as chief minister on August 29 and led the administration until 2007. According to reports, Vajpayee was persuaded by BJP officials that Mulayam Singh Yadav would support the party during the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. However, Mulayam Singh Yadav did not assist, and the SP received 39 Lok Sabha seats—the most ever—while the NDA lost power at the federal level. Some BJP leaders still maintain that if the BJP hadn't supported Mulayam Singh Yadav in 2003, he would have been marginalised. The 2003–2007 administration of Mulayam Singh Yadav came under heavy fire for the state's deteriorating law and order situation and rising crime rates.

The Brahmins, whom her master Kanshi Ram had fiercely opposed, were part of Mayawati's social engineering strategy, and the Dalit-Brahmin alliance helped her win 206 of 403 seats. The first single-party majority in the Assembly since 1991 made Mayawati's fourth term as chief minister historic. She became the first chief minister of Uttar Pradesh to serve out her whole five-year term in 2012.

The SP has the questionable reputation of being a party of musclemen under Mulayam Singh Yadav. To run for the Charkhari seat in Bundelkhand in the 2012 elections, the BJP even brought in Uma Bharti, a leader of Lodh from Madhya Pradesh. It was announced that Akhilesh Yadav, a young engineer and Mulayam Singh Yadav's son, would become chief minister. Voters responded favourably to his pledges of free laptops and a subsidy for young people without jobs. Don D.P. Yadav was denied membership into the party by Akhilesh Yadav, but Babu Singh Kushwaha, a corrupt Mayawati government minister, was admitted by the BJP. At the age of 38, Akhilesh Yadav was sworn in as the state's youngest chief minister after the SP secured 224 of 403 seats. He served his entire five-year tenure, much like Mayawati.

After Modi's intervention, Kalyan Singh rejoined the BJP in 2014, but he was a remorseful and chastened individual. As the Governor of Rajasthan, he was sent to Jaipur. The BJP's performance in the 2017 Assembly elections was the best of any single party since 1977 when the Janata Party received 47.8 per cent of the vote and gained 352 seats in the House of 425 (82.8 per cent) following the Emergency. The BJP's vote share increased by 25 percentage points from the 2012 Assembly elections to 39.7 per cent in 2017 after winning 312 out of 403 seats, or 77.4 per cent. It nearly duplicated its record in the 2014 parliamentary elections, winning 73 (more than 90 per cent) of the 80 Lok Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh and 42.7 per cent of the vote. The BJP won again in 2017 despite the consequences of demonetization and the belief that voters could act differently in parliamentary and assembly elections.

Additionally, its performance nearly mirrored that of the Congress in 1980, when the BJP won only 11 seats with 10.8 per cent of the vote, while the Congress won 309 seats with 39.6 per cent. Only seven seats (6.2 per cent of the total votes cast in Uttar Pradesh) were won by the Congress in 2017.

In the 2012 and 2017 Assembly elections, the SP and BSP were unable to convert their core vote shares of over 20 per cent into seats, respectively. But until 2017, when the BJP recorded its greatest performance ever, the Congress its worst since 1977, and the SP and BSP their worst since their founding, the vote shares of the two main national parties, the BJP and the Congress, had been steadily declining.

The BJP stayed out of power in Uttar Pradesh for 15 years after becoming the single largest party and forming the government for one term (1997-2002) during the 1993-2002 period. The 15 per cent vote share that the Congress secured in 1993 was never regained.

The Congress's decline has stayed constant, but the BJP has now made a U-shaped comeback. In 2017, the BJP and Congress were relegated to the status of a third front due to the dominance of the SP and BSP over the previous forty years. Non-Congress and non-BJP parties combined consistently received more than a third of the vote, except in three of the 12 state elections during that time. In 2007, they achieved a high of more than half of the state's vote. The advent of the BJP and a fragmented mandate that favoured regional parties in 1989 and 1993 during the second decade, followed by the four decades since 1980, was followed by the dominance of regional parties like the SP and the BSP for two decades. Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati were voted out after serving out their entire tenure.

The Caste Profile Of Political Parties In Up

Caste is a fundamental idea in the explanation of strategic selection of political parties, lower with respect to political discourse and higher in terms of political practices during elections. Caste is a vital factor when it comes to selecting candidates, and parties take into consideration the balance of power of a local area and the proportion of every caste group, serving as an important factor among other variables. When political parties lay emphasis on caste, this in turn impacts the decision of voters as well. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

Till the year 1980, National parties have exercised a vital role in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Although there are no regional political parties except Congress I, other political parties have established their separate local bases in the state. As a consequence of this, electoral politics in the state of Uttar Pradesh have been impacted by the politics at the National level to a larger extent compared to other states. The Congress party exercised a strong position in UP throughout the national movement as well as the early post-independence time. In the mid-1960s, opposition parties started establishing their foundation in the state. Till the 1970s, the Congress Party enjoyed the support of upper castes, lower castes and the Muslim community; on the other hand, the support of middle and backwards castes was gained mostly by the opposition parties. It is because the Congress leaders of the upper castes created vote banks or caste factions in rural areas. In the middle of 1967 and 1970, it was a challenging time for Congress/ Congress I in Uttar Pradesh, and opposition parties enjoyed a favourable time as they were able to acquire power, which led to a chain of coalition governments. Only the Janata party enjoyed political power for a short duration. The popular policies introduced by Indira Gandhi led the Congress Party to enjoy power in the 1970s. The Congress party faced a declining position after the 1984 elections when the Congress was unable to obtain power and the party went into a phase of downfall. Many elements were responsible for their downfall. The state politics of Uttar Pradesh were interfered with by the central government because of the policy of consolidation of power by Mrs Gandhi. This central interference breaks the local leadership and is responsible for internal fragmentation and spoils the party structure. Since the 1977 elections to fulfil posts in the regional party branch have not been filled, and these party branches have disappeared in most areas. As a consequence, the foundation of Congress I decayed. Congress I is dominated by the upper caste Brahmin community and is not able to present the backwards castes like the opposition parties, which led the party to lose elections in the 1980s. (Pai, 1994)

The Bhartiya Kranti Dal (BKD) / Bhartiya Lok Dal, founded by Charan Singh, has faced numerous changes. One segment of this party led to the formation of the Janata party in the year 1977, in 1989 the Janata Dal and in 1991 the Samajwadi Janata Party/JD. This group as

a political party has succeeded because it provides representation to classes like big landowners and peasants of the rich class, along with representation in terms of castes like Backwards Castes and Other Backwards Castes in Uttar Pradesh, thus profitably integrating both castes and class at different periods. The one and only party which does not appear in the Congress was the Jan Sangh, founded in 1951. The base of the party, as well as its leadership, shifted over time from an upper caste party largely in Oudh and Central Uttar Pradesh in the 1950s to one having the support of traders from the Hindu community in towns and big landlords in rural areas by the 1970s. The power of the Jan Sangh increased twofold in the middle of 1952 and 1967. The growth of the BKD put it down to third rank, and its downturn started as displayed by the election outcomes of 1969 and 1974. Beginning in the middle of the 1980s, the party moved from its middle path between conservatism and radicalism and tried to acquire by mobilising support on the lines of the Hindutva platform and succeeded in the assembly elections of 1991. (Pai, 1994)

Next comes the BSP, a political party of scheduled castes, founded in the year 1984, also asks for the support of the Backwards castes and the minorities. Unlike the scheduled castes parties like the Republican Party of India (RPI), which enjoys backing in western Uttar Pradesh, are small groups and often persuaded by the Congress, the BSP enjoys a clear base and identity. The BSP is the outcome of the social movement started by Kanshi Ram, the Backwards and Minority Community Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) and the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) in the year 1982. It has a larger existence in rural areas. Kanshi Ram describes the BSP as an Ambedkarite party instead of a Gandhian one; it has faith in the principle of challenging the upper castes to obtain their share. He states that the disadvantaged groups and minorities have been put out of the political and economic power which is held by the elite Brahmin minority. This system can be changed by capturing power through voting in favour of the BSP. The BSP looks for support from the Scheduled Castes and Backwards Castes in Uttar Pradesh. The party has been successful in expanding its foundation steadily and is influential in beating the BJP in the State assembly elections of November 1993. The socialist parties like the SSP and PSP enjoyed vital rank till 1967 and eventually vanished after amalgamating into the Janata Party in the year 1977. (Pai, 1994)

The data provided by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) on total voting behaviour display that for any political party, upper castes do not constitute the sole and advantageous vote bank, even though both the nationalist parties, the Congress and the BJP, rely mostly on their support. This is not a new event, but this development is because the upper castes tend to divide their votes among parties to elect the upper caste candidate locally, and their growing support goes to the two influential state-based parties. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

The two trends which can be observed concerning the fall of the representation of upper castes, which comes with analysis on the rise of backward castes. The first one is the decrease of Other Backwards Classes' representation (OBCs), commonly caste acts as the motivating factor responsible for the achievement of the Samajwadi Party. In 1993 and 2007, their representation dropped entirely eight per cent, with a slight comeback in 2012. If we go more deeply into details about the particular groups of the OBC caste, we find that it is mainly the representation of the Most Backwards Castes that has declined. The profile of MLAs compared with the candidates verifies the observation that candidates from Yadav, Lodh and Kurmi communities tend to do better than other OBC candidates. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

The Other Backwards Classes are not a united group, and political parties try to take advantage of their internal division by giving tickets to certain sections of the OBC group. Therefore, more tickets were given by political parties like the BJP and the BSP to Kurmis (27

and 20 individually) and in the OBC category, non-Yadav candidates, particularly Lodhs, when it comes to the BJP. SP distributes tickets to Yadavs (out of the total 108 tickets given to OBCs, 53 tickets to Yadavs). (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

This is the case earlier also. The change that is noticed within the SP and BSP is admitting more candidates from upper castes, thus the deduction of OBC candidates, and therefore, legislators can be seen. The support given by some sections of OBCs and the upper castes has moved from the BJP to two dominant regional parties, which is responsible for their latest achievements. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

The second trend which is observed is an increase in Muslim representation from 5.4% in 1991 to 17% in the 2012 elections. This is the first time after independence that a proportional representation of Muslims can be seen in Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. Sixty-eight MLAs are from the Muslim community, out of which forty-one get elected on the SP ticket. We should not conclude this achievement that the Muslim community give support to SP altogether. On the contrary, in the middle of 2007 and 2012, their support for the SP has come down from 47% to 39%. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

The scheduled caste representation remains unchanged because candidates from the Dalit community commonly do not get elected to unreserved seats. We find that after thirty years of reservation of many constituencies, it has not left any change on Dalit candidates' electability on non-reserved seats, i.e. general seats. This is a very small number of candidates from the Dalit community on de-reserved seats. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

Representation based on Caste

First of all, the OBC candidates are not only the domain of SP and BJP; many of BSP's MLAs come from the OBC category, and this has been happening for more than twenty years, exceeding upper castes in the year 2007. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

The dispersal of Scheduled Castes MLAs has changed greatly; the Samajwadi Party won a significant fifty-six seats on reserved seats. This is another significant part of these elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the proportion of BSP MLAs from Dalit castes at no time is so small, merely sixteen MLAs. The reasons for such a decline in their representation are varied. According to the author's perception, after the abandonment of the Jatavs by the BSP, their divided votes benefit non-Jatav Dalit candidates. This instinct was proved for a restricted number of seats, around 12 to 15, after studying the candidates' vote share on reserved seats. The Samajwadi Party achieves the achievement of electing Jatav candidates. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

The third one, despite everything else, the Congress's support towards the upper caste remains unchanged. Based on the elections which taken place in the last few years, most of the upper castes' candidates win on Congress tickets. The inclusion of a few very important candidates from the OBC category, like Beni Prasad Verma, dominant among them, does not aid Congress in reducing the vote share of the OBC. A strategy employed by Congress called "Mission 85", which consisted of some unique attempts on reserved seats, was a failure. The Jatav candidates receive half of the tickets at the last moment, who have a poor chance of winning against the BSP candidates. However, they are successful in making BSP suffer a loss of about twelve seats, which can be accomplished by dividing the votes of Jatavs for the benefit of SP candidates who are non-Jatavs. The BJP under the captainship of Kalyan Singh, former Chief Minister, is to a greater extent controlled by the upper castes, when the upper castes have the tendency to divide their votes every now and then among different political parties. Adopting Lodh and Kushwaha as good luck personalities like Uma Bharti and Babu

Singh Kushwaha, respectively, is a failure. Among the OBCs, the party performed poorly even in those regions where these two caste groups are dominating. (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012) The Samajwadi party, representing different caste groups equitably, is the new inclusive party. Since 2002, the upper castes have had a noticeable existence among the MLAs from the Samajwadi Party. The majority of the MLAs from the OBC category are still represented by the Yadavs in spite of the decline in their support (Out of fifty-eight MLAs, thirty-four). (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2012)

Social Engineering Based On caste In muzaffarnagar Pri Elections

The significance of the caste factor can be seen in the 2021 Muzaffarnagar Panchayat elections. For the last few years, leaders from the Bharatiya Janata Party represented the Muzaffarnagar district in the Sansad Bhawan and Vidhan Sabha. A significant portion of the Muzaffarnagar population consists of the Muslim community as well as Jats. The 2020 Farm laws proposed by the BJP pulled these two communities against the BJP, and the ball went into the court of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). The sentiment among Muzaffarnagar residents was that it is very unlikely to incur any loss to the BJP in panchayat elections. This was a result of the BJP's strong caste based social engineering in Muzaffarnagar.

More than 700 candidates contested for the 43 poll-bound seats in Muzaffarnagar's Zilla Panchayat. Over 70 lakh voters had to exercise their franchise to elect the members of the Village panchayat, Taluka panchayat and District Council. The state election commission had declared in advance that the president had to be from the Other Backwards Class (OBC) category. Of all forty-three seats of Zilla panchayat, seventeen seats belonged to the unreserved category, 7 seats reserved for females of the unreserved category, 4 seats reserved for the Dalit category, along with 3 seats for Dalit category women and 7 seats for the OBC category, along with 4 seats reserved for women belonging to the OBC category.

According to Sachin Kumar, a resident of Dholra village, caste is the most significant factor, and the public cast their votes in favour of the candidate of their caste. Udham Singh, a leader from the farmer community and a resident of the village named Kisan Majra, also agreed that caste plays a vital role in polls.

Emerging Trends

Political socialisation of the masses happens through different means in both urban and rural areas. As stated in the Economic Survey of 2022-2023, 65 per cent of Indians reside in rural areas and 34 per cent reside in urban areas. Political Orientation of the rural masses happens basically through two means, i.e., family and the community where the people are residing. On the other hand, the urban masses are driven by the educational institutions and workplaces. Political candidates from different political parties try to gather the support of voters by focusing on the problems concerning their constituency.

Media plays a very important role in the formation of public opinion of both rural and urban masses, which is through print media, social as well as electronic media. Public opinion formation through different wings of the media determines their political orientation. Different political parties, through their media wings, participate in the election campaigning and henceforth influence the electoral conduct of the electorate. A lot of differences can be seen in the voting behaviour of the masses in rural and urban areas.

In the general election of 2009, the urban constituencies were mostly captured by the non-BJP political parties. It is seen that Muslim voters have always been against the Bhartiya Janata party, and as a result of this non-BJP party has represented around 13 constituencies in urban areas. The influence of identity politics based on caste can be seen in the general election of 2009.

However, in the general elections of 2014, the BJP dominated both the urban and rural constituencies. Of Uttar Pradesh. The seats of Faizabad, Rae Bareilly, Amethi and Azamgarh, which traditionally belonged to the INC and SP, were preserved.

BSP had not won even a single seat from UP. The leadership of Narendra Modi at the national level and his politics of appeasing the masses by providing them what they want led to a driving force behind winning elections in the years 2014 and 2019. In the general elections of the year 2019, the pre-poll alliance of BSP and SP tried to come back to their politics. The BJP's dominance in electoral politics is far more than other political parties due to its Pan-India Approach, especially in North India and its politics of populism.

In the UP-Assembly elections of 2017, the BJP alone got 312 seats and the NDA alliance got 325 seats. The alliance of SP and Congress got 54 seats together. Whereas the BSP just won 19 seats in total.

In the last general elections of Uttar Pradesh conducted in the year 2022, the BJP won 255 seats out of the total 403 assembly seats, the Samajwadi Party 111, and the BSP got only 1 seat.

In the politics of Uttar Pradesh, Caste is still a determining factor in electoral outcomes. In the 2017 assembly polls, the BJP did caste arithmetic, and this is evident in the survey conducted by the CSDS-Lokniti post-election. According to the survey findings, the BJP made its upper caste base even stronger, which led the party to get more than four-fifths support from the upper caste groups like Brahmins, Thakurs and even Vaishyas. The party also got the support of non-Yadav OBCs, consisting of around 40% of the eligible voters. This support of backwards classes arose from the BJP's policy of welfarism.

Conclusion

It is evident that the caste system still holds a strong place in Indian political spaces. Post, there have been efforts by the government to lessen the impact of the rigid caste stratification. However, this has not borne any fruitful result till now. The roots of the caste system continue to remain very strong. The caste of a person remains alive from his or her birth till his or her death.

Within the larger Hindutva context, OBC and Scheduled Castes have been strongly supporting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, since 2014. Regional parties have broadened their social and electoral base to win back this support, and they have been adamantly calling for a census that includes caste counts. By focusing on caste-based proportional representation, the Samajwadi Party, led by Akhilesh Yadav, has successfully allied with minorities, Dalits, and backwards classes in Uttar Pradesh. In the Uttar Pradesh Lok Sabha elections of 2024, the party won 37 seats. Rahul Gandhi, the head of the Congress, recently acknowledged that the party has not prioritised OBCs and other restricted groups in the past and that they are prepared to change that. He promoted a caste-based census as part of the INDIA alliance's Lok Sabha electoral program in an effort to appeal to OBC, Dalit, minority, and Adivasi seats in addition to the Congress's traditional base of voters. He compared this to a thorough "X-ray" of Indian society.

Though there are fracture lines within it, there is a large political leadership that emerged through OBC politics and has attained prominent positions in political parties and legislative settings. Certain communities, particularly those belonging to intermediate and highly backwards castes, are concentrated in certain areas. Caste enumeration in the upcoming census may provide a window of opportunity for underserved communities to be included. In addition to OBCs, other subaltern communities and minorities will be included in this census. Additionally, it will highlight the number of castes with privilege. Demographic compositions and the social causes of India's economic inequalities will be exposed if economic information, such as land ownership, is added. Due to the failure of land reforms and economic

equality initiatives, which have exacerbated caste-based discrimination and marginalisation, this Census will provide a crucial chance for visibility and advocacy for smaller Scheduled Castes and OBCs without notable leaders. More significantly, it will provide a voice to a large number of itinerant and denotified communities.

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