

DIFFERING ALCHEMY OF AKHILESH AND TEJASWI YADAV

IN UP AND BIHAR

Five factors, namely, preponderance of subaltern demography, remnants of feudal culture, centrality of upper caste dominated Congress rule, persistence of Lohiaite resistance to the same, and the tectonic arrival of Mandal phenomenon changed the political script of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. By 1990s, the anchors of this political shift were two Yadavs, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav in the two populous and politically significant Hindi-states.

Both were trained in the political culture of anti-Congressism; were the outcome of politically turbulent decades of 1970s; and emerged as the flagbearer of secularism by 1990s against BJP's Hindutva. Subsequently, by mid-1990s and thereafter, the logic of intra-subaltern conflict and competing assertions led to both falling out with significant sections of Dalit electorates and leaders, namely, with Jatav-Chamar Dalits under the leadership of Kanshiram and Mayavati in Uttar Pradesh and Dusadh Dalits under Ramvilas Paswan. Further, their electoral decline were attributed to the process of Yadvisation, leading to non-Yadav OBCs shifting to other parties.

By 2012 and 2015, both Yadav satraps passed the political baton to the heirs-apparent, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav, the gen-next leaders expected to be adapted to the sensibilities of millennial generation.

THE BACKGROUND

However, a closure look at the political trajectory of Akhilesh and Tejashwi would reveal that they are following different and oppositional approaches to make a defining niche for themselves.

In the case of Akhilesh Yadav, he had a decadal stint in formal politics before becoming the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Besides getting elected as M.P by 2000 in by-election at Kanauj Lok Sabha seat, which he represented till 2012, Akhilesh Yadav headed the youth wing of Samajvadi party and was credited to revitalize the rank and file of the party. It was under his guidance that the party that until 2009 had officially expressed its opposition to English and use of computers, promised laptops and computers for high-school pass out students– a scheme implemented subsequently.

To put things in perspective, by 2012 when Akhilesh Yadav scripted a clear victory for Samajvadi Party, the main opponent was incumbent BSP. Therefore, on the expected pattern he adopted the political rhetoric of appealing to every section of society without going for the relatively easier mobilizational plank of using the fault line of backward vs. forward caste narrative that symbolized the decade of 1990s. In fact, that option wasn't alluring for Akhilesh as a thick section of subalterns, particularly from OBC castes were aligned with BJP.

On the other hand, in the case of Tejashwi Yadav, the story is quite different. First, he is 16 year younger to Akhilesh Yadav. Second, he didn't have any experience in politics before being appointed as dy. C.M of Bihar at the age of 26 in November 2015. However, what departs Akhilesh and Tejashwi isn't the relative lack of experience of the later, but rather the differing demographic structure of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and corresponding political context when both occupied the prime political positions in their respective states. Unlike Akhilesh, who was facing a Dalit strongwoman Mayavati wherein BJP was in the state of perpetual decline, Tejashwi heralded on the political scene of Bihar in 2015, when BJP under Modi had swept the country and until 2013 was the ruling partner in the state since 2005.

Besides, the demographic logic of the state wherein upper castes don't cross 15% mark, made it easier for RJD to go for the old mandalite mobilizational pattern of declaring the electoral contest as the battle between feudal upper castes and the aspirational subalterns. In fact, in the run up to state assembly election on 27th September 2015, Laloo Yadav while campaigning at Raghapur assembly constituency wherefrom Tejashwi Yadav was the candidate, declared the political battle as Mahabharat between backward and forward castes. The immediate context for the same was the controversy generated after the remarks of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on reservation. However, the message of the caste narrative wasn't lost on Tejashwi Yadav when RJD-JD(U) alliance scored a spectacular victory against BJP in 2015.

PRESENT SCENARIO

In this backdrop, a comparison of the stances and approaches of both the new-gen Yadav satraps acquires pertinence as the same would have an defining bearing upon the political culture and by extension the social dynamics of their respective states.

On the parameter of political experimentation and creative plunge in the muddled electoral terrain, Akhilesh took everyone by surprise when he crafted the unbelievable alliance with arch-rival BSP. While over the board aggressive approach of Amit Shah led BJP against the rival parties helped many arch rivals seek common ground across India, no one succeeded in translating the same into a reality as Akhilesh did. Who would have thought that in post-Guest house incident of June 1995, Mayavati could be brought on the same platform with Samajvadi Party! It was Akhilesh Yadav alone who walked extra miles to accommodate the tough bargainer Mayavati by agreeing to become the junior partner. While there was much hullabaloo of opposition unity, neither Congress, nor Trinmool or CPM cared to translate the sentiment into a formidable political reality.

Secondly, the creative departure of Akhilesh Yadav lied in making a radical departure from the pre-existing political narrative wherein in their formal press conference announcing the grand alliance, he and Mayavati referred overwhelmingly to class and occupational identities, and only a passing reference was made to OBC and Dalit identities. In marked contrast to their position during the Mandal phase of the early 1990s, they welcomed the 10% reservation announced for economically weaker sections.

On the other hand, while the policy posture of Tejashwi Yadav in Bihar has the elements that marks a blend of the sensibilities of the old socialist worldview and millennial aspiration, the political rhetoric, surprisingly seems to be caught in the logic of 1990s Mandal politics. In marked contrast to Samajvadi Party and BSP, RJD opposed 10% EWS reservation. Further, following the footprints of Laloo Prasad Yadav, Tejashwi Yadav has been consistent in declaring the current electoral contest as the contest of Dalits and backwards against upper castes. Even in terms of representation, RJD has fielded just 4 upper castes candidate– all Rajputs. In fact, the party hasn't fielded a single Brahmin, Bhumihar or Kayasth candidate, while over representing the Yadavs and Muslims. The attempt to convert the election as a battle between forward vs backward caste scenario went overboard when RJD's official twitter handle on 28th April, i.e, a day before 4th Phase of election declared CPI as upper caste Bhumihar's party and its candidate Kanhaiya as the representative of upper caste militia Ranveer Sena.

One may contextualise these extremities as tactical ploy by the party and its leader Tejashwi in the backdrop of demographic logic of the state wherein the subaltern consolidation behind a party can render the upper castes redundant like the decade of 1990s.



However, at a time when BJP had made serious inroads among the subalterns, particularly, the non-Yadav OBCs and have crafted an alliance with Nitish Kumar and RamvilasPaswan, who had their appeal among the Extremely backward castes and Dusadh Dalits in the state, Tejashwi's attempt of going for the politics of 'othering' and antagonizing the upper castes who have emerged as the balancer in the politics of Bihar, may boomerang. A better template of Akhilesh Yadav is worth emulating wherein the subaltern consolidation doesn't require the politics of othering of any section. The rule of thumb in the increasing competitive political ambiance that Akhilesh offers is the attempt to appeal to every section even if they many not be one's core voters. Tejashwi, certainly has a long way to go.
