

NON-YADAV OBCs MAKES

LOTUS BLOOM IN UP

The margin of landslide victory for BJP in UP has proven even the best of the pro-BJP electoral forecasts wrong and compounded by the 40 plus percentage of vote share that it got along with its allies demands unravelling of the prime determinants catapulting it to the corridors of power after one and a half decade. This exercise entails the employment of elimination process to discount the factors that, at the best, were not crucial in the making of the electoral outcome. On this parameter, four issues merit utmost attention, namely, demonetization, 'development & Welfare', leadership and candidate profile. Let's take them one by one.

Demonetization:

Contrary to the stated claim of the BJP, demonetization hasn't been a positive factor in its impressive victory. In fact, as per the reports the party strategists were quite worried about its negative bearing so much so that one found a complete absence of the issue in all the speeches of Modi. Neither did, any of the leader's statement or press release throughout the campaign mentioned the issue as a chief electoral plank. On the other hand the party was seriously worried about a probable negative reaction on account of its core voters hailing from, upper castes and Banias and send them feelers by promising agrarian and tax related dividends.

Development & Welfare:

On this parameter, BJP simply failed to encircle Akhilesh Yadav led Samajwadi Party as latter- a fact widely reported- was popularly perceived as having an edge in the state even by the core voters of BJP as well as BSP. The specific measures like starting of ambulance services for remote areas, special policies for girl child and female students, massive revamping of Rural Housing schemes like 'Adarsh Lohiya Gram Yojna' along with focus on public transport and link roads were seemed to have an edge over rivals.

Leadership:

The issue of leadership unequivocally went in favour of Akhilesh Yadav and his positive image became a worrying factor in the electoral strategy of both BJP as well as BSP. His extempore and witty speeches and a soft but deterministic image in the post-Samajvadi family feud were seemingly more popular than that of Modi and Mayavati. All the surveys and ratings gave him edge over his rivals throughout the election.

Candidate Profile:

As usual, BJP face the biggest challenge of rebel candidate factor on account of multiple aspirants along with its practice of declaring the final candidate in the last moment, unlike regional parties. The charges of fielding parachute candidate over the local ones have been a ticklish issue bothering the party both in Bihar as well as Uttar Pradesh.

The crucial question now meriting attention is why did BJP win such a landslide mandate despite being on the sticky wicket on the above-mentioned parameters?

The clue lies in unravelling the three dominant characteristics concerning the social base that the party focused meticulously. That the upper castes, who post-2002 had become swing voters, would consolidate behind the party after its capturing the ‘winnability quotient’ after 2014, needed no extra endeavor on part of BJP. In fact, after the ugly episode of BJP Rajput leader Dayashankar Singh’s remark upon Mayavati and the equally vulgar and abusive response by BSP leaders targeting his wife and daughter and BJP fielding his wife as a face to counter Mayavati over the issue helped upper castes further consolidate behind the party. Secondly, this election also witnessed the dilution of traditional Brahmin-Thakur electoral rivalry in favour of BJP. Also, the Banias, the core social base, despite being at the receiving end of demonetization, ended up voting for the BJP albeit reluctantly. Thus, BJP, barring few exceptions, got its 20 percent plus core voters (Upper Castes and Banias) intact despite not investing much.

Moreover, following the pattern of 2014 Lok Sabha election of employing calculated electoral sense on account of winnability factor, BJP didn't field a single Muslim candidate despite the community constituting more than 19% of the total electorate. A close analysis would also reveal that the party also didn't invest much on Dalits, both Jatavs and Non-Jatavs, except for fielding non-Jatav candidates in constituencies reserved for them. In fact, BJP organized systematic rallies and meetings for OBCs, Youths women as well as farmers except Dalits. Thus, BJP got upper caste consolidation behind it quite easily, didn't invest much in Dalits and at all in Muslims, leaving it to focus on the largely loose but the biggest social constituencies, namely, non-Yadav OBCs who according to various estimates constitutes around 35% of the states electorates.

One must take note that even in the heydays of Mandal agitation in early 1990s, when the OBCs and Upper castes were at loggerheads, the leading and militant face of BJP's Hindutva over Ram Temple issue, hailed from non-Yadav OBCs, like Kalyan Singh (Lodh), Vinay Katiyar (Kurmi), Uma Bharti (Lodh) etc. These non-Yadav OBCs suffer from a triple-deprivation syndrome where they feel under-represented in OBC centric parties like Samajwadi Party and Dalit centric party like BSP, leading to develop a jealousy against Yadavs and contempt against Dalits, making them open to align with anyone who pampers them and make them feel represented.

The success of BJP in 2017 election, lies in tapping this social constituency of non-Yadav OBC quite meticulously. In fact, the party organized 200 "PichhdaVargSammelan" (OBC Conclaves), one for each two Assembly constituencies, targeting the non-Yadav OBCs throughout the state. This measure was followed by fielding them in significant numbers. Besides, the dominant image of SP as a pro-Yadav and pro-Muslim party and the same plank by BSP of exclusive focus on Muslims ended up alienating whatever the non-Yadav constituency from both SP and BSP, making BJP all the more appealing. Also, the desertion of veteran non-Yadav OBC leaders, like Swami Prasad Maurya etc. before the election took away the edge of BSP among them.

Thus, the triad of Upper castes, Banias and non-Yadav OBC, though failed to catapult BJP in Bihar due to their limited demographic numbers, the same clinched the deal for BJP in UP as the numbers were working in its favour despite facing the difficulties over issues discussed earlier.
