

HOW BIHAR VOTING IN 2019?

Nithish factor in Bihar is assumed to be Joran/Jaman (starter needed to make yogurt out of milk) whose company has ensured victories to the allies. Since, 2005 until 2013, he ruled Bihar in alliance with BJP, while in 2015 assembly election, he revived the electoral fortune of moribund RJD, making it the single largest party. However, known for throwing surprises, he defected to NDA by July 2017 and is contesting on 17 Lok Sabha seats, while other NDA partners, BJP and LJP is contesting on 17 and 6 seats respectively.

On the other hand, UPA in Bihar is headed by Tejaswi Yadav led Rashtriya Janata Dal, along with Congress (9), RLSP, HAM(S) and newly formed VIP who are contesting on 19, 9, 5 and 3 each seats respectively.

TICKLISH CASTE ARITHMETIC

On the expected pattern, BJP led NDA focused on privileging the representation of upper castes, non-Yadav OBCs and Dusadh Dalits, while denying the due share of Muslims and to some extent, Yadavs. BJP and its allies have fielded 14 upper castes (8 Rajput, 3 Bhumihar, 2 Brahmin, and 1 Kayasth), 6 Dalits, 5 Yadav, 13 non-Yadav OBCs (3 Kushvahas, 2 Kevats and 8 others) and 2 Muslims.

Similarly, UPA has privileged the M-Y representation by fielding 10 Yadavs (including Congress candidate Ranjita Ranjan, w/o Pappu Yadav), and 7 Muslims, besides, 8 upper castes (4 Rajput, 2 Bhumihar, 1 Brahmin and 1 Kayasth) 6 Dalits, while the representation of non-Yadav OBCs have been diminished to just 9 seats. Thus, the thick MY equation in Bihar is at the cost of upper castes and non-Yadav OBCs.

Linked to this caste arithmetic is the attempt by both, the NDA and UPA to float respective electoral narrative, wherein Tejaswi Yadav tried to convert the electoral ambiance into the early '1990s Mandal logic' of creating the political Faultline of Backward vs Forward. Guided by the old socialist veterans like Shivanand Tiwari, who is back to RJD fold again, Tejaswi Yadav accused BJP of scuttling OBC reservation by earmarking 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Section, a pseudonym for general category, and went to the extent of declaring CPI and its candidate Kanhaiya, who is contesting from Begusarai Lok Sabha constituency as representative of just one caste, i.e, Bhumihars.

However, this attempt to convert the election into a battle between Backward vs Forward castes proved to be a non-starter on account of BJP fetching the alliance with Nithish Kumar, who still has the thick support base of MBCs (Most Backward Castes) and RamvilasPaswan, who ensured the support of populous Dusadh Dalits to NDA. Besides, like Uttar Pradesh, Modi-factor independently has a significant traction among the lower OBC besides upper castes in Bihar.

Adding to this complexity is the intra-upper caste dynamics having a bearing for both NDA as well as UPA. As would be clear from the table, while the share of upper castes is thick in NDA and proportionate in UPA, in terms of the caste breakdown, it is Rajputs who have got lions share in NDA and UPA, while the representation of Bhumihars and Brahmins have diminished significantly. This has caused heartburn among a section of these communities who in select constituencies are tactically voting for non-NDA candidates. For instance, at Valmiki Nagar Lok Sabha constituency, Brahmins electorates voted for Congress' candidate ShashwatKedar, a Brahmin as BJP had denied ticket to sitting MP Satish Dubey by allotting this seat to JD(U) which fielded a Kushvaha candidate. Similarly, at Jehanabad Lok Sabha constituency, a section of Bhumihars preferred to vote for independent candidate Arun Kumar, a Bhumihar and sitting MP, on account of JD(U) not fielding a Bhumihar candidate against RJD contestant Surendra Yadav.

The justification for disproportionate share given to Rajputs by BJP in general and NDA in particular stemmed from two factors: one, in the past Rajputs have been thickly associated with RJD and BJP wanted to foreclose that possibility by giving them thick share, and two, the Rajput lobby in BJP as of now is strong enough to claim more seats as compared to Brahmins and Bhumihars. In fact, from BJP, while there are 6 Rajputs candidates, there are just two Brahmin candidate while Giriraj Singh happen to be the lone Bhumihar representative from the saffron party.

Interestingly, the thick representation itself isn't enough to guarantee the en-masse support of the community as was witnessed in Buxar Lok Sabha constituency wherein BJP has fielded its sitting Brahmin MP, Ashwani Choubey while RJD has fielded its senior leader from Rajput community, Jagatanad Singh. In the wake of fieldwork by the author, it was found that while majority of Rajput electorates opined a pro-Modi narrative, in terms of their voting preference, casteman Jagatanand Singh of RJD came on the top, making the seat tough for BJP.

TACTICALITY OF MODI FACTOR

Adding to the complex interplay of caste arithmetic and electoral dynamics is the tacticality of Modi factor in Bihar wherein a majority of upper castes is supporting BJP, their anger at select constituency notwithstanding. However, the real bulwark of NDA in general and BJP in particular aren't the upper castes, nor the Dusadh Dalits, but rather, they are the MBCs (Most backward castes) who while opining a pro-NDA preference hyphenate Modi factor with their abhorrence with the fear of the return of Yadav-Raj in Bihar. This constituency has three incentive to vote for NDA en-masse, namely, Nithish Kumar's patronage to them, Modi hailing from OBC caste and a fear of return of Yadav dominance to the state in case UPA surges ahead. This tripling gets presented in the form of a normative claim of voting for the development, nationalism, bold leadership whose fusion Modi signifies.

On the other hand, RJD's attempt to play Mandal card wherein the party hasn't fielded a single non-Rajput upper caste, gets neutralised to a great extent by Congress which alone has fielded 4 upper castes out of a total 8 by UPA. At three out of four seats wherein the party has fielded upper caste candidates, namely, Purnea (Rajput), Munger (Bhumihar), Valmiki Nagar (Brahmin), as per ground reports, Congress is expected to win the seats, indicating a fractured pattern of caste voting.

In the final analysis, NDA still is expected to be ahead of UPA on account of having a resonance with a thicker and diversified social support base by attracting a major section of upper castes, non-Yadav OBCs and Dusadh Dalits. On the other hand, UPA would improve its tally from the 2014 as it too has in its kitty the diverse social base of Muslim, Yadav, a section of Kushvaha and Kevat besides non-Dusadh Dalits. However, the disproportionate tickets to Yadavs has created a counter consolidation in favour of NDA, thereby taking away edge it could have acquired, had it fielded more non-Yadav OBCs like NDA. It would be prudent for the RJD needs to come out of Yadavisation tag at the earliest as has been done by Akhilesh Yadav in neighbouring state Uttar Pradesh.

CASTE	NDA	UPA
RAJPUT	8	4
BHUMIHAR	3	2
BRAHMIN	2	1
KAYASTH	1	1
YADAV	5	10
KUSHWAHA	3	4
MALLAH	2	2
OTHER OBC	8	3
DALIT	6	6
MUSLIM	2	7
