

NON-YADAV OBCs GO BY WIND IN UTTAR PRADESH

The political psychology of non-Yadav OBCs, as a clustered community, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, is caught between the pulls and pushes of their ‘aspiration to have political domination like Yadavs-their OBC companion’ and ‘the feeling of relative deprivation vis a vis both Yadavs and Dalits’. The only OBC caste exception to this trait happen to be Jats, who on account of their concentrated spatial location into the western part of the state, relatively better economic position in post-Green revolution phase, with the legacy of a leader like Charan Singh, are partially immune from the feeling of ‘relative deprivation’, even though the tinge of jealousy against Yadavs dominating the state emerges as a factor in their demand for a separate State.

Roughly considered a third of the state population their support emerges as the ‘balancer’ upon the distinct ‘core support base’ of various parties like SP, BSP and BJP, who leave no stone unturned to woo them for their electoral support in the coming election. Trapped in between this ‘aspiration-anxiety axis’ and driven by their ‘caste-centric logic’ they have been swinging among and negotiating with the discourses of ‘Hindutva, Mandal and Bahujan’ from election to election. Their frustration of playing second fiddle to Yadavs in Samajvadi Party, Dalits in BSP and Upper Castes in BJP, has many a times, resulted in formation of caste parties, albeit with dismal electoral success, leading to their political destiny of responding to the best offers that various political parties, most notably, BJP, SP and BSP come up with.

Since 1990s, not only a majority of these castes like, Pal, Nishadh, Kahar, Kumhar, Rajbhar etc. have failed to utilize the reservation policy to their advantage but rather, have been on the receiving end with the political rise of Yadavs and Dalits. While, Rajnath Singh led BJP tried to woo them in early 2001 by earmarking a separate quota for them within the existing OBC reservation- a move struck by judiciary and declared a conspiracy against Yadavs by then leader of opposition Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajvadi Party leadership responded in 2005 by putting many OBC castes into SC category, leading to Mayavati being put in a dock.

This time, all the parties are coming with focused program and policies for them. BJP with its aggressive ‘Pichhda Varg Sammelan’ (Backward Caste Conclaves) one each for two Assembly segments across the state; Incumbent Samajvadi Party, by recommending to the Central government the inclusion of 17 OBC castes into SC category; BSP via its caste-centric ‘Bhaichara Sammelan’ (Brotherhood Conclaves); are competing for their electoral support.

How these non-Yadav OBCs would respond to the offers of various political parties would hold the clue about the possible front runner in the coming Assembly election. A fieldwork undertaken in the election bound state revealed three ‘distinct but interrelated’ existing electoral articulations among them, namely, a. they would be voting for a candidate from their respective castes and therefore, b. their vote would be scattered and divided, however, c. in the absence of any candidate hailing from their respective castes, they are more likely to vote for BJP.

The caste centric electoral rationality of non-Yadav OBCs could be understood in the response of Mati Prasad Maurya, a Kushvaha voter in Kanpur-Dehat, when he justified his preference for BJP by stating: “Hum Log Is Bar BJP ko Vote Denge Kyunki Yadav Padeshan Karta Hai Jab SP ki Sarkar Aati Hai, aur SC Padeshan karta hai Jab Mayavati ki Sarkar aati hai, Hum Beech Wale Jaye to Kaha Jaye, Isliye BJP ko Vote Denge” (This time we would vote for BJP as Yadavs bother us when SP is in power and Dalits bother us when BSP is in the power; where else would we intermediary castes go if not BJP).

However, it was found that a significant number of non-Yadav respondents also preferring SP and BSP by giving conducive secular and developmental logic which in the final analysis turn out to be, primarily, contingent upon the caste profile of respective candidates fielded or likely to be fielded by the preferred political parties in their electoral constituencies.

On part of the political parties, BJP seem to have an ‘off the bloc’ advantage over SP and BSP as far as these OBCs are concerned. With the aim to woo OBCs, BJP, appointed an OBC, Keshav Prasad Maurya (Kushvaha by caste) as its state president. This was followed by a series of follow up measures like inducting dissident OBC leaders, like Swami Prasad Maurya from other parties, especially BSP; inducting various OBC caste leaders like Om Prakash Rajbhar, Sanjay Rajbhar and merging their insignificant but symbolically important caste parties into BJP; appointment of Anupriya Patel (Kurmi by caste) as central minister besides organizing around 200 OBC conclaves (Pichhda Varg Sammelan) around the state covering 403 constituency, giving BJP an edge over the others among these OBCs.

The decision of ruling Samajvadi Party to include 17 OBC castes into Dalit category on the eve of election is intended precisely to reverse this shift of OBCs to BJP fold beside putting BSP in a dilemma. Of 17 OBC castes recommended to be included into Dalit category, the Kahar, Kumhar, Nishadh and Rajbhars constitute significant voting bloc in many assembly constituencies and have been divided among all the three main contender, SP, BSP and BJP, depending upon their loyalty to local caste leaders since 1990s. These caste leaders have conveniently chosen the political ideology of Hindutva when joined BJP, of Mandal when joined hands with SP and Bahujan when aligned with BSP and their support base, driven by the logic of caste representation, has followed the suit.

Therefore, one finds, the castes which have their prominent political face in any party decisively shifting to the respective party, like Lodh and Kushvahas, predominantly batting for BJP while other OBC castes like Kurmi, Pal, Rajbhar, Nishadh, Prajapati, lacking a prominent leader being divided from region to region and constituency to constituency. This trend is well captured in the response of a Prajapati (Kumhar) respondent at Sultanpur, “Humari Vote Badalti Rahti Hai Kyunki Humaari Koi Apni Party Nahi Hai, Humara Ek Hi Hisab Hai Ki Jidhar Lahar Chal Padi, Udhar Chal Diye (Our vote keep shifting from election to election as we don’t have our own party. We follow just one trend that we go by the wind).

As the following Table shows, the BJP has the tough challenge to retain the massive support it gained of non-Yadav OBCs in 2014 election- a task the saffron party is following to the hilt- while BSP and SP are competing to retain a share of the same, which in turn, would witness their votes scattered among the three main contender with slight edge to BJP.

Voting Preference of OBCs in Uttar Pradesh (in percentage)

OBCCastes/Party	Congress				BJP				BSP				SP			
	2007	2009	2012	2014	2007	2009	2012	2014	2007	2009	2012	2014	2007	2009	2012	2014
Yadav	4	11	4	8	5	6	9	27	7	5	11	3	72	73	66	53
Jat	2	13	11	13	18	31	7	77	10	41	16	6	8	10	7	8
Kurmi-Kushvaha	6	28	13	16	42	20	20	53	16	18	19	4	17	18	35	17
Other OBCs	9	17	12	8	17	29	17	60	30	19	19	11	20	25	16	1

Source: National election study, Conducted by CSDS – Lokniti