

RIDDLES OF MODI FACTOR IN UTTAR PRADESH

Uttar Pradesh has always acquired centrality during general elections on account of the sheer number of Loksabhas seats it offers. However, this time the political experiment of ‘Maha-Gathbandhan’ wherein the two regional political rivals, BSP and SP joined hands to take on Modi led BJP has made the ongoing electoral discourse in the state all the more interesting as in 2014 the saffron party with Apna Dal, swept the state by winning 73 seats. Two interrelated questions—has Modi wave waned or persistent in the state and would ‘Maha-Gathbandhan’ halt the BJP winning spree in the state since 2014—merit immediate attention. These questions can be answered, partly, by identifying the respective social base of electorates identifying Modi factor as the most influential criterion behind their support for BJP and partly, by mapping the social profile of Modi-detractors.

MODI’S CORE CONSTITUENCY

Unlike states like Chhatisgarh wherein BJP decided to drop all the 10 sitting MPs, in Uttar Pradesh majority of incumbent MPs have been fielded, who as per the field narrative are not popular with the electorates. The weaker profile of BJP’s candidates in most of the Loksabha constituencies as compared to BSP-SP-RLD alliance is widely acknowledged by both the supporters as well as detractors.

Nevertheless, the weaker profile of BJP's candidates and corresponding anger among party's supporters notwithstanding, the non-Yadav OBCs, Upper castes and a section of non-Jatav Dalits, are rallying behind BJP quite enthusiastically, citing Modi factor as the superseding consideration behind their decision to support the party. Among the non-Yadav electorates, one finds people hailing from castes like Kashyap/Jhimar, Saini, carpenter in Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur region; Lodh, Kurmi and Kushwaha and others in Braj, Rohailkhand, and central UP regions; majority of Kurmis, Rajbhar and Kushwahas in Awadh and Poorvanchal regions are consolidated behind BJP. Similarly, barring some notable exceptions like Hamirpur Loksabha constituency wherein a section of upper caste Rajputs are veering towards BSP's Rajput candidate rather than that of BJP, the spirited support of upper castes, Brahmin, Thakur, Bania, Tyagis and others for BJP is quite visible across the state. There is also a section of non-Jatav Dalits like Khatiks, Valmikis and Katherias (Dhanuk) and Pasis in western and central and Awadh region enthused by Modi factor so much so that they are willing to overlook the weaker profile of BJP candidates while voting.

MODI'S DETRACTORS

As a corollary to upper castes and non-Yadav OBCs emerging as thick support bloc of Modi-led BJP, one finds a strong state wide pattern of dominant intermediary peasant castes, politically assertive Jatav-Chamar Dalits and Muslims emerging as the strong detractors of the saffron party, its leadership and policies.

Interestingly, these dominant castes , tend to privilege their farmer's identity over the caste one while outlining their opposition to BJP in the state. Thus, what set of issues would emerge as the prime determinant of electoral articulation in the state is contingent to the caste-community location of the electorates.

For an overwhelming majority of upper castes and non-Yadav OBCs besides a section of non-Jatav Dalits, Modi signify a bold and decisive leadership wherein the issue of national-security ranks above factors like anti-incumbency, unemployment etc. The factors like welfare schemes like PM AwasYojna, UjjawalaYojna (free LPG cylinder connection to BPL families), Rs. 2000 to the farmers are cited as secondary issues with a positive bearing over their pro-BJP stance.

On the other hand, for dominant intermediary castes like Jats and Yadavs, apparently, it is the precarious agrarian issues that acquire prominence besides matters of unemployment and price inflation. In fact, in the wake of ban on cattle trade and cow-vigilantism across the state, though the issue of stray cattle destroying farmers' crop is a recurring theme which is widely acknowledged by electorates across the political spectrum, its electoral significance lies in the social profile of the voters. While for the upper castes and non-Yadav OBCs, the problem arising out of stray cattle is real, the issue doesn't merit any attention in their political choice. Quite contrarily, for Jats and Yadavs, the same issues add to the woes of farmers who already suffer on account of lack of a decent remunerative prices for their crops, non-payment or delayed payment, rise in input cost of farming besides alleged police brutalities upon the protesting farmers recently in Delhi.

On the question of nationalism, the dominant intermediary castes don't seem to endorse Modi by arguing that Indian army has always made India proud wherein cheerleading Modi and BJP as sole custodian of nationalism and national security is unwarranted. Together with Jatav Dalits, they seem to project Modi led BJP as an unambiguous saga of failures and unfulfilled promises. Muslims echo the sentiment.

In this backdrop, much of the debate around impact of the competing set of issue like nationalism, bold leadership and India's prestige catapulting to a greater height for the first time on the one hand and rural distress, agrarian crisis, unemployment and price inflation on the other, is partially misleading as they tend to club the electorates into homogeneous category measured statistically.

A social mapping of the complex interplay of the electorates and the set of issues they offer as justification would reveal that while Upper castes and non-Yadav OBCs are invoking the issues of nationalism and bold leadership as justification for their support for BJP, the dominant intermediary castes like Jats and Yadavs are privileging farmers issue over the hyped debate over national security. *Thus, it is the social profile of the electorates that is determining the pertinence of a set of issues rather than issues determining their voting behaviour.*

EXPALINING THE RIDDLE

Three factors help explain as to why the social background of the electorates determine their preference about the party as well as issues. For the dominant intermediary castes like Jats, Yadavs and Jatav Dalits, Modi signify the process of de-centering of their political prominence in the Uttar Pradesh. Thus, these Modi-detractors nurture a strong sense of tangible loss of power since Modi's arrival. On the other hand, for upper castes who lost political prominence by early 1990s in the wake of Mandalization of state politics wherein dominant OBCs and assertive Dalits acquired prominence, the domineering presence of Modi-led BJP since 2014 marks a corrective measure. Along the similar lines, the non-Yadav OBCs who by late 1990s got disillusioned with Mandal politics having witnessed its tangible benefit cornered by one OBC caste represented by Samajvadi Party, their new felt centrality in the political scheme of Modi led BJP is an aspiration that has been long overdue. To them, electoral defeat of Modi is not just about alternating one party with the other but rather going back to the undesirable prospect of allowing dominant castes to call the shot.

Thus, Uttar Pradesh has made upper castes and non-Yadav OBCs as the political allies without any thick correspondence in their social lives. Similarly, the desperation to make a comeback to the core of political imagination of the state has made socially antagonistic communities like Jats and Dalits or Yadavs and Dalits joining hand.



In this backdrop, it is the social profile, seen in terms of caste and community, of the electorates that constitute their outlook. The demographic profile of the respective Loksabha constituencies, whether dominated by upper caste and non-Yadav OBC combine or Yadav-Jatav-Muslim, would determine the electoral outcome in the state. Irrespective of the electoral outcome, one aspect is unambiguously clear: It's a waveless election wherein the preference or dismissal of a leader and issues seem to be pre-determined by the social background of the electorates.
