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BSP's Transformation into Multiethnic Outfit

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Abstract:

An outfit floated by Late Kanshi Ram in 1984, the BSP has travelled a long distance and is being considered a national party in the Lok Sabha election since 1998. Having its root in Uttar Pradesh, the BSP has been fielding its candidates across all the states and union territories since 1989. Over the years, the party BSP that initially was confined to the dalits votes only has sought to expand its voter base by including member of the forward (savran/upper castes) and Muslim community. This transformed BSP from a dalit centric party into a multiethnic outfit.

1. Introduction

The emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party as a force in Indian politics has introduced a new discourse among political pundits and sociologist. The BSP has completed a three decade journey in national politics on 14 April 2014. For an outfit floated by late Kanshi Ram in 1984, the BSP has travelled a long distance and is being considered a national party in the Lok Sabha election since 1998. Over the past 30 years, the party that essentially sought to transform the lives of the downtrodden and backward sections of the society has more than 20 percent vote share in many Assembly constituencies, especially in Uttar Pradesh.

In its earlier days the BSP party depends only upon the votes of the SC, ST and the OBC communities and has been labeled a party that spreads the venom of casteism, a party without ideology, a 'power hungry' outfit without any agenda of emancipation and only committed to erecting Ambedkar's statues, gardens, celebrating birthdays etc. but later on the party BSP moves from Bahujan to Sarvajan and distributed tickets to the sarvan communities (Upper Caste). This has helped BSP not only to make a stronghold in the saravan communities' votes but also to make it a multiethnic party from a single caste based outfit.

2. Objectives

The present study has following objectives

- To analyze the BSP social Engineering of wooing the voters.
- To analyze the political behavior of the voters.
- To find out the factor that helped BSP becoming a multiethnic party.

3. Area for Present Study

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is a national political party in India. It was formed mainly to represent Bahujans (literally meaning "People in majority"), referring to people from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes (OBC) as well as minorities. The party claims to be inspired by the philosophy of B.R. Ambedker. The BSP was founded by a Dalit charismatic leader Kanshiram in 1984, who was succeeded by his protégé Mayawati in 2003. The party's political symbol is an Elephant. The ideology of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is "Social Transformation and Economic Emancipation" of the "Bahujan Samaj", which comprises of the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Religious Minorities such as Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Buddhists and account for over 85 per cent of the country's total population.

4. Data Base and Methodology

Data required for the purpose of understanding the whole range of basic facts, opinions and attitudes relevant to our study have been collected from various sources and through diverse methods. More emphasis has been placed on published materials and written documents while discussion with political leaders and people belonging to different walk of life have been conducted in a limited scale in order to present the course of events in its proper perspective. The secondary data have been collected from Election Office India, New Delhi, Census of India 2001 and 2011. Mapping and graphical presentation works have been made with the help of GIS techniques and Ms-Excel.

5. BSP-- The Sole Custodian of Dalits

The BSP's first step in politics was establishment of an 'independent dalit political leadership' instead of a 'dependent dalit political leadership' (Kumar 2003). The latter was present in the political parties that were led and dominated by the so-called upper castes and was a product of the politics of patronage—the 'mai-baap' culture. Against this the Kanshi Ram produced an 'independent dalit political leadership' in a party that was led and dominated by the dalits with an independent agenda. As a result the BSP made the dalit leaders in other political parties redundant. The 2007 UP election was a witness to this phenomenon; with all political parties giving Mayawati a virtual walkover as far as the dalits votes were concerned.

Year/Party	1989	1991	1993	1996	2002	2007	2012
BSP	13 (9.4)	12 (9.4)	69 (11.3)	97 (11.2)	98 (23.1)	206 (30.5)	80 (25.9)
SP	0	0	109 (17.9)	109 (21.8)	143 (25.4)	97 (25.4)	224 (29.1)
BJP	57 (11.6)	221 (31.5)	178 (33.3)	174 (32.5)	88 (20.1)	50 (16.93)	47 (15)
INC	94 (27.9)	46 (17.4)	28 (15)	33 (8.4)	25 (9.0)	22 (8.56)	28 (11.6)

Table 1: Party-wise Seats in Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election (1989-2012)

Source 1: Chief electoral office Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow.

Note: The figures in brackets represent the percentage of vote polled.

Except for giving tickets to dalits from reserved seats no political party tried to mobilize the dalits. Even during the election campaign no political party could present a dalit leader for mobilizing the dalits, though they did have a number of such candidates for leadership. This has happened because of the emergence of Mayawati. She has not only effectively mobilized the dalits in the BSP's favour but her style of governance and performance of her successive governments has consolidated dalit support. The dalits have virtually lost faith in dalit leaders from other parties. This helped BSP to garner dalits votes in its favour. This can be called the end of what manyavar Kanshi Ram used to call the 'Chamcha Age' and the BSP became the sole custodian of dalit votes.

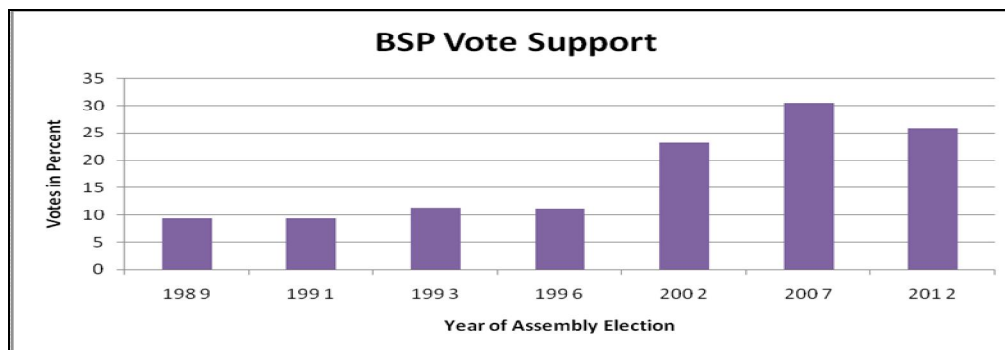


Figure 1

6. BSP Wooded Other Backward Classes

Over the year the BSP has develop an amicable relationship between the dalits and OBCs by propounding a common history of exploitation by the 'Manuwadis'. The pantheon of bahunjan leaders which includes Jotiba Phule, Narayan Guru, Sahuji Maharaj, Babasaheb Ambedkar and E V Ramasamy Naicker Periyar helped further to unite bahunjans in the Hindi heart land. Moreover, the BSP has developed a committed leadership among each sub-group of these OBCs. If the leaders failed to win direct elections they were nominated to the vidhan parishad and Rajya Sabha so that they could be visible in their communities. The BSP also directed OBC leaders to mobilise members of their castes in the reserved constituencies. Now these leaders and their castes have become the second pillar of BSP politics. That is why in the 2007 UP assembly elections, out of 110 tickets given to OBCs about 50 percent have won, 27 percent of OBCs (non-yadavs) voted for the BSP and 8 yadavs have also won.

Lok Sabha	Year	Candidates	Win	Vote Percent
9 th	1989	245	3	2.1
10 th	1991	231	2	1.6
11 th	1996	210	11	4.2
12 th	1998	251	5	4.7
13 th	1999	225	14	4.2

14 th	2004	435	19	5.3
15 th	2009	500	21	6.2

Table 2: Increasing vote support of BSP in Lok Sabha election
Source: Chief electoral office Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow

7. The 'M' Card (BSP Mobilizing the Muslim Votes)

The BSP has always included religious minorities in its definition of Bahujans and since its inception has tried to bring them in its fold. Kanshi Ram's strategy was to mobilize the lower castes of Muslims—the ansaris, chikwas, kasais, ghosis, gaddis, lalbegs etc, to name a few. To instil confidence among Muslims, the BSP appointed four cabinet ministers from the community in 1995 when the party formed its first government. The BSP's efforts have slowly but surely convinced Muslims to support the party; this has ensured a regular flow of Muslims to its fold. Even in 2002, 12 MLAs had won on the BSP ticket. In the 2007 elections Mayawati deliberately gave a free hand to Naseemuddin Siddiqi, a Muslim face of BSP, Who was projected as a leader with independent stature. He prevailed on the leadership to distribute tickets to candidates of choice and he was given a separate aircraft for campaigning in the Muslims voted for the BSP. The Mandir-Masjid issues worked as yet another catalyst to the acceptance of Kanshi Ram's new paradigm. The minorities realised that they were becoming vulnerable to the Hindu communal backlash in the context of aggressive Hindutva politics and they looked for a security belt in the SC, ST, and OBCs alternative. In Uttar Pradesh, the emergence of Mulayam Singh as a political force is closely linked to such realisation of minorities. In a way the BJP's attempt to create Hindutva- through the notion of Ramrajya as an ideological paradigm gave enormous scope to the BSP to quickly gain the upper hand in UP politics. There is considerable disagreement among the political pundits about whether or not Hindutva can be projected as an ideology. But there is no denying the fact that the stronger the efforts of Sangh Parivar to project Hindutva as an ideology of Hindu nationalism the greater would be the possibility of caste getting ideologised in the Indian context as it is basically a caste society and because the Hindutva slogan of 'one religion, one nation' will only provide enough ground to the dalit bahujans to assert their autonomy from Hindutva as the dalit bahujans were never an integral part of Hindu religion. Kanshi Ram understood this ground reality and used the historical legacy of Phule, Shahumaharaj, Periar Ramaswami, Naicker and Ambedkar.

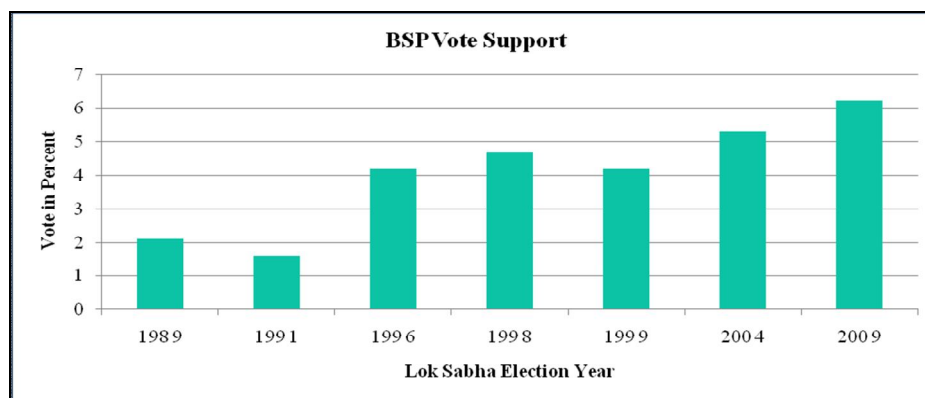


Figure 2: From Bahujan to Sarvajan Party- Drive towards a Multiethnic Outfit

BSP had started mobilizing the upper caste in 1998-99 and in the 1999 parliamentary election. Kanshi Ram distributed approximately 12 percent of tickets to the 'Sarvan'. In the 2002 assembly elections BSP gave 38 tickets to Brahmin, of whom only seven won and the party got only 4.7 percent votes of 'sarvajans'. But since the beginning of 2005 Mayawati started mobilizing Brahmins, Kshatriyas, vaishyas and kayasthas vigorously. 'Brahmin Jodo Sammelan' (mobilizing Brahmin conferences) were organized across the state with a specific membership drive, which culminated in the 'Brahmin Maha Rally' in June 2005 in Lakhnow. This was a tactical move because it changed the preconceived notion of Brahmin about the BSP. To convince them further Mayawati groomed an upper caste leadership in her party and changed the party's slogan from 'Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Bhagedari' (representation of each caste according to its population) to 'Jiski Jitni Taiyari; Uski Utni Bhagedari' (representation of each caste on the basis of their ideological preparedness to accept BSP's ideology). To bring in a large number of sarvanas, the BSP constituted 'Bhaichara Baraho Committees' (develop brotherhood committees) in every assembly constituency. The economically poor among the upper castes were made a target. Mayawati vehemently criticized former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a Brahmin, for not paying attention to their problems. Finally, in a pragmatic move she distributed majority of tickets to Brahmin, Rajputs and vaishyas (Kumar 2007). When in 2007 the BSP came to power with 206 of 403 seats, it adopted 'Sarvajan Sukhaye, Sarvajan Hitaye' as its motto. The words mean that its government was one for everyone's welfare and everyone's interests. This was the brave new BSP sought to shed its 'image' as a party of the Dalits. In all the BSP leadership followed a different strategy. In the era of coalition politics, by directly forging an alliance with caste and communities instead of having an alliance with political parties. Along with its core constituency of dalits, OBCs and Muslims, the BSP mobilized the so called upper castes and they also voted for BSP.

8. Conclusion

Over the past 30 years, the party BSP that essentially sought to transform the lives of the downtrodden and backward sections of the society has more than 20 percent vote share in many Assembly constituencies, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Initially the main aim of the party was to fight against the obnoxious Manuwadi system. In this way the struggle of Manyawar Kanshi Ram Ji who was born in Scheduled Caste community, proved to be greatly effective and pregnant with far-reaching consequences. Later on his successor Mayawati took care of his legacy and is fulfilling the party's vision.

After becoming the party chief, Mayawati justified the move stating that the BSP was committed to not only improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of the 'Bahujan Samaj' but also of the poor among the upper caste Hindus, small and medium farmers, traders and people engaged in other professions. This helped BSP to transform its image from a dalit centric party which was known for erecting Ambedkar statues to a party that sought the development and welfare of all the communities. The party distributed tickets to the upper castes and Muslims. This instilled faith in the upper caste and Muslim towards BSP. Most of the BSP candidates of upper castes won and proved that this faith was not on paper but on practical and political ground. This gave BSP a new definition by transforming it from a dalit centric party into a multiethnic outfit that sought development of Sarvajan (all communities).

9. References

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