

# Subalterns in Uttar Pradesh: A New Trajectory

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The subalterns in Uttar Pradesh – dalit bahujans – are not a homogenised social denomination. They themselves are a highly differentiated and hierarchical social bloc facing intra-caste discrimination. The elites amongst the dalit bahujans are taking advantage of their numbers to claim continuance of reservation benefits and affirmative action programmes without showing any inclination to pass them on to the marginalised.

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With assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh (UP) less than two years away, subalterns or dalit bahujans, i.e., scheduled castes/scheduled tribes (SCs/STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) seem to be taking a new trajectory, a development that may change the state's electoral face.

The emergence of caste parties – the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of dalits and Samajwadi Party (SP) of OBCs – owing to the fragmentation of the electorate based on social cleavages against the backdrop of mobilisation by the All India Backward (SC, ST, OBC) And Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) and Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) – and the “second democratic upsurge” leading to *mandal*, have since defined rules of the game.

The rise of the BSP and SP was attributed to the fact that the subalterns faced discrimination at the hands of the upper-caste dominated Congress Party and were not given their due share in the leadership structure. The erstwhile rainbow coalition of the

Congress, acquired during the freedom struggle, comprised all social denominations, but was steadily shattered during the 1980s and 1990s. Hence, when an opportunity presented itself, these castes quit the Congress not only to avenge discrimination, but also to find new caste identities. The entire post-Congress system discourse hinged on equality and justice to subalterns.

## Intra-Caste Discriminations

But as things unfolded, it came to be realised that the subalterns are not a homogenised social denomination. They are themselves highly differentiated and a hierarchical social bloc with intra-caste discrimination. The dalits in UP are divided into 66 sub-castes of which the Chamars (also called Dhusia/Jhusia/Jatava) are most dominant and also consider themselves superior to the remaining 65 dalit sub-castes and indulge in discrimination against them (Verma 2001). These 65 sub-castes of dalits (known as *ati-dalits*) are further divided horizontally and there are prohibitions of *roti-beti* (bread and daughter) relations not only between Chamars and non-Chamar dalits, but also among many of *ati-dalit* sub-castes.

The same is true of the OBCs. The OBCs in UP comprise 79 sub-castes and are divided into three categories: backward caste (BC) which consists of only one caste – Yadav (also called Ahir/Gwala/Yaduvashiya),

more backward castes (MRBCs) that include eight sub-castes – Sonar/Sunar/Swarnkar, Jat, Kurmi/Chanau/Patel/Patanwar/Kurmi-Mali/Kurmi-Sainthwar, Giri, Gujjar, Gosain, Lodh/Lodha/Lodhi/Lot/Lodhi-Rajput, Kamboj; and most backward castes (MBCs) that include 70 sub-castes (Verma 2001). The intra-caste discrimination is common to both dalits and OBCs. Thus, there is double discrimination against the real subalterns in UP – ati-dalits, MRBCs and MBCs; they suffer discrimination not only from upper castes, but also from various sub-castes within their own caste group. Unfortunately, subaltern discourse in UP, as elsewhere, has focused more on inter-caste discrimination and less on intra-caste discrimination.

**Table 1: Reservations within Reservation in Uttar Pradesh 2001** (Aborted)

Part of Schedule	Nomenclature of Caste	Name of Caste	Population (%)	Share in 28%	Overall (%)
<b>Backwards</b>					
A	Backward caste	1	19.40	5	18
B	More backward castes (MRBCs)	8	18.91	9	32
C	Most backward castes (MBCs)	70	61.69	14	50
<b>Dalits</b>					
A	Chamars	1	55.70	10	47.6
B	Non-Chamars	65	44.30	11	52.4

Source: UP Gazette Extraordinary, 15 September 2001.

**Table 2: Reservations within Reservation in Maharashtra**

SN	Caste	Reservation (%)	Details of Caste Categories	Remarks
1	SC	13	SC and SC, converts to Buddhism	59 castes
2	ST	7	ST including those living outside specified areas	47 tribes
3	OBC	19	Other Backward Classes	346 castes
4	SBC	2	Special Backward Classes	7 castes
5	VJ	3	Vimukta Jat/Denotified Tribes	14 tribes
6	NT-B	2.5	Nomadic Tribes-B	28+7 tribes
7	NT-C	3.5	Dhangar-Nomadic Tribes-C	1 caste
8	NT-D	2	Vanjari-Nomadic Tribes-D	1 caste
Total		52		

Source: First Foundation Social Forum - [http://www.firstfoundation.in/socio\\_casteslist\\_Maha.htm#Scheduled%20Castes%20%28SCs%29](http://www.firstfoundation.in/socio_casteslist_Maha.htm#Scheduled%20Castes%20%28SCs%29).

What agitates dalit bahujans in UP is the fact that elites amongst them are taking advantage of their numbers to claim continuance of reservation benefits and affirmative action programmes without any inclination to pass them on to the marginalised among them. Hence, the focus is shifting from inter-caste discrimination to intra-caste discrimination. Intra-caste discrimination is further aggravated because reservations in government jobs and educational institutions are largely gobbled up by elites among the dalit bahujans. The reservation law provides for transfer of reserved category candidates or students to general category, if they obtain marks higher

than reserved category candidates. That means that some of the reserved category (sc/st/OBC) students are transferred to the general category and the subsequent space in the reserved category is filled further by them. This provision greatly enhances the overall share of the OBC/sc/st candidates in the total selections, pushing it from 50% to 70-75% or more in educational institutions and government services. This enhanced representation is again captured by elites among dalit bahujans.

### Reservation Advantage

Due to this, the reservation advantage does not properly accrue to MRBCs/MBCs/ati-dalits who continue to be discriminated as usual. And, because they continue to be so discriminated upon, the dalit bahujan elite make a case for continued affirmative action support to OBCs and dalits as a whole. When the Rajnath Singh government in Uttar Pradesh tried to rationalise reservation accrual advantage to ati-dalits, and MBCs and MRBCs through the Hukum Singh Committee<sup>1</sup> (2001) and the consequent legislation (Table 1), there was a hue and cry from the dalit bahujan elite. The former tourism minister in Rajnath's cabinet Ashok Yadav, filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the

amended Uttar Pradesh Public Service (Reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) Act. The Supreme Court in its order dated 14 December 2001 and 21 January 2002 stayed the appointment of members of the scs/sts and OBCs under the amended act. When Mayawati came to power on 3 May 2002, her government dumped the amended law and reverted to the old Uttar Pradesh Public Service (sc/st and OBC Reservation) Act of 1994, though she had supported the Rajnath move earlier.<sup>2</sup> However, reservations within reservation exist for dalit bahujans in other states, viz, Maharashtra (Table 2) and Karnataka (Table 3).

**Table 3: Reservations within Reservation in Karnataka<sup>3</sup>**

Sl No	Class of Persons	Reservation (%)
1	Scheduled castes	18
2	Scheduled tribes	5
3	Category-I (most backward)	7
4	Category-II (a) (relatively more backward)	20
5	Category-II (b) (more backward)	6
6	Category-III (a) (backward)	7
7	Category-III (b) (relatively backward)	10
Total		73

Source: The Karnataka Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and of Appointment or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 1994.

There is a growing resentment among dalit bahujans regarding double discrimination. While they want to fight discrimination by the upper castes, they also resent discrimination by their own caste group and caste party. This was proved by the declining OBC support to SP (MRBCs/Lodhs -11%, MBCs -2%) in the 2007 UP assembly elections (Verma 2007b) and a major OBC shift to the Congress (Yadav +6%, Kurmi +20%, other OBCs +9%) in the 2009 Lok Sabha (LS) elections in UP.<sup>4</sup> The same may be true of dalits; the ati-dalits resent BSP policies for failing to better their day to day life. In the 2009 LS elections, the BSP recorded a small 1% loss in Jatav support and heavy losses in OBC support (Yadav -3%, Kurmi -5%, other OBCs -9%). This is significant against the backdrop of a complex web of inclusive politics by BSP, and constant pampering of dalit bahujans by the Congress.

## Rural Labourers in Neo-liberal India

York University, Toronto, Canada and Xavier Institute of Management – Bhubaneswar (XIMB) are organizing, with financial support from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada and also supported by Dialectical Anthropology (New York), a conference on **Rural Labourers in Neo-liberal India** to be held on **18-19 December 2010** at XIMB, Bhubaneswar.

Please visit the conference website <http://sites.google.com/a/ximb.ac.in/rlni/> for details on registration, and send queries, if any, to [conf-rural-labour@ximb.ac.in](mailto:conf-rural-labour@ximb.ac.in).

In case of any difficulty, please call Prof. Banikanta Mishra at 91-9437075075. Registration is free (but must be done by 10<sup>th</sup> December).

No less significant is the fact that only 44% of the dalits voted in the 2007 assembly<sup>5</sup> and 2004<sup>6</sup> and 2009 LS elections<sup>7</sup> in UP. Where are the remaining 56% dalits? Why are they not voting for Mayawati? Can they be attracted by any other party? As per the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (csds) data, the Congress attracted 2% more Jatavs and 11% more ati-dalits in 2009 LS elections. Are dalits not impressed with the high sounding slogans of Mayawati? Will they be willing to transcend caste boundaries and integrate with other castes from all sections of society to coalesce into a subaltern class?

But the subaltern class is not a homogenised social denomination, it is an economic construct. Together with dalit bahujans are the “poor of the upper castes”, who collectively constitute the “subaltern class” – sharing a common discrimination and plight. The one living perpetually in poverty loses all social esteem and faces socio-economic discrimination. That makes them educationally backward too. Hence, there is forced socio-educational backwardness among the poor of the upper caste. Even “poor Muslims” must be included in the subaltern class. Already, in some states, Muslims are included in backward castes, viz, Quresh (Muslim butchers) in Andhra Pradesh; Bakho, Bhatiara, Churihar, Dafali in Bihar; Chapper band in Karnataka; Julaha Ansari and Momin Ansari in Maharashtra, and Muslim Kayastha, Momin Ansari and Ansari in UP.<sup>8</sup> In the now aborted law consequent to the Hukum Singh Committee’s report, 22 Muslim other backward castes had been placed in the most backward caste category in UP (Verma 2001).

Thus the subaltern class in UP, and the rest of the country, should not only include ati-dalits among scs/sts, and MRBCs and MBCs among OBCs, but also the poor from the upper castes and Muslims. In addition, the neo-rich among dalits and OBCs must be excluded from the subaltern class. Though there is a provision to exclude the “creamy layer” OBCs from reservation benefits, yet many escape the trappings of law through false claims; rich businessmen usually manipulate expenditure to show poor income in tax returns, and hence only salaried OBCs are trapped in the creamy layer. However, the raising of creamy layer

ceiling to Rs 4.5 lakh has almost sealed the fate of the real poor among them for a share in reservation benefits.<sup>9</sup>

### Inclusive Politics

Such a subaltern class would be ideal not only for transcending the trappings of caste politics, but would provide a rationale for inclusive politics by an effective political mobilisation. Why should a political party allow itself to be limited by patronage of a small social denomination? Why not reach out to all sections of society? Caste politics is a limiting experience; why not resort to class politics having potential of pluralist majority for a long? That would, on one, address the social, educational and economic backwardness of subalterns; on the other, will take us closer to idea of Indian citizen instead of forcing myopic caste identities on individuals. The BSP in UP did take a couple of steps in this direction by resorting to inclusive politics through “reverse social osmosis” (Verma 2007a) and “sandwich coalition” (Verma 2007b) as also by advocating reservation for poor of upper castes.<sup>10</sup> But, the party is just emerging from the cocoon of exclusivist dalit politics and marching towards inclusive politics – though it has a long way to go towards class politics, a concept that was ingrained in BAMCEF of Kanshi Ram. The BSP is likely to face a tough challenge from the Congress which is trying to recreate its erstwhile rainbow coalition through Rahul Gandhi, who is visiting dalit helmets and focusing on poor Bundelkhand. The Bharatiya Janata Party in its recent *chintan baithak* at Shimla (19-21 August 2010) also had a brainstorming session on how to win over youth and subalterns. The SP having drifted away from the socialist policies of Lohia appears to be in disarray.

It is, then, necessary to transcend caste and address this “class”. This may not necessarily warrant an amendment of Article 15 of our Constitution which talks about the “socially and educationally backward class” of citizens. While determining backwardness, even the Mandal Commission made caste-based social backwardness a “crucial element”, though it also used educational backwardness as a “linked element” and economic backwardness as a “derived element” (Verma 2007c). There is a growing realisation that

it is economic backwardness that ultimately determines our social and educational backwardness. The Mandal Commission recommendations, therefore, contain the seeds of a smooth transition from caste to class. It is to this subaltern class that political parties must turn. That will be in tune with the constitutional scheme and aspirations of Kanshi Ram and Ramanohar Lohia, who both aimed at the subaltern class, not backward castes. But, the emergence of local parties capturing the aspirations of the subalterns at the grass roots level in UP and the failure of national parties to open up to such class aspirations may be a stumbling block.

### NOTES

- 1 The UP government constituted a social justice committee on 28 June 2001 under the chairmanship of Hukum Singh, minister for parliamentary affairs. Ramapati Shastri, health minister and Daya Ram Pal, member of the UP legislative council were other members of the committee. The committee was told to suggest improvements to achieve social justice in UP. The UP cabinet accepted the report of the committee and in September 2001 the UP legislative assembly approved an amendment to the existing Uttar Pradesh Public Service (Reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) Act, 1994. The amended law provided for reservation within reservation as suggested by the Hukum Singh Committee.
- 2 Report of R B Singh, “Polls Over, Maya Junks Backward Plank” in *The Indian Express*, 2 June 2002.
- 3 On 13 July 2010, a Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice S H Kapadia, Justice K S Radhakrishnan and Justice Swatanter Kumar restrained the Karnataka government from going ahead with its policy of 73% reservation. It fixed a ceiling of 50% reservation for reserved categories. The Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and Appointments or Posts in the Service under the State) Act, 1994, which provided 73% reservations had been challenged in the Supreme Court. The state was also asked to re-examine its law based on the fresh data if it wanted to provide reservations beyond the ceiling as fixed in the Indra Sawhney (Mandal case) (*Economic Times*, 14 July 2010).
- 4 National Election Studies (NES) data 2009, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi.
- 5 In 2007 assembly elections, of 11 crore voters in UP, SC vote accounted for 2.41 crore. Only 1.06 crore SC voters showed up. Thus, 44.21% SCs voted. About 67 lakh dalit women did not vote, “Statistical Report on General Election, 2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Election Commission of India”, New Delhi.
- 6 In 2009, of 11 crore voters in UP, SC votes accounted for 2.49 crore. Only 1.11 crore SCs voted in the 2009 LS elections. Thus, 44.64% SCs voted. About 45 lakh dalit women did not vote, “Statistical Report on General Election, 2009 to the 15th Lok Sabha”, Vol I, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.
- 7 In 2004, of the 11 crore voters in UP, SC/ST votes accounted for 2.33 crore. Only 1.03 crore SCs/STs voted in 2004. Thus, 44.17% SC/ST voted. About 66 lakh dalit women did not vote, “Statistical Report on General Election, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha”, Vols I, II, III, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

