

The Rise of Caste-Based Parties in Uttar Pradesh: An Analysis of Their Social Justice Politics

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Post-2014, there has been a splintering of the lower caste votes from the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The concerned lower caste base has shifted to the leading traditional party, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), and to parties with a support base in one caste or a group of sub-castes. The paper aims to study the politics of these caste-based parties, which revolves around the social justice plank. But this novel phenomenon of the rise of the single-caste-based parties needs to be analysed in its sense as it considerably differs from that of the traditional social justice parties- the SP and BSP. First, the strategy of these caste-based parties will be analysed. The difference between their strategies, the reason for the difference, and the difference from traditional social justice politics will be analysed. Second, the paper will explore the theoretical analysis of how the politics of the caste-based parties fit the social justice framework.

Keywords: Caste, Political parties, Social justice, Vote bank, Coalition, Social mobility

Uttar Pradesh (UP) politics has traditionally been a populated space. Four major traditional political parties- The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), the Indian National Congress (INC), and the Samajwadi Party (SP) have been jostling for political space in UP. These parties have also been in alliances in the past, at times making it a three-cornered fight. The space for other small political parties had been less before 2014.

The traditional political parties had the target vote base of large social or ethnic groups. But post-2014, there has also been a rise of specific caste-based parties whose influence is limited to just one caste or a group of sub-castes. These parties include: the two factions of Apna Dal whose support base is in the Kurmi community; Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) whose support base is in the Rajbhar community; Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal (NISHAD) Party whose support base is in the communities whose traditional occupation centers around rivers, such as boatmen and fishermen; Mahan Dal whose support base is in the Maurya, Shakya, Saini, and Kushwaha communities in Western UP; Janvadi Party (Socialist) who claim to represent the Nonia Chauhan caste who were traditionally salt-makers and salt-diggers.

The common feature of these caste-based parties is that their politics revolves around the social justice plank. But this novel phenomenon of the rise of the single-caste-based parties needs to be analysed in its sense as it considerably differs from

that of the traditional social justice parties- the SP and BSP. First, the strategy of these caste-based parties will be analysed. The difference between their strategies, the reason for the difference, and the difference from traditional social justice politics will be analysed. Second, the paper will move into the theoretical analysis of how the politics of the caste-based parties fit the social justice framework.

The methodological design adopted by the study is a comparative analysis. Comparative design is helpful when we seek to understand the similarities and differences of a phenomenon, thereby gaining a better understanding of it (Bryman, 2012: 72). The comparative analysis method fits the purpose of the paper as the paper tries to analyse the strategies of the political parties from the singular lens of social justice. This comparative analysis can be broken down into two parts. First, the comparison will be between the strategies of SP and BSP, and the other single-caste-based parties. The SP and BSP with bigger ambitions target a larger vote bank and hence there will be differences in how single-caste-based parties strategise. Second, the paper will depict the ideological and pragmatic positions taken by the three prominent small-caste-based parties in UP. The interpretive case study method adopted here analyses the strategy adopted by the political parties while taking up the cause of social justice (Lijphart, 1971).

On the theoretical front, the paper uses the social justice theorisation in India that focuses on discriminatory moral rules and sanctions that explain why certain social groups are invisible in institutions and public domains (Verma, 2011). The paper utilises the three-dimensional social justice given by Nancy Fraser (2010) in the Western context and applies it to the Indian condition. The framework based on the dimensions of recognition, redistribution, and representation, is a political philosophical guide to understanding the Indian polity. The redefinition of political identities and the establishment of new political frontiers in terms of social justice depict the deeply political nature of social justice in India. The assertions of small-caste-based parties are to be seen as both actively using and rebelling against the statist perception of social justice politics as practiced in India. Instead of using social justice to assemble a roster of disadvantaged communities (Dirks, 2001: 283), the paper sees how the same term is being used to craft alternative smaller rosters.

The paper does not indicate a direct correlation between caste and electoral votes. It can be a matter of research whether caste and votes are correlated, what other variables are in play, and how is it so? (Gupta, 2019). But it is well understood that the ministers in governments, the main leaders of political parties, the selection of candidates, etc., in all parties the caste of the individual in concern is an important criterion. Similarly, in the case of these small parties, there is no hiding the fact that these parties are heavily reliant on their caste identity to gain electoral advantage.

Rajni Kothari (1970) has covered this aspect of the relationship between caste and politics as a basis for organising public activity. Through the course of the paper, the three aspects of Kothari's theorisation of caste in Indian politics will continuously come into the discussion. It is necessary to outline that the theorisations of castes as a political group are being duly reflected in empirical form, albeit in newer and complex forms. First, the paper will focus on how caste has emerged as a factor in creating factions and interactions. It will help in understanding the alignments and realignments that have taken place both in consonance with social justice politics and in violation of it in UP. Second, the paper shows how the aggregative and conflicting elements have transformed caste in the political age in UP. Third, the

consciousness aspect of caste comes out very well in the paper. The paper will discuss reasons for the rise in caste consciousness in specific castes, their concerns and demands, their means for attaining social mobility, and the interaction of political and social issues due to the disaggregated consciousness of single-caste-based parties.

Before that, a look at the politics before the rise of single-caste-based parties is necessary.

A Backdrop to Post-Mandal Politics in Uttar Pradesh

The politics in North India has revolved around the debates of Mandal- the rise of lower castes around social justice demands- and kamandal- the Hindutva politics of the BJP. In Uttar Pradesh, this politics is particularly prominent as the decline of the INC led to the rise of SP, the BSP, and the BJP in the 1990s. Their rise was attributed to these parties catering to different caste and religious constituencies.

The SP- an offshoot of the larger socialist-inclined Janata Party- had its core base in the administratively defined but ambiguous category of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) that gained from the implementation of the Mandal Commission report. The SP was led by Mulayam Singh Yadav who united the middle castes under the banner of the administrative category OBC. The comparatively socially and economically well-off and numerically dominant Yadavs emerged as its de facto leaders (Michelutti, 2008).

The BSP politics was also based on the cause of social justice of the administratively defined group called Scheduled Castes (SCs). The group defined its identity based on being ex-untouchables- they prefer to call themselves Dalits- and the most deprived because of being the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Further, despite Constitutional and statutory provisions in favour of the SCs, the SCs continued to be plagued by social backwardness. It allowed Kashi Ram and his protégé Mayawati to lead the politics of Dalit assertion against the upper castes (Pai, 2002).

The BJP aims to counter the BSP's and the SP's social justice politics through its Hindutva politics. As a response to the caste assertion by the lower castes, the BJP responded in the 1990s with the politics of Hindutva where it tried to project all Hindus irrespective of caste under a single umbrella and with a single cause of the Ram Mandir movement (Hansen, 1999: 141-145). But the core constituency of the BJP is understood to be the upper caste, with an aspiration to consolidate a vote bank of the Hindus by keeping out the Muslims (Manor, 2019).

The problem of all three parties has been that they are seen as parties of particular caste groups that can administratively easily be delineated into General (also known as forward castes), OBCs (also known as backward castes), and SCs. The parties have attempted to move beyond their core constituency and capture some percentage of votes apart from their core constituency (Verma, 2001). The danger of doing so is losing its core ideological base as well as its core constituency. The primary tussle between the SP and BSP has been the Muslim votes as they are alienated by the BJP. The upper castes' votes have also been the target of these parties of the lower caste where they can attempt to target a single caste in the General category. For example, the strategy of BSP was most successful when it targeted the Brahman votes in the 2008 Vidhan Sabha elections.

The BJP has done well by eating into the core voter base of the SP and the BSP since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. It has done it through a two-fold process. First,

following its core agenda it has legitimised its plank of Hindutva politics and successfully being able to eliminate the importance of Muslim votes as the determining factor in UP elections. Second, the task of curbing the talk of social justice cannot be made defunct by the politics around Hindutva. The idea of social justice and the need for social engineering in elections has made the BJP balance the caste arithmetic. A strategy that has been successful for the BJP has been its ability to divide the OBC and the SC vote.

The core constituency of the SP and the BSP has shrunk since the 2014 General Election. The SP's core constituency of votes is being limited to the Yadavs within the administrative category of the OBCs. The party is led by Akhilesh Yadav (since 2012), who is the son of its founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, with a larger extended family also involved with the SP. The SP has been blamed for favouring the Yadavs during its reign in power in Uttar Pradesh and it has led to resentment from the other section of OBCs (Akanksha Kumar 2015). Also, a narrative has been successfully built where the SP is seen as favouring Muslims. The BSP's core constituency is being limited to the Jatavs within the administrative category of the SC. The party is led by Mayawati who belongs to the Jatav community. A chunk of the benefits of affirmative action policies is seen to be cornered by the Jatavs among the Dalits (Pai 2002).

The CSDS-Lokniti data shows from 2014 continuously onwards that the non-Yadav votes among the OBCs and the non-Jatav votes among the SCs have gone to the BJP (Beg et. al, 2014). A separate non-Yadav and non-Jatav row while conducting and analysing surveys is a clear example that the election studies also recognise the shrunk core constituent base of the SP and the BSP. This epochal shift needs to be analysed from the perspective of the non-Yadav and non-Jatav demand for social justice, rather than dismissing it as a Hindutva wave or just superficially analysing the strategy of political parties.

Single-Caste-Based Parties

Post-2014 politics has witnessed the emergence of single-caste-based parties in UP. It is a phenomenon that needs new theorisations as it takes the cleavage-based party system to another level of divisiveness (Chibber, 1999). The single-caste-based parties are no longer protesting the domination of the dominant castes by drawing localised demographic resources (Palashikar, 2006), but even challenging their hegemony. It has developed new forms of politicisation of caste (Kothari 1970). They are a product of the increased political consciousness of OBC castes especially. This increased political consciousness reflects realisation among the new politically active castes that the castes are in a better bargaining position with traditional parties and the State when they pursue their demands as a separate political entity. There are factors apart from political consciousness that determine the influence of the political parties.

Factors Determining the Influence

The population of the caste is the factor that is the most influential in determining the power of the caste-based political party (Chandra 2004). The primary reason for Yadavs and Jatavs emerging as a particularly strong caste- apart from having a better social, educational, and economic status- within the OBCs and SCs respectively is that their population within their group was the highest. Yadavs form 19.40 percent of the OBCs and Jatavs form 55.70 percent of the SCs (Government of UP, 2002). The

same applies to the case of single-caste-based parties.

These parties were not only limited by the target group they wanted to cater to but also the region of the target group. The reason was that the target group they were catering to was also limited by the regional spread of the caste. For example, the NISHAD and the SBSP party are limited to East UP or Purvanchal region because of the presence of the fisherman community caste and Rajbhar caste respectively in the region. Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), a party with a support base in the Jat community, can also be put in this category. However, it is not applicable in the case of this study as their politics revolve around social justice politics, and the party has had a base in Western Uttar Pradesh since the 1990s only.

The reverse is true for the limited influence of single-caste-based parties. A caste can be well spread across the state but the influence of a single-caste-based party can be limited to a region. The reason for the limited influence is that only members of a caste in a particular region consider a political leader as the leader of their caste. For example, the two factions of Apna Dal- and particularly Anupriya Patel of Apna Dal (S)- are influential among Kurmis mostly limited to the Purvanchal region of the state. Kurmis are well-spread across the state, but their loyalties might be with other Kurmi leaders belonging to traditional political parties.

It takes us also to point out that few leaders of these single-caste-based parties were at some point in time leaders of the traditional political parties. Late Soneylal Patel (founder of Apna Dal), Om Prakash Rajbhar (founder and leader of SBSP), and other leaders also started their political careers at the BSP. The BSP, the SP, and the BJP have had leaders who are considered leaders of single-caste groups. It makes us ask the question of what led to the need for the setting up of parties whose target group was the voters of only one caste when the traditional political parties already catered to the needs of caste groups by propping up leaders of particular castes. A theoretical analysis of this question is necessary which will be taken up later in the paper.

The success and failure of these single caste-based also might vary. Though these parties target a single caste group, it cannot be taken for granted that these single caste parties will get all the votes of the caste in question. Though it is never the case that any party will en bloc get votes of any caste, to remain influential it must at least get some share of the votes. For example, the Mahan Dal claims to represent the Shakyas, Mauryas, and Kushwahas in the region of Western UP, but its claim has not translated into votes for itself or for its allies. The BJP continues to get more than 50 percent votes of the group despite the Mahan Dal opposing the BJP in the UP election of 2017 and 2022 (Beg et. al 2022).

From the discussion, it can be ascertained that the population of a particular caste state-wise/region-wise/ constituency-wise along with the regional concentration (or spread) of a particular caste, and the acceptance (or denial) of the leadership of the single-caste-based party in opposition to the representative of a caste in a traditional party, are the factors that might affect the power that a single-caste-based party holds. The limited influence of the single-caste-based parties shows that all of them needed a political strategy to win seats, as the vote of single castes would not be enough.

How is the politics of these limited influence political parties effective when they control (or claim to control) the voter base of a single caste in a particular region?

Varying Political Strategies

The common feature of these parties has been that they all emerge from the plank of social justice politics. They have adopted different strategies based on the balancing act of gaining the most electoral votes/seats and keeping their core constituency satisfied with its ideological push. They have adjusted their relationship with the Hindutva politics of the BJP- often seen as opposed to the social justice politics of SP and BSP- depending on the course of action they saw fit to maintain the balancing act. Sudha Pai's (2002) work on the BSP has shown that while keeping its core ideology of social justice intact- against the Manuvadi politics of BJP and INC- the BSP also aligned with the BJP and the INC to gain electoral advantage.

The small caste-based parties and the large traditional parties both have their reasons to align. The reason for these single-caste-based parties to align with the larger parties is that they will not be able to win the elections by gaining the votes of just a single caste in any Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha constituency. The reason for the larger parties to align with the single-caste-based parties is two-fold. First, they can play spoilsports by taking away crucial votes in First Past the Post System. Second, if aligned with a larger party, they can tilt the crucial balance of votes in favour of the party they are aligning with. These votes are usually called the swing votes. If the single-caste-based party can demonstrate its caste-base loyalty to the party, more and more traditional parties will try to align with them.

The different strategies of the three most successful caste-based parties the Apna Dal (Soneylal) (ADS), the SBSP, and the NISHAD party will be discussed. It will help analyse the politics of single-caste-based parties.

Apna Dal: The two factions of Apna Dal- ADS led by Anupriya Patel and Apna Dal (Kamerwadi) (ADK) led by Krishna Patel and Pallavi Patel have had different trajectories. The politics of both parties have revolved around targeting the Kurmi votes. Based on the performances in elections since 2014, the ADS can be said to be the most successful single-caste-based political party. The legacy of Soneylal Patel- the founder of Apna Dal- has been transferred to ADS and Anupriya Patel. But it cannot be said to be the only reason for the success of ADS.

The primary reason for its success has been its alignment with the BJP. The addition of the Kurmi votes to the already available vote base of forward castes has helped both the BJP and the ADS. There are reasons why it was easier for the ADS and Kurmi voters to vote for the coalition of BJP-ADS. First, despite falling within the Mandal politics fold and occupying similar social positions, there is no strong coalition between the Yadavs and the Kurmis (Jaffrelot, 2003). The dominance of Yadavs in the SP has alienated the Kurmis, and the Kurmis alliance with the BJP is seen as a natural alliance. The intra-OBC rivalry between the Yadavs and the Kurmis trumps social justice politics. It falls in line with the BJP targeting the non-Yadav votes (Arvind Kumar, 2022).

Second, the Kurmis in SP or BSP have had to play second fiddle to the Yadavs and Jatavs respectively. While SP and BSP have tried to build a social coalition, the Kurmis have felt hard done when it came to allotting leadership roles and a piece of the cake in government institutions. The SP has constantly been blamed for giving importance to Yadavs in government jobs- especially during the Akhilesh government between 2012 and 2017- thus the dissatisfaction among Kurmis (Akanksha Kumar, 2015).

Third, the Yadavs and the Kurmis both are on the OBC list for State and Centre. The Social Justice Committee Report of 2001 placed the Yadavs in Group A, and Kurmis in Group B, to rationalise reservations and allow them to percolate down the hierarchies of OBCs and SCs (Samajik Nyay Samiti, 2002). The Raghvendra Kumar Committee constituted on the demand of Jat reservation, has been reported to suggest putting the dominant OBC caste- The Yadavs, the Kurmis, and the Jats- in one category, But the implementation of the report by the ruling BJP government can be disadvantageous as it can be a political loss for both BJP and ADS and go against BJP's strategy of dividing the Yadavs and non-Yadavs (Rashid, 2021).

The politics of ADK has failed compared to that of ADS. Due to the reasons explained above, ADK has failed to register among the core constituency of Kurmis. In 2022, ADK entered an unnatural alliance with SP which did not last long. Despite Pallavi Patel defeating the sitting deputy Chief Minister of BJP on the Sirathu Vidhan Sabha seat on the SP ticket, the alliance has been tenuous at best. Fighting elections on the seat of a larger party is a sign of the weakness of the party, which is less than a merger but diminishes the autonomy of the smaller party.

Suhaldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP): The SPSB has been another successful single caste-based party that has swung the votes one way or another in Purvanchal in the State Assembly elections of 2017 and 2022. It won 4 seats in 2017 and 6 seats in 2022 aligning with the BJP and SP respectively. There are reasons for SBSP to adopt the strategy it has.

First, though the SBSP is particularly a party of Rajbhars, the strategy of SPSB has been to target the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) vote- the most socially and educationally backward among the OBCs- of which Rajbhars are also a part. The assertion of the SBSP before coming into prominence, and even after that has been mobilisation on the issue of reservation. It has asked the Rajbhars who are currently classified as OBCs in the State and Central list, to be shifted to SCs or STs in the Central list. Another alternate demand given by SBSP is to do a three-fold sub-division of the OBC reservation so that the reservation benefits trickle down to MBCs. The SBSP has stuck to its agenda of pursuing these demands whether in power between 2017 and 2019 in alliance with the BJP or in opposition while allying with the SP. The strategy has shown results in both 2017 and 2019, allowing SBSP to gain benefits through the alliance.

Second, the ideological and strategic contradictions between the SBSP with both the BJP and SP must be bridged at the time the party is in alliance with one of the two. The SBSP does not subscribe to the Hindutva ideology of the BJP, but it chose to compromise in 2017-2019 for electoral success and to allow itself to be a champion of the MBCs. The inability of the BJP to anger a dominant OBCs section- the Kurmis being the primary one- and the failure of SBSP to project itself as the MBCs champion led to the breakup of the alliance. The BJP has adopted the strategy of propping up Rajbhar leader Anil Rajbhar to be the Rajbhar face of the BJP, but the SBSP's influence has remained strong.

A political situation has emerged because of social justice politics where the BJP had to choose between ADS and SBSP. The same difference of subdividing the OBCs can exist for SBSP with the SP too. The subdivision might limit the share of Yadavs in the OBC pie leading to a disadvantage for SP. But because of staying out of power, promising the alternative of moving most MBCs to SCs, and the call for a caste census

had made the SBSP align with the SP. The SP is trying to curb the cleavages in social justice politics, while the SBSP benefits from enhancing the same.

The SBSP is seen to make political calculations to play the long game by being visible in opposition and fighting for the cause of the MBCs. It has made more strategic calculations combining it with social justice where and when necessary. At the time of writing this article, the SBSP has left the alliance with SP and joined the alliance with BJP, without leaving its demand for a caste census.

NISHAD: The NISHAD party chief Sanjay Nishad- a previous BAMCEF (All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation) member- has had to change his strategy making compromises on the ideological front. NISHAD party has tried to build a voter base by uniting the fishermen's community sub-castes. Like SBSP, it wants to build a larger coalition with other MBCs and Dalits, by pitching itself against the Manuvaad (Singh, 2018). NISHAD party's demand for social justice is based on the demand for SC status for the fisherman community. The NISHAD party had an alliance with SP for a brief period in 2018 and has been the alliance partner of BJP since the 2019 General Election. An analysis needs to be made of why the NISHAD party has chosen to stay in government and ride the BJP wave, a complete reversal from its previous stance on BJP and its politics.

First, during its time with the SP, the NISHAD party launched sharp attacks on the BJP ideology of being against the OBCs and demanded the status of SCs (Gupta, 2017). However, after the alliance, it has softened its stand and cites procedural difficulties in obtaining the SC status (Interview of Dr. Sanjay Nishad, Lallantop, 2022). It has not been as adamant as Om Prakash Rajbhar for the SC status. It has supported the rhetoric of the BJP related to *madrassas* and the Hindi language, taking a contradictory stance to what they had in the past. The NISHAD party has calculated that they should be on the side of the mood of the majority. It calculates that its voter base of Mallah/Kewat/Nishad will not shift even if it allies with the BJP. NISHAD party won 6 seats in the 2022 Vidhan Sabha election, projecting that the alliance has borne fruit for the NISHAD party.

Second, CSDS data has shown that the vote share of the BJP has reduced only in the fishermen community (Beg et. al, 2022). But it has only reduced from 74 to 63 percent, showing that the fishermen's community vote got divided in the 2022 elections. The rhetoric for social justice has been visibly decreased by the NISHAD party which seems to have impacted the Mallah/Kewat/Nishad vote going to the NISHAD party. The social coalition knitted by the BJP did not do well in the Purvanchal region, allowing the SP-SPSP alliance a mini-victory in the region.

Third, the Mallah/Kewat/Nishad is particularly a traditional occupation-based caste centering around rivers. NISHAD party chief Sanjay Nishad is a cabinet minister in the BJP government in UP. He is the Minister of Fisheries which is directly related to his caste and voter base. The NISHAD party thinks they can influence the vote by employing other social welfare policies that are directly related to the occupation caste. Parties like SBSP do not have that option when in government. Still, the dissatisfaction related to no progress on the SC status has come up time and again.

The NISHAD party has receded in the aspect of demand for social justice. It must be seen how it plans its future strategies and works for the cause of social justice within its alliance limitations.

Understanding the Politics of Social Justice

The politics of the policies involving social justice dominate the discourse on social justice. Among the policies, the policy of reservation- despite its limited impact- dominates the discourse on policies for social justice. This section will theoretically analyse the rise of single-caste-based parties and their relationship with the politics of social justice. The social justice framework given by Nancy Fraser (2010)- though it needs to be tweaked in the case of caste-based affirmative action- will be used to analyse the outlook on representation, recognition, and redistribution.

First, the literature on sociology has a lot of reference to Sankritisation and the effort made by caste groups for mobility. This claim for mobility and higher status is not often fulfilled by the caste assertion. William Rowe (1961) has shown that as early as the 1960s Noniya Chauhan mobilised to claim Kshatriya status. Now a single-caste-based party Janvadi Party (Socialist) under the leadership of Sanjay Chauhan has emerged claiming to be the representative of Noniya Chauhans in Purvanchal. These two contradictory claims of a higher status and backwardness should not be seen as incompatible. In a similar strain of claim, the Yadavs who claim to descend from Lord Krishna have successfully maintained their claim for backwardness (Michelutti, 2008). The SBSP claims the legacy of King Suhaldeev, this process of ethnicisation should not be seen as separate from Sanskritisation. It must be clear from the discussion that the claim for a backward or a more backward status in no way disrupts the process of Sanskritisation. On the contrary, Alexander Mark Lee (2020: 27) views the tussle to be declared as backward (or more backward) as Indian caste society being transformed into unranked ethnicities. From a social justice framework, a backward status does not downgrade the community's position. Instead, it raises the status of the community by legally demanding its rights while simultaneously moving up the social ladder.

Second, the concept of graded hierarchy in the caste system becomes very prominent when we look at the politics of Uttar Pradesh. The attempt made to simplify and club the hierarchy of the caste system into forward castes, backward castes, and scheduled castes does not hold when we look at the actual social behaviour (Gupta, 2019). This differentiation has come out prominently in the politics and social composition in Uttar Pradesh as seen from the cleavages in the OBC and the SC votes and within the OBCs and SCs. Previously, only the divide between OBCs and SCs was prominent, as SCs were discriminated against by OBCs. Now, the cleavages with OBCs and the SCs have come to the forefront. Hence, no matter how hard SP and BSP tried to include the Bahujan Samaj and unite the lower castes, the differentiation always remained prominent as the boundaries had not been bridged in the social setup.

This differentiation now holds even within the OBCs and the SCs. This differentiation came out as early as 2002 in the Samajik Nyay Samiti under the leadership of Hukum Singh. The Committee recommended a two-fold division of reservation for SCs and a three-fold division of reservation for OBCs. The three-fold division of OBCs has been reiterated- though with a different composition- by Justice Raghavendra Kumar's committee in 2018 (Rashid, 2021). The rise of the single-caste-based party is also a sign of demand for the recognition that they have been deprived of in the leadership of Yadavs and Jatavs in the SP and BSP respectively. Nancy Fraser's theory neglects the graded structure of status inequality. The social justice framework fails to deliver when the different grades look to transcend their status, without challenging the

structure itself. It results in the continued demands for subdivision within the administrative categories created by the state. Without the challenge to the structure of the caste system, the demand for subdivision will continue.

Third, previously it has been seen that a party created with a limited vote bank and regional reach is usually pressurised to be merged with a larger party. Om Prakash Rajbhar has mentioned in his interviews that he has resisted many such attempts for a merger with larger parties. He was even ready to fight the election alone and lose but did not agree to a merger. The NISHAD party has chosen to compromise much more when it has allowed its candidates to fight on an SP and BJP ticket. The ability to survive based on a single-caste vote bank depicts the caste assertion done by these single-caste-based parties. The representatives of the same caste leaders in the traditional parties in the words of Om Prakash Rajbhar are 'loaders' instead of 'leaders' (Interview on Lallantop, posted on January 15, 2022).

Therefore, we need to divide the aspect of representation into dependent and independent representation. Dependent representation has been rejected by single-caste-based parties, though it also creates space for the lower castes. It allows traditional parties to not only give tickets to leaders of under-represented castes but also project them as leaders and give them ministerial berths when in power (Hasan, 2011). Independent representation has allowed the parties to bargain from a position of power for the castes in question. Carrying on from the first and second points, it has depicted the rise of consciousness among the small castes that they need to have autonomous representation to achieve their ultimate target of recognition.

Fourth, the rise of single-caste-based parties can be seen as another democratic surge (Yadav, 1999), where the caste who have been in a poorer social and economic position than the Yadavs and the Jatavs, but in a better social and economic position than the remaining non-Yadavs and non-Jatavs are asserting their identity. It can be taken as an example that years of democratisation and implementation of affirmative action policies have allowed redistribution that has started to show their effect. It raises the assertion of whether this democratic surge conforms with the social justice framework presented by Nancy Fraser. This paper disagrees with it as the breaking up of administrative formations into smaller castes and specific caste formations leads to the reification of identity. It means that the caste identities are further solidified, while the goal of social justice politics is to get rid of primordial identities.

Fifth, the politics of social justice has been overshadowed by the Hindutva politics of the BJP which has tried to isolate the Muslims (Trivedi and Singh, 2021). This element of recognition by small caste-based parties has also come in the form of religious identity of which someone like Fraser will not be in favour. Nancy Fraser will be opposed to any kind of reification of identity, especially when it places itself against a minority religious group. The single-caste-based parties do not see the politics of Hindutva in opposition to their politics of social justice. It is learning to the students of Indian politics that Hindutva and social justice politics can co-exist. However, the small-caste-based parties dilute their narrative of social justice in the form of caste census and reservation when they are a BJP ally. Thus, small caste parties ally with the BJP to gain representation to oppose immediately graded hierarchy. However, this alliance exists with contradiction as the BJP does not provide emancipation from the caste structure which is based in the Hindu religion.

Conclusion

The rise of single caste-based parties presents a double-edged sword. On expected lines, as democratisation seeps into society, there will be more assertions by the castes that till now did not have any political influence (Kothari 1970). This paper has shown how these assertions expand the political representation (dependent or independent) to numerically small and marginalised sections of society. Though similarities with Fraser's social justice framework ends here in these assertions. This social justice phenomenon challenges the immediate social hierarchy, a unique response to the unique challenge of a graded hierarchy of the caste system. However, it stops at challenging the hierarchy which is closely related to a religion. Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2023) sees the distribution of government largesse according to the population of castes (big or small) as not addressing real issues. This paper responds that if looked at from a theoretical lens the demands of redistribution or representation are a by-product of the recognition. The Indian context of social justice is completely formulated in the status (for others) and self-esteem (for self) issues as framed by Fraser and Honneth (2003) respectively. Moving beyond an electoral analysis of caste-based politics, the discussion also provides an intellectual starting point for Indian theorisation of social justice which has been lacking till now.

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