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REMAKING OF DALIT IDENTITY AND ITS IMPLICATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

The debate on identity emerges with the question 'who I am and how I am related to the world'. This is a two-way process, it considers both 'how one defines oneself and how others define you. In this sense, identities are always relational. The Dalits in India is dehumanised social category. The literal meaning of the term Dalit is ground down, broken to pieces or crushed. Dalit is a word for community and identity that are in making. Dalits are historically untouchables and are usually known by degrading names such as Chamar, Mahars, Mang and Periyar. These are dehumanised by caste Hindu order. Dalit belongs to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the Indian Constitution. This Paper deals with two major questions, first is the question of diverse identities among Dalits, in other words, their belonging with political identity of Dalit and also their association with other socio-cultural identities such as Hindus, Bahujan, and their particular castes like chamar, Mushahar, Valmiki etc. in North India. The second question deals with the political implication of this diverse identity among Dalits. So how does their identity affect their voting behaviors/ voting patterns, in other words, which identity do they conceive at the time of casting their votes? This paper is divided. two parts, the first part deals with the question of diverse Dalit identity in north India, which will give us a brief description of this question from our fieldwork observation and close interactions where I have asked them about how do they define themselves and how other define them. The second part of this paper is dealing with the implication of electoral politics in diverse Dalit identities. It seeks to understand the relation between their multiple identities and their voting pattern. Is it the case when a Dalit defining them as Hindu is voting to BJP or when he is defining himself as a Dalit is voting to BSP ? Or, is it like when he is even though associating himself as Dalit is voting to BJP while opposing the BSP? Are the majority of Dalits who earlier associated themselves with BSP, did they vote for BJP in recent elections? The chapter explains this question with two different methodologies, firstly I will analyse the qualitative data from fieldwork where I have asked Dalit voters several questions like are they fascinated towards BJP if they voted for BJP then Why. and, are they feeling that traditional Dalit voters of BSP are now shifting towards BJP? I found that Dalits from Jatav Caste are rigid for BSP but other castes of Dalit community voted for BJP. Secondly, I will analyse the secondary election data collected from different sources like the Centre for Developing Study Society (CSDS) and the National Election Survey of India (NES). With this data I will try to understand that, is there any shift in political preferences of Dalit voters, is there any rightward shift of Dalit voters in Uttar Pradesh.

KEYWORDS: Dalit Identity, Voting behaviors, BSP, BJP, Uttar Pradesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is the complex process of defining someone with the questions like- who am I or who are we and who are you or who are they. Individual carries their own defined identity or sometime they carry the identities imposed by significant others. You can define who you are

by comparing yourself with others. define who you are by comparing yourself with others. The boundary is the locus of identity formation. This is the case individually as well as collectively, including ethnic groups and nations. One' own identity can only be completely realised if it is acknowledged by others. As Hegel¹ observes, an individual yearns for acceptance for his/her identity which indicates that she/he is not self-sufficient. The individual defines him/herself but he/she also needs 'significant others' to acknowledge that definition

Through the close discussion and observation in the field, I found that there is a diverse understanding of their own identity among the Dalit community. This multiplicity implies from both sides- from the definition side and the recognition side as well. On the one hand, Dalits are defining their identity in multiple ways such as Dalits, Hindu, Bahujan and with particular caste (defining side). On other hand, other castes (upper caste) do reject their definition of their identity by not recognising and by imposing other identities.

Some of the people are clearly saying that yes, I am a Dalit, and not Hindu because others do not recognise us as Hindu. Some other people were arguing that yes, I am a Hindu categorically and constitutionally but they (upper caste) were not treating us as Hindu. The upper caste also conceives their identity in a very political background. At the time of election 'we' are used as Hindu to serve their purpose. So, the fieldwork observations show that sometimes Dalit are associating themselves with diverse identities such as Hindu, Dalit, Bahujan or any other particular caste, and also sometimes significant other (other castes) recognised their diverse identity according to their socio-political interest. So, it needs to be understood here that how they (Dalits) interact with this contrary and unwanted identity. When someone is defining himself as a Hindu but other is not recognising the same. So how do they encounter their imposed identity in their day-to-day life?

2. FIELD RESEARCH IN UTTAR PRADESH

For this study, I have conducted the fieldwork in four different districts of Uttar Pradesh- Khusinagar

and Mirzapur from the Eastern part of U.P and Muzaffarnagar and Meerut from the Western part. I visited here at least twice or thrice, stayed here for nearly 5-6 months in every district, interacted and conducted in-depth interviews with around 30-35 people each from every district. Despite the individual interaction in forms of deep discussion and in-dept. interview with open-ended questions, I also conducted some focussed group discussions as well. I collected their diverse opinion on different issues such as identity, their assertion against any discrimination, about Bahujan Samaj Party and the current crises it is facing, their views on BJP/RSS activism or strategy to mobilize Dalits on the ground, the coalition among Sawajwadi Party and BhaujanSamaj Party, the emergence of Bhim Army and Chandra Shekhar Ravana was also incorporated. In the field, we participated in local political rallies and meetings of BSP, BJP and Bhim Army as well. Here I got informed about the political strategies, the way of mobilising voters, training of their members and cadres. With the purpose of knowing more and more about their everyday life, I had been spending most of the time around them. Accepting their invitation for lunch and dinner, I tried to immerse ourselves more with their daily living so that I understand their behaviour towards different party politics. I participated in their several festivals and public programmes such as Buddha Purnima, Ambedkar Jayanti and flowering of Ambedkar's statues. To know their inside story and truth it is necessary to win their confidence and make them comfortable, for this language plays an important role. My 'Bhojpuri Mixed Khadi Boli Hindi' speaking skill helped me a lot in the Eastern part of U.P. Ethnographic fieldwork requires some personal skills for a researcher. Patient listening and observation of some important skills among them are important. I was trying to listen to each and every sentence even knowing that it is not directly related to our discussion. Without imposing our own opinion on them our major concern was to know what is their clear take on any issue.

With the above-mentioned process, I found that the people belonging to the Dalit community have a very blur/rough understanding of their identity. There is a group of people saying proudly that yes they are Dalits and not Hindu at all but a few among them say the same thing 'yes we are Dalit' not proudly but feel embraced by saying so. It seems that they are in pain for recognising them as Dalit in contrary to the above who feel proud of being a Dalit. Simultaneously another group of people from the same community

¹Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). *Phenomenology of spirit* (A. V. Miller, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1807)

are claiming themselves proudly as Hindu. They said that we are Hindu constitutionally as well as politically, similarly, a few among them are again saying the same 'yes we are Hindu' but other parts of society do not recognise themselves as Hindu which was painful for them.

So now the real question arises to decode this very identity question that Dalit carries on them as being proud or inferior as a Dalit or as a Hindu. Who are they who is saying proudly that I am a Dalit and on the other hand how to understand them who is saying that I am a Dalit but not proudly? Similarly, how to understand the identification process of that group who are saying 'yes I am a Hindu' on the one hand and the other hand those who are saying same but not proudly. Field research suggests that those who are saying proudly that I am a Dalit are socially very aware and politically very active. The well-educated and young Dalits are saying so. Those who are part of BSP directly or indirectly they are confidently saying that they are Dalits and not Hindu. We found the recent development in the field that the Bhim Army and their organisation are giving confidence to young minds to carry the identity of being a Dalit. For example, respondent from Mirzapur (aged 78) who is well educated and retired from the government engineering office and was primarily associated with BSP and was office holder as well in the party, but now he turned from BSP to Bhim Army and also holds an official position in Bhim Army proudly told us that –

"Hum dalithain aur ye pehchanhamaresangarsh ka pehchanhai, Hum hindunahihai, jab hame koi hindukehtahaitohamegalisalagatahai..."

We are proud Dalits and this identity is proof of our struggle, we are not Hindu at all, whenever anybody tells us Hindu it feels like abuse to us now.

Respondent number 10, Mirzapur

In Kushinagar I met a person who has been running an English medium primary school who told his story that earlier he was used to associating himself as Hindu and made several upper caste friends without revealing his caste identity. He was not intentionally hiding his caste identity but believing that nobody is caring about the caste things at this higher level. But after an incident that happened in Medical College Patna when he was a student, now changed his understanding of identity, now he defined himself as a Dalit.

After his 12th exam, he got admission to MBBS in Medical College Patna where he faced several caste-based discriminations at college hostel, classroom and hospital and finally he was forced to give up his study from there and come back to his town. He decided to fight the caste-based discrimination and burden

associated with Dalit identity. He says that

"Main to khud ko Hindu Samaj ka hissa manta raha aur garv hi kartaraha, lekin college ki ghatna ne mere nazariye ko badal diyahai, ab main khud ko dalitkehatahun. Dalit pehchankesaath kai burden judahuahai, main usne se ek burden 'ashikha' ko dur karne me lagahunisiliye main dalitbachonkeliyeangrezi medium ka school chalatahun."

I always considered myself a part of Hindu identity and even felt proud of it, but the incident of my college life changed my entire views on it, now I proudly associate myself to be a Dalit. There is so much stigma attached to the Dalit identity, and I am trying to finish one such stigma of illiteracy, for this, I have been running and teaching English medium school for the Dalit children.

Respondent No.2, Kushinagar

I visited an Ambedkar Hostel situated in Muzaffarnagar District and met several Dalit students residing there. One of the students (aged 32), pursuing an MSc. Mathematics, belonging to the 'saini' caste narrated his understanding of the Dalit identity. He told me that when he was not associated with this hostel and used to stay at his village, he defined himself as Hindu. When he came to the city and met the hostel mates where he associated himself with Bhim Army people, then he was able to know the politics behind identity. Now he understood the conspiracy of him being called a Hindu which was mainly trying to conspire him against the Muslim community. He also shared that when he goes back to his village and there did not associate him to Hindu identity then he is being labelled as a radical casteist by fellow villagers. He says:

"Kuch log kuch vishesh hit se hame hindu banane ki koshish karte hai, main samajhta hun ki unka hit kya hai- 'muslim kaum ka virood karna'. Ab main khud ko dalit manta hunaur jab gaon jata hun to hj aati bhed bhau ke khilaaf awaaz bhi uthata hun."

Some people have a special interest in associating us with the Hindu identity; I can totally understand their intention which is to 'fight with the Muslim community'. Now I proudly call myself a Dalit and whenever I visit the native village, I used to oppose the discrimination based on caste.

Respondent No.3, Muzaffarnagar

In the same district (Muzaffarnagar) I participated in a focused group discussion (respondent 7, Muzaffarnagar) consisting of 15 farmer labourers with an average age of 45 years. They were uneducated poor who also did not know larger political awareness; they shared, with me, their personal feelings and experiences of daily life regarding the identity question. They said that when we are with our people we feel to share our Dalit identity, but then this confidence goes away when we interact with upper caste people. They ask us to vote

for the Hindu party and tell us that we all are Hindu at the time of election. We understand their hidden agenda over voting politics, thus at the booth, we vote for our party only with our consciousness. These are the people who believed that the upper caste is the upper caste who can be never helpful to us. Behen Ji (Mayawati) is not ready to understand this thing. This is the main reason why BSP is losing election by-election. When Behen Ji was in power, the 'Brahmins' hold the top party positions and was appointed as ministers, with this they had been using us and fulfilling their personal interest whatever they can. Now they are abusing us and shifted towards BJP. The upper caste has created propaganda that Dalits are deserting the BSP and are moving towards other parties, but the reality is that the Brahmins and Other Backward Castes are shifting towards BJP.

There is a 'Kumar hostel' in Meerut, several Dalit students and scholars stayed here. One of the scholars (aged 30) pursuing his MPhil degree in Sociology from some university of Meerut interacted with us. Economically he was a poor guy and managed to earn some money by giving a home to home tuition. He was well politically aware and very fascinated towards the way Bhim Army has been reaching the ground. Although he was very critical to BSP at the same time he felt the need for a broader collaboration among the BSP, The Bhim Army and other Dalit Organisations for the revival of Dalit Politics from the ground. On the identity question first, he says in a satirical way that 'yes I am Hindu but only till when we are required to fight the Muslim community and build a temple'. He said that we are never considered as Hindu but we are proudly Dalit. For them we are Dalits who can't build houses higher to them, cannot enter the temple, but the reality is that the Dalits has been changed. We can build the big house first and we are rejecting and not going to their temple. He said:

"Haan hum hindu hain lekin tabhi tak jab musalmano ke khilaaf khada hona ho, ya phir unke mandir banana ki ladai ladni ho. Mandir ban jaye toh ham achhut hai, mandir me nahi jaasakte, unke liye hum wo dali thai jo unse bada ghar bhi nahi bana sakte. Lekin sachai ye haiki ab dalit badal chuka hai aur ab bada ghar bhi bana sakta hai aur unke mandiron ki jarurat bhi nahi hai."

Respondent 12, Meerut

Similarly, a respondent from the same district (Meerut, aged 63), retired from Bank Office. He worked with Kanshiram and his BAMCEF and after that BSP as well. He told us about how they are trying to create a counter-narrative of Hindutva and mobilising Dalit people with the same Dalit identity. When we rejected to go to the Hindu temple then our people search for a place where they can pray or gather. So that is why now we have built our own

Ravidasi Mandir. Now we are in a position to reject their definition of identity because whenever they define us as a Hindu or Dalit there is 'bhed-bhau' (discrimination) in their definition. He says:

"Hum unkiparibhasa par nahijaatekyuki wo hame hindu kahe ya dalit dono jagah bhed bhau karte hai. Hum dalit hain, hamara dalit ka paribhasa unke dalit ke paribhasa se alaghai".

We do not go with their definition of identity, because either they will call us Hindu or Dalit, there is a sense of discrimination always in it. We are Dalit and our definition of identity is different from their definition of identity.

Respondent No.13, Meerut

Similarly, a respondent from Khusinagar (aged 30) defined himself clearly as a Dalit and rejected the Hindu identity, he is saying that

"Main to dalit hun aur hindu kattai nahi hun, aap bhi jante hai ki hindu ka matlab kewal do jatiyan hai - Brahmin aur Rajput, iske andar ka khel muzhe pata hai."

I am a Dalit, not Hindu at all; you also know that Hindu only means two castes i.e. Brahmin and Rajput; I know the hidden agenda behind Hindu politics.

Respondent Number 10, Kushinagar.

These are the young and politically aware people who are defining their identity by own self and rejecting the other imposed identity for them. They are not caring about the recognition part of identity, in other words, they proudly stand with their way of identification and do not look for recognition from others. They are also in a position to reject and dismantle the burden and stigma associated with their Dalit identity. The emergence of the Bhim Army and their socio-political activism has given confidence and voice to the young Dalits to proudly associate them with this identity. This is also the new generation who has risen a bit with the constitutional provision of affirmative action policies and are questioning the wrong practices or discrimination that was always burdened on them.

How to decode the people who are saying that we are Dalit but not proudly? It seems that for them the identity of Dalit is associated with the same traditionally imposed burden and inferiority. Field observation suggests that either they are uneducated old age people or are politically unaware poor Dalits. They are mostly labour class people working at the houses or fields of upper-caste with the same traditionally inferior caste mindset of themselves. These people don't carry their own independent political opinion and are still considering themselves inferior to the high caste people. Somewhere we observed that those Dalits who are directly or indirectly associated with BJP and RSS are considering

themselves primarily as Dalit, but they do not disassociate themselves clearly from Hindu identity. Either they are carrying both identities or defining themselves as Dalit or feeling inferior for not being recognised as Hindu.

Mr B L (named changed, aged 70) is unskilled labour from Mirzapur. Once in the morning, I have reached his home. He was ready and about to leave for his work place, when I requested to talk with him he accepted my request and discussed with me in a very formal way for half an hour. Almost he answered every question that we asked him. When we started talking about his identity question first he replied 'yes I am a Dalit, not Hindu at all but you know I am not a Muslim as well'. When I requested to elaborate it more then he told "*sir sham ko mere gharkhane pe aayengekya, agar aapaayein to main aapkoaurbhi bahut kuchhbatayunga*". (Sir, will you come to my house in the evening for food if you come then I will share many other things). I accepted his invitation and went for dinner. He told us that he falls in the Hindu category constitutionally and socially, he is not a Muslim. He expressed his pain for not getting recognition and respect as a Hindu. He shared his story that is like this:

"Abhi kuch din pehle main apne bazaar mein baal katwane ke liye gaya tha, wahan babu sahib² log bhi baal banana ke liye bhi aate hai, unhi logon ke dawab mei nnai ne mere baal katne se mana kar diya kyuki main chamar hun. Hum chahte hai ki hame Hindu ki tarah samman mile kyuki hum Musalmaan to nahi hai na, Hamare hindu log hi to hame chamar aur dalit bana ke rakhte hai".

Some days back I went to my village market to get my hair cut, at the shop those of high caste people also come for their service, because of their pressure the barber refused to cut my hair saying that I belong to Chamar caste. We want to be respected as Hindu only because ultimately we are not Muslims. But our Hindu people are only dividing us as chamar or Dalits.

Respondent No. 8, Meerut

Mr Gautam (name changed, aged 38), is a Madarasa Teacher in Kushinagar. He belongs to the Chamar caste. For him, the question of identity is 'very complex'. He feels very restless in defining himself. He wanted to be considered as Hindu but the society primarily recognises him as Dalit so he told us that he is a Dalit but not very confidently because nobody recognises him as Hindu at all. For his economic need, he started teaching in Madarasa where he is interacting with several Islamic religious practices such as prayers and greeting to others etc. He told us that in their day to day life he and his family members are used to following the Hindu norms. He says

"Sir meri pehchankyahaiaap khud hi taykarlijiye, main ghar me hotahuntoh khud ko dil se hindusamajtahun, Hindu manyatayon ko manta hun aur usitarah se Jeevan jeetahun, lekin. Ghar ke bahar nikalta hunt tohindunahi reh jatahun. Hamare hi samaj ke log muzhe Dalit/ Chamar/ Achhutbanadetehai. Aarthik majboori me main Madarsa me padhanejatahunjahanroz ek alagparampara se rubarootahun. Aise me kuch log muzhe aur bhigalatnazron se dekhtehai".

Sir who am I to decide my identity, when I am at home I believe myself to be a Hindu and follow the customs of the Hindu religion and try to live according to that. But when I am out of my house, then I am not considered as Hindu. It is our people only who tells us as Chamar/Dalit or Achhut. It is because of economic crises that I have to teach at Madaras, and where I interact with different religious practices every day. Due to this also people look at me with other suspicious views.

Respondent no 14, Kushinagar

Mr Paswan (name changed, aged 50years) belongs to the Pasi caste from Khusinagar District. He is a district head of Hindu YuwaYahini of 'PasiSamaj Wing'. Hindu Vahini is a socio-cultural organisation founded by current Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Mr Paswan believed in the traditional structure of caste Hindu society and say that there is no issue if he is offering his chair to the upper caste and does not feel inferior to sit down of him because they are upper caste and upper caste is an upper caste. In contrary to Mr Gautam (our previous respondent) who is very clear about his identity and says:

"Humlog Dalit hai yeh sachaihai, Dalit nihotetohjis pad pe hai ye pad nahimilta. Hum Hindu bhihaitabhitoh hum Hindu Wahinimeinhain. Uch Neechtohhar samaj me hotahai, sab barabarkaise ho sktehai."

We are Dalit and this is the reality. If I was not Dalit then I would have not been offered this position. Also, we are Hindu and that is why I am with Hindu YuvaWahini. The differences of upper and lower strata are there in every society, everybody cannot become equals.

Respondent No. 5, Kushinagar

Now we are trying to understand those Dalits who are saying proudly that they are Hindu first. Who these people are defining them as Hindu, not as Dalit? The fieldwork observations suggest that primarily these people are directly or indirectly associate themselves with any organisation of RSS or BJP. They are active in taking part in any functions organised by RSS and BJP. It also seems that they are not very aware of the history and politics of Dalit Movements and are influenced by the politics of Hindutva led by RSS and

² This term is used for upper caste in north India

BJP. We also observed that they are uneducated poor people who got some direct personal benefits from these organisations. Somewhere we found that few of them are very prejudiced about the Muslim community. They are defining their identity in a very relative term like they are Hindu because they are not Muslims, and they are Hindu because they have to fight for the protection against their Hindu enemy (Muslim).

Mr Valmiki (named changed, aged 55) is belonging to Valmiki Caste from Meerut District. He is well aware of the current political development in Uttar Pradesh. He uses to read newspapers and watch television every day. He joined the BJP from 2013 onwards. He does have a clear opinion on several issues like SP-BSP Coalition which according to him was 'for defeating Modi'. For him, Bhim Army is doing well but they are creating casteism all over the country which is not good. They are going to replace Mayawati or BSP soon. When we tried to discuss with him some basic story of Dalit identity politics, Kanshiram and B.R Ambedkar, we found that he was very unaware of it. On identity question, he believed that the Dalit identity cannot accommodate/bound all SC/ST communities in one can. He is a Hindu who is fiercely ready for the protection of the Hindu religion. He says:

"Main Hindu hun ye baat main garv se kehtahun. Hamari party jati-wati ko dhyaannahideti. Dekhiye Kuldeep Sengar ko khud Sarkar ne hi jail me daala. Party jati ko bachatitoh Hathras mamle par inti kadi karwainahihoti."

I am a Hindu and I feel proud of it. My party (BJP) does not believe in caste. Look in the case of Kuldeep Sengar, it was the party who has sent him to jail. If the party would have looked for benefiting the caste him then the Hathras Case would not have been dealt with very strongly.

Respondent No. 14, Meerut

In the same district, we met with a respondent (aged 55 years) who is also associated with RSS and is holding an office position 'GATH NAYAK'. Socially he belongs from Chamar Caste but who changed his surname 'BALYAN' as his leader belongs to Balyan Group, who also holds an office position above him within the organisation. He defines his identity in a very relative term as he told us that he is a Hindu and always stands against Muslims. He says:

"Sir meri pehchan Hindu hai aur main garv se kehtahunki main Hindu hun aur main Musalmaanokesaktkhilaafhun, wohhamareapnenahihai. Pehle main kuch BSP ke logon kesaathkaamkartathalekinwoh khud hi Musalman ko ticket dene lagin. RSS ke log hamari bahut madadkartehai."

Sir my identity is Hindu and I can proudly say that

I am a Hindu and am against the Muslim Community altogether. Muslims are not our people. Initially, I used to work with the people of BSP, but they started giving tickets to Muslims at large. The RSS people help us a lot.

Respondent No. 35, Meerut

I met with a senior retired doctor who is well reputed in both Hindu and Muslim communities and asked him that why people are very communally charged up here. What are the reasons behind the deep communal polarisation and hatred among these communities? He explained to us that after the communal riots that took place in 2013 in Muzaffarnagar, the traditional socio-communal fabric has broken down. The RSS and BJP's intervention and current Yogi regime have been contributing tools in that. Before that people from both communities were defining themselves as Kisan (Farmer). Now that Kisan is divided into two-fold – Hindu Kisan and Muslim Kisan and they have lost their common identity as Kisan. His argument was proved right with our personal experience when we met owners of a Sugarcane Mill which was jointly owned by Hindu and Muslim both.

In the Mirzapur district, I discussed with a respondent (aged 45 years) who belongs from Chamar Caste. He is a 'folk singer' and used to sing 'Ramcharitramanas' and other spiritual songs and folk with his other team members. People specially from so-called upper-caste Hindu generally organise such spiritual programmes during 'SAWAN month, DUSSEHRA, and any other occasion such as INAUGURATION OF NEW HOUSE or MARRIAGE etc. They do invite such a team for singing spiritual songs. About his identity question this man is very clear and saying that he is a proud Hindu, he says:

"Main Hindu hun aur Hindu parampara ko puri tarah manta hu. Roz Pooja kartahun aur jagahjagah Pooja path karne bhi jaata hun. Jabkabhi Hindu samaj pe khatra hoga toh uski Raksha ke liye jarura age aayunga".

I am a Hindu and believe in Hindu customs throughout. I use to pray every day and also visit different places to offer prayer based on Hindu culture. Whenever there will be a danger to the Hindu Religion then I will surely come to protect it.

Respondent No. 17, Mirzapur

Mr Prasad (name changed, aged 25) is daily wage labour from Khusinagar District. He belongs from Mushahar Caste and is an active member of Hindu YuwaYahini. He is neither very politically aware nor well educated and is a very strong supporter of Yogi Adityanath. He defines himself as a Hindu and was rejecting any other political identity of Dalit. He always counts Muslims as others in process of

defining his own identity. He says:

"Main dalit walit kuch nahi janta aur bas itna janta hun ki ek Hindu hun aur maharaj ji (yogi Adityanath) hamare bhagwaan hai. Unke aadesh pe hum kuch bhi kar sakte hai. Jabse maharaj ji CM bane hai dekhiye ye log (Muslim) bahut control me hai."

I don't know anything like Dalit or non-Dalit, I just know that I am a Hindu and Maharaj Ji (Yogi Adityanath) is a God to me. I can do anything on his order. Till when he has become CM, then those people (Muslims) are living in control.

Respondent No. 1, Kushinagar

Similarly, I met with several respondents who belong to different castes such as Mushar, Khatik, Mahar, Chamar etc. Most of them are associated with Hindu YuwaYahini and define themselves as Hindu. In Khusinagar and other neighbouring districts, Yogi Adityanath and his Hindu YuwaWahini are very popular. Illiterate young Dalits are very fascinated towards this organisation because somewhere they are getting protection and personal interest from this organisation.

There are few people who defined themselves as Hindu but not proudly. They have a kind of similar pain for not getting equal respect and recognition as upper-caste Hindus are getting. They are very close to those people who are defining themselves as Dalit but not proudly in a way that they both want to get equal respect and dignity as Hindu. On the one hand, the first group are ready to reject the Hindu identity in the response that others (upper caste) are not ready to recognise them as Hindu and on the other hand the latter group don't have such confidence to reject the Hindu identity altogether. Still, they are hoping for social change and are somehow satisfied with procedural social change such as de-ritualization of caste, constitutionally prohibition of the traditional practice of untouchability and emergence of new right approach etc. So, how to decode such people who are defining themselves as Dalit but not getting due respect from others? It creates a kind of ambiguity among them. Through the fieldwork observation, we found that these are the people who are defining themselves as Hindu during formal conversation and in the public domain but when we discussed informally and observed their everyday life, we found that somewhere on the line they expressed their pain and anger for not getting equal respect and dignity in Hindu social order. As they are facing discrimination and exploitation in several ways more or less they believe that Dalit is a stigmatized category.

Mr Prasad (name changed. aged 66) is a retired clerk from Revenue Department from Kushinagar. He belongs to the Khatik caste and his favourite leader is

Yogi Adityanath. He believes that CM Yogi is working well for Dalit and marginalised castes. He identifies himself as Hindu by saying that formally and socially he falls in Hindu Category. But at the end of our conversation, he rebels that in his office days he had been facing several discriminatory behaviours by the upper caste fellow. Even nowadays some discriminatory practices are continuing. This is the biggest negativity in our Hindu society and it should be stopped as soon as possible. He says:

"Hum toh hindu hi hai – aap hindu keh sakte hai. Ab toh bahut sudhar huahai, log samman bhi karne lage hai to acha lagta hai. Un dinon hamne khodbedh-bhav ,gaali aur soshan jhele hai. Thoda bahut abhi bhi hai, is baat ka dil me bahut chot pahunchta hai. Bhed -bhau hamare Hindu samaj ke sabse badi burai hai .Lekin ab samaj ko chor ke jayenge kahan".

We are Hindu only and you can say so. Now there have been lots of improvements, people have started giving respect, so it feels good now. But back in my office days, I have myself faced a lot of discrimination, was been abused on caste lines. Today, although the discrimination is less, it is continuing. This feels bad. Caste-based discrimination is the biggest evil in our Hindu society. But sadly, we also cannot leave this society.

Respondent No. 22, Kushinagar

MrCharathawal (name changed, aged 32) is pursuing his D. Pharma degree course from a private medical college in Meerut. He belongs to the Chamar caste and is very critical of BSP and BJP both. He thinks that the BJP government is about to kill our constitutional rights of reservation, especially in Higher education. He also believes that BSP has moved away from its primary goal of Dalit emancipation. Related to them (BSP people), Bhim Army is doing wonderful for Dalit interests. On identity question, he believes that he is a Hindu and he does have the eagerness to be recognised as Hindu. He says:

"Hum Hindu hain aur Hindu ke roop me jaane jaye, aise hamari chahat bhi hai. Lekin dukh hai ki hum SC/ST ke log hamesa apni jati se jane- pehchane jate hai. Aise me hame apni Chamar pehchan ko dhona padta hai. Sarkari forms me hum Hindu aur Chamar dono likhte hai".

I am a Hindu and wish to be known by that Identity. But the sad reality is that we people of the SC/ST community are always known by their caste only. In this, we are bound to carry the burden of caste (chamar) identity. Even while filling of government forms, we have to write both Hindu and Chamar identities together.

Respondent No.15, Meerut

Despite the above categorisation of people on identity question as I have categorized in four broader categories according to their understanding about

identity to which they belong, we found that it is not so simple to categorise people in such category with their identity. We met several other people in the field who could not be categorised in such away. They have a very different understanding of the question of Identity. Either they have questioned over this broader category of identities such as Hindu, Dalit, Bahujan etc. or they are defining themselves in a very different way. For e.g.

Dr Lal (name changed, aged 55 years) is running a small hospital in the Muzaffarnagar district. He does have deep knowledge about socio-cultural struggle and the movement of Dalit identity politics. Currently, he is an active member of BAMCEF led by Vaman Meshram. Dr Lal thinks that Dalit identity is being defined narrowly and shrinkages down and denotes only chamar caste. That's why he is not ready to define himself as Dalit. He says:

"Darshal Dalit pehchan ab kewal chamar jati se judke reh gya hai toh acha hoga ki aap Dalit kewajayeh SC kahen. Bahujan sabdh nichle tabke me bahut prachalit nahi ho paya hai. Yeh baat sahi hai ki varna veveshtha me 85% jansankhya Shudra hai, lekin ye log aisa manane ko Tayyar nahi hai".

Dalit identity is only associated with the chamar caste so better to say SC rather than Dalit. Even the Bahujan term is not very popularised among the marginalised community. In the Varna system, most of the 85% population is shudra but they are not willing to accept this category.

Respondent No. 1, Mirzapur

3. THE IMPLICATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS IN U.P

In the above first section, we dealt with the identity question of Dalits. As we observed the political identity of Dalit does not popularise in all the sections of Dalit society, in the same way, there are multiple notions of identity among them. The significant 'others' (non-Dalit) section of society is also defining and recognising them (Dalit) in a very diverse way. In other words, not only do the Dalits are defining themselves in very multiple ways but also significant others are seeking their identity in multiple manners. Keeping this above discussion in mind here the second section seeks to understand the political implication of it especially in electoral politics. How these people with their multiple identities have been casting their votes is a big question. It tries to understand the voting behaviour and voting pattern of Dalits. To which parties and leaders they like more. Have they voted for BJP and Modi in the past few elections? Is it the case that the traditional voters of BSP among Dalit have voted for BJP? In other words, is there any rightward

shift of Dalit people? In the process of addressing these questions, we are going to understand and analyse the massive victory of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh in 2014 General Elections. How far do Dalit voters contribute to it?

The 16th Lok Sabha Elections (LS) results were significant for several reasons. It gave the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) a massive mandate and a clear majority for the first time to govern the country. BJP won 282 Seats in Lok Sabha and secured 31.1 % of the votes. It added 12.3 % vote and 166 seats to its performance in the 2009 election. The allies of BJP on their part added another 7.2% of votes, contributing 54 Seats taking the final tally of NDA to 336 seats in a House with a maximum strength of 543. Notable partners of BJP included the Shiv Sena and a few smaller groups in Maharashtra, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andra Pradesh, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP) in Bihar, Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab and Apna Dal in Uttar Pradesh. BJP strongly consolidated its domination in the northern, central and western parts of the country. More than three-fourth of its total tally of 282 Parliamentary seats came from these three regions.

The 2014 outcome resulted in a severe setback for the oldest political party of India, i.e. The Congress Party. Party was reduced to its lowest tally of 44 seats receiving only 19.3 % of the vote cast. It suffered an erosion of 9.3 % of the vote and a loss of 162 seats over the 2009 election outcome. Similarly, Communist Parties went below 5% (4.83%) and their seat strength was reduced to 12 from 24 in the 2009 Elections. Only a few state-based political parties that showed enough resiliency to check the BJP were Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha, The All-Indian Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, The Telangana Rashtriya Samiti (TRS) in Telangana and to some extent newly formed Aam Admi Party (AAP) in Punjab.

This election introduced a significant shift in Uttar Pradesh (U.P), a key state that reflects the sweeping political change in the country. BJP won a spectacular victory in the region of the state, reducing the Congress and Samajwadi Party. It also penetrated deep into the backward and Dalit base of two well established and strong identity-based parties - The Samajwadi Party and The Bahujan Samaj Party. The BJP emerged out winning with a massive victory in UP with 71 of total 80 seats. Other parties performed very poorly in U.P. The only parties to win seats were the Samajwadi Party with 5 seats (all went to the members of Mulayam Singh Yadav's Family), and Congress that managed to win only Rai Bareilly and

Amethi, represented by Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi respectively. Mayawati's BSP drew a blank.

Table 1A and B shows all the detailed result of Uttar Pradesh.

Table 1a: 2014 Lock Sabha Election Result in UP

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seat Changing from 2009	Vote %	Vote Change from 2009 (%)
UPA	78	2	-24	8.4	-13.3
Congress	67	2	-19	7.4	-10.8
RLD	8	0	-5	0.5	-2.4
NDA	80	73	+63	43.3	+24.9
BJP	78	71	+61	42.3	+24.8
Apna Dal	2	2	+2	1.0	+0.2
SP	78	5	-18	22.2	-1.1
BSP	80	0	-20	19.6	-7.1

Sources: ECI data compiled by CSDS data unit and published in Palshikar and others 2017

Table 1b: 2019 Lock Sabha Election Result in UP

Party	Seats	Vote %
BJP	62	50
BSP	10	19.4
SP	5	18.1
AD	2	1.2
INC	1	6.4

Sources: ECI data compiled by CSDS data unit

The magnitude of the victory of the BJP was very surprising. Notably, the party has been in decline in U.P since the mid-1990s after the Babri

Masjid Issue, lost importance following its destruction. As Table 2 shows its seats in Parliament dropped from 57 in 1996 to 29 in 1999 and 10 in the 2009 Lok Sabha Election. In 2012 U.P Assembly Election, the party has won only 47 seats (with barely 15% of total votes polled) and was forced to forfeit deposits in 229 seats. In contrast in 2014 election, the BJP obtained 71 seats with 42.3% of the votes and its ally Apna Dal (AD) won 2 seats in Eastern U.P as Table 1 shows.

Table 2: Position of Parties in the Lok Sabha Elections in UP since 1991

Name of the party	2009	2004	1999	1998	1996	1991
	Won (Contested) Vote %	Won (Contested) Vote %	Won (Contested) Vote %	Won (Contested) Vote %	Won (Contested) Vote %	Won (Contested) Vote %
BSP	20 (80) --	19 (80) 24.67	14 (85) 22.08	4 (85) 20.9	6 (85) 20.61	1 (67) 8.7
BJP	10 (71) --	10 (77) 22.17	29 (77) 27.64	57 (82) 36.49	52 (83) 33.44	51 (84) 32.82
INC	21 (69) --	9 (73) 12.04	10 (76) 14.72	--	5 (85) 8.14	5 (80) 18.02
SP	23 (75) 23.25	35 (68) 26.74	26 (84) 24.06	20 (81) 28.7	16 (64) 20.84	JD 22 (73) 21.27

Sources: Election commission of India in published in Rehman 2018

The landslide victory of BJP and Modi have been analysed in different ways in scholarly studies. Some posit that it was voters' anger with incumbent governments, the terrible economic situations and voters' desire for strong leaders (Sardesai 2015). Harish Khare suggested that it happened because of a desire for change by a new middle class subscribing to aggressive nationalism (Khare, 2014). Declining voters' interest in caste and their rising aspiration for development as A.K Verma wrote (Verma 2014), the BJP's success in building cross-caste coalitions hinged on coherence and development (Vaishnav 2015). They all may partially explain the BJP/Modi's unprecedented victory, primarily at the national level. Sudha Pai (Pai and Kumar 2015) explained the

real reasons for the BJP's massive win in U.P, for her the revival of its organizational structure and the social base is the fundamental reasons. A.K Verma, Beg and others explained the broader questions that why did the BJP, a party that was in consistent and steady declined since 1990, suddenly rediscover itself and make a robust rainbow coalition to its own and everyone else's surprise, what happened that brought almost a clean sweep for the BJP in U.P. (Verma, Beg and others 2017). Despite the above, all debate one thing is very clear that BJP was able to gain the votes from all sections of society. As data shows (Table 3) that voters from across their caste and class identity, across their religion and regional identity, voted for BJP in UP. Our focus here is to

discuss whether Dalit voters, traditionally who voted for BSP, have voted for BJP in large numbers in UP?

Have they voted for BJP by deserting BSP? If they do what are the socio-political reasons behind it?

Table 3: Party Vote Share in UP, by Socio-Economic Variables (%) 2014 Election

	INC+	BJP+	SP	BSP
Education				
Non literate	6	34	29	25
Up to primary	11	39	22	24
Up to matriculation	10	45	18	22
College and above	8	51	13	19
Locality				
Rural	8	41	21	23
Semi Urban	9	49	17	21
Urban	20	55	14	7
Caste and Community				
Brahmin	11	72	5	5
Rajput	7	77	5	8
Vaishya	13	71	4	10
Other upper caste	3	79	2	8
Jat	13	77	6	4
Yadav	8	27	3	53
Kurmikoeri	16	53	4	17
Other OBC	8	61	11	13
Jatav	2	18	68	4
Other SC	4	45	30	11
Muslim	11	10	18	58
Others	10	51	20	17
Class				
Poor	6	31	33	25
Lower	8	46	19	22
Middle	10	41	19	23
Rich	9	51	12	20
Age group				
18-22 yrs	8	51	16	22
23-35 yrs	8	44	21	22
36-55 yrs	9	42	19	22
56 - above	8	41	20	22

Sources: CSDS data unit- NES 2014 and published in Palshikar and others 2017

Data shows (Table 4) that Dalits have voted for BJP in large numbers in General Election 2014. Since 2007-2012 BJP never touched the double-digit vote percentage of Dalit vote share. In 2007 13% of Dalit voters voted for BJP within that only 2% of Jatav have voted for BJP and 11% Non-Jatav Dalit voted. These figures are more or the less same in Lok Sabha Election 2009 where BJP gained 12% (4% Jatav and 8% Non-Jatav Dalit) Dalit votes and also in 2012 State Assembly Election where 13% (5% Jatav and 8% Non-Jatav) Dalits have voted for BJP. The vote share of Dalit voters suddenly jumps towards BJP during 2014 General Election. BJP gained a 63% (18% Jatav and 45% Non-Jatav) Dalit vote, which is near about +51%

vote shrink from 2009. This is a huge number. Now the question emerged that where they are coming from. In other words, earlier to whom they used to cast their vote. It is very clear that they are traditional voters of BSP. Data shows that since 2007-2012 they voted for BSP in a huge number. In 2007 BSP gained 85% vote of Jatav Caste and 56% votes of non-Jatav Dalits. Similarly in 2009, 84% Jatav and 62% non-Jatav Dalit and in 2012 65% Jatav and 48% non-Jatav voted for BSP. The 2014 General Election shows the drastic decrease of Dalit support to BSP. BSP gained only 68% Jatav votes and 29% non-Jatav Dalit votes which reported 16% less of Jatav and 39% less of non-Jatav Dalit voters over 2009 General election.

Table 4a: Dalit Vote Shear (in %) to different Parties in Various Elections

Party	Caste	Election Years 2007	Election Years 2009	Election Years 2012	Election Years 2014	Election Years 2019
BJP	Jatav	2%	4%	5%	18%	17%
	Non Jatav	11%	8%	8%	45%	48%
Congress	Jatav	2%	4%	6% (+ RLD)	2%	1%
	Non Jatav	5%	16%	15%	4%	7%
BSP	Jatav	85%	84%	65%	68%	75% (+SP)
	Non Jatav	56%	64%	48%	29%	42% (+SP)
SP	Jatav					
	Non-Jatav					

Sources: Compiled from the data CSDS

Table 4b: Support to Various Political Parties across Jatav and Non-Jatav Dalits in 2014 Elections

Castes	Congress +RLD		BJP+AD		BSP		SP	
	2014	Swing from 2009	2014	Swing from 2009	2014	Swing from 2009	2014	Swing from 2009
Jatavs	2%	-2%	18%	+14%	68%	-16%	4%	-1%
Other Dalits	4%	-12%	45%	+37%	29%	-35%	10%	0

Sources: NES 2014 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS (Verma, Beg, Kumar -2014)

Table 4c: Support to Various Political Parties across Jatav and Non-Jatav Dalits in 2019 Elections

Castes	Congress		BJP+AD		BSP+SP	
	2019	Swing from 2014	2019	Swing from 2014	2019	Swing from 2014
Jatavs	1 %	-1 %	17 %	-1 %	75 %	+7 %
Other Dalits	7 %	-3 %	48 %	+3 %	42 %	+13 %

Sources: Compiled from the data of CSDS

4. CONCLUSION

Primary observation suggests that yes BSP has lost their Dalit vote base and their traditional core Dalit voters deserted them and shifted towards BJP. Deep observation shows another clear picture that it is not only BSP that lost their Dalit votes but also other parties like Congress has been losing their Dalit voters. In 2014 Congress loss 2% Jatav and 12% non-Jatav Dalit votes over General Election 2009. The BSP, despite gaining 25% votes in U.P could not win even a single seat in 2014. It gained 7.22 lakhs more votes in 2014 compared to 2009 polls, spread over 46 seats across the state. Its vote share fell primarily in the western U.P. and some parts of the Bundelkhand

area. BSP secured 2nd position in 34 constituencies. BSP was the major challenge to the so-called 'Modi Wave' in U.P. Despite this gain there was a significant shift of BSP's Dalit vote base, over the 2009 General election towards BJP. There are several socio-political and strategical reasons behind the BSP loss in 2014 General Elections.

Here our major concern is why Dalit voted for BJP in large numbers? How to understand the BJP's gain of the Dalit voters? And how to interpret it? What are the major strategies have followed by BJP? Is it the case that those Dalits who have cast their vote for BJP, also shifted their identity towards Hindu Identity? To answer such questions another deep research is needed

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