

A very material shift

Occupational identities are competing with caste and religious identities in Madhya Pradesh



SAJJAN KUMAR

The political mood of the people in Madhya Pradesh is complex. To understand voting behaviour only through the prism of caste is an outdated method in this State. In fact, occupational identities resonate across caste and religion. Employing the categories of farmers, labourers, government employees, small businessmen, the urban service classes, and so on helps us understand voter behaviour more clearly than categories such as upper caste, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Shifting identities

In the wake of Mandalisation of politics in the early 1990s, when caste-based identity emerged as the dominant electoral fault line, Madhya Pradesh did not witness the replacement of traditional upper-caste political elites by OBCs as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar did, despite having the demographic logic for the same. This was seen in 1993 when Digvijaya Singh was elected as the Congress Chief Minister in the State rather than Subhash Yadav. Mr. Singh occupied that position for two terms until 2003.

It was this feeling of denial of due share to the OBCs that the BJP utilised to the hilt in 2003 by projecting Uma Bharti, an OBC, woman and a firebrand Hindutva leader, as its chief ministerial face against Mr. Singh. The OBCs overwhelmingly shifted to the BJP, and that trend continued until the 2013 Assembly elections. The upper castes, who perceived the BJP as a pro-Hindutva party, also made the same shift. In the same period, particularly from the mid-1990s to 2008, a significant section of Dalits in the areas adjoining U.P. shifted to the Bahujan Samaj Party, thereby signifying the dominance of caste-based identity over other markers.

However, now, after demonetisation and other factors, my two-phase field study in Madhya Pradesh in May-June and November this year



"Solidarity around occupational identity has been forged by a combination of factors such as destruction of the agrarian economy, the problem of digital payments and lower-level corruption." Farmers waiting for the Chief Minister to arrive during the Kisan Mahasammelan in Bhopal in February. *A. M. FARUQUI

suggests that occupational identities are now competing with caste and religious identities. A sense of solidarity around occupational identity has been forged by a combination of factors such as rampant lower-level corruption; destruction of the rural and agrarian economy and livelihoods allegedly on account of demonetisation; anger due to lower minimum support prices; anger due to schemes like the Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana, which allegedly benefits the intermediary vyaparis; and the problem of digital payments that causes undue delays in money being credited into accounts. There is a consolidation of farmers belonging to upper castes, OBCs, SCs, and STs rather than around their respective caste identities. Though the same doesn't necessarily translate into all of them making the same electoral choices, their articulation of these issues shows strong similarities.

Customised welfare measure

At a time when a large section of farmers in the rural areas and those in the lower and middle classes in urban areas share a sense of perceived marginalisation, the government's political and policy responses reveal

a subtle attempt to privilege socio-cultural identities over occupational ones. The consistent political success of the BJP's OBC and Hindutva card (from Ms. Bharti to incumbent Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan) in the last 15 years has not lost its hold on BJP leaders. Customised welfare measures, particularly for those who fall in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category, are seamlessly fused with caste-cum-religious markers. There are many policy announcements for farmers, a host of schemes for women, and there is rigorous implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (which was originally meant to cover the economically weaker sections and low-income groups but has been extended to the middle-income group as well).

However, there are also socio-cultural measures that favour socio-political identities over occupational ones. For instance, at a time when the anger of farmers was emerging as the dominant issue, the State government in coordination with the BJP organised six Pichhda Varg Mahakumbhs (OBC confluences) in this election year. The first confluence was inaugurated by the Chief Minister himself, who labelled half the

population of the State as OBCs rather than as farmers. Similarly, the popular Mukhyamantri Teerth Darshan Yojna (Chief Minister's Pilgrim Visit Scheme), which was introduced in 2012, provides a one-time assistance to those above the age of 60 years and Below the Poverty Line who want to go to various places of pilgrimage that have been chosen by the government (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Jagannath Puri, Dwarka, Haridwar, Amarnath, Vaishno Devi, Shirdi, Tirupati, Ajmer Sharif, Kashi, Amritsar, Rameshwaram, Sammed Shikhar, Shrihar Belgola and Belang Church, Nagapattinam). Also, there is another trend of initiating social identity-based customised welfare measures wherein ₹1,000 per month is deposited in the bank accounts of the women heads of three tribes – Sahariya, Baiga and Bheria tribes – to combat malnutrition. Those who have been left out of this scheme are naturally resentful.

Based on my field study, I found that more people seem to privilege their occupational identity over their caste and religious ones. Correspondingly, they are less likely to be swayed by the cultural politics of fusing ascriptive caste identity with a religious framework. This shifting trend was captured in multiple field responses. For instance, the majority of Gujjar farmers in Bandha village of Morena district that falls in the Chambal region are angry with the BJP government as farmers. They dismiss the demand of a Gujjar-led political body, the OBC-SC-ST Ekta Manch, for 27% reservation for OBCs instead of the existing 14%, despite them constituting around 50% of the State's population. They are unequivocal in their articulation that their suffering lies in being farmers rather than belonging to the OBCs.

The shift towards occupational identities signifies the privileging of material politics over cultural politics. However, it is different from the class politics of the 1970s, as markedly differentiated classes are consolidating under the same occupational frameworks. Also, the same process may not be true in States like U.P. and Bihar, where caste consciousness still holds the ground.

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Protect indigenous people

Implementation of the various provisions to protect the tribals of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been poor



VENKATANARAYANAN S.

The debates following the recent alleged killing of an American national, John Allen Chau, by the Sentinelese have put the spotlight on the vulnerability of an indigenous community that has lived for thousands of years with little contact with outsiders. The Sentinelese have been more fortunate than the Jarawas, though. The Andaman Trunk Road, among other projects, has cut into the heart of the Jarawa reserve, which has not only disturbed their ecological environment but also changed their lifestyle and dietary habits and endangered them.

There are four ancient Negrito tribal communities in the Andaman Islands (the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese) and two Mongoloid tribal communities in the Nicobar Islands (the Shompen and Nicobarese). Except the Nicobarese, the populations of the other tribes have reduced drastically over the decades.

From Nehru to now

What has been India's policy towards these tribals? Jawaharlal Nehru's Tribal Panchsheel were the guiding principles after Independence to formulate policies for the indigenous communities of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Based on them, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation (ANPATR), 1956 was promulgated by the President. This Regulation protected the tribals from outside interference, specified the limits of reserved areas and said no land in a reserved area shall be allotted for agricultural purposes or sold or mortgaged to outsiders. Those violating the land rights of the tribals were to be imprisoned for one year, fined ₹1,000, or both. Despite this, there continued to be constant interactions between the tribals and settlers/outsiders.

A policy of non-intervention was also proposed by an expert committee on the directions of the Supreme Court. The committee submitted its report in July 2003. The trigger for this was a 1999 petition that sought to bring the Jarawas into the mainstream. The committee recommended protecting the Jarawas from harmful contact with outsiders, preserving their cultural and social identity, conserving their land and advocated sensitising settlers about the Jarawas.

In 2005, nearly 50 years after it was promulgated, the ANPATR was amended. The

term of imprisonment as well as the fine were increased. However, in the years in between, the Andaman Trunk Road had already ensured increased interaction with the tribals. In the case of the Jarawas, this had led to the spread of diseases, sexual exploitation, and begging. Similarly, a policy for protecting the Shompen tribes was released only in 2015. However, in spite of the 2005 amendment, videos of commercial exploitation of the Jarawas in the name of "human safaris" were widely reported in the media. Following this, the government amended the ANPATR yet again in 2012, creating a buffer zone contiguous to the Jarawa tribal reserve where commercial establishments were prohibited, and regulating tourist operators. Despite all these amendments and provisions, there continue to be numerous reports of civilian intrusion into the Jarawa tribal reserve.

International conventions

International policy has changed over the decades. While the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957, of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) insisted on an integrationist approach towards tribal communities, the 1989 convention insisted on a policy of non-intervention, "recognising the aspirations of these peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development." India ratified the 1957 convention but has not ratified the 1989 convention. However, despite not signing it, India tried to tread the path of non-interference.

Therefore it is puzzling that in August the government relaxed the restricted area permit (RAP) for 29 islands in the Andaman and Nicobar, including North Sentinel Island. If the government has decided to ease the restrictions in a phased manner, this could adversely affect the indigenous population in the long run. Such commercialisation of tribal spaces could lead to encroachment of land, as we see in other parts of the country. Considering the significance of the indigenous tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the government needs to reorient its priorities towards protecting them from outside influence. India needs to sign the 1989 convention of the ILO, and implement its various policies to protect the rights of the indigenous population. It should also make efforts to sensitise settlers and outsiders about them. That Chau was helped in his journey shows a lack of understanding about the Sentinelese. Only concrete efforts can prevent such an incident from happening again.

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SINGLE FILE

Music for our times

While we could avoid reducing music to political sloganeering, it can be heard for more than raag, sur and taal

KUNAL RAY



I have vivid memories of my first encounter with Carnatic vocal maestro T.M. Krishna, much before he attained nationwide fame, when I was a young, rookie Spic Macay volunteer. I don't remember what he sang but something he said that day stayed with me and made me confront what was perhaps a systemic malaise which we were unknowingly perpetrating.

After reaching the hotel, he asked me where his coartists were. I said they had been put up in the guest house. He was visibly uncomfortable hearing that and told me in no uncertain terms that if the guest house was good enough for his co-artists, he could have stayed there too. Before I could do anything, he was on the phone enquiring about their comfort and apologising for this arrangement which had been unknown to him.

I realised how we had normalised a form of deep-seated disparity and were safeguarding a kind of hierarchy between the 'main artist' and 'coartists'.

The world of Indian classical music is in a sense apotheosised as holy and as a vehicle of sanctity, which also aids the way we think about the music and the musicians. It is particularly believed that such music demands unquestioning devotion to a guru, who is the seat of knowledge. I am speculating whether these are the reasons which prohibit our musicians from speaking as much as they should. Does Indian classical music training breed subservience? Why are voices from the realm of Indian classical music and dance often missing from important discourses in the nation? Musicians don't live in a political vacuum, after all. Many of us also feel a growing disconnect with the Indian classical music that is regularly presented on stage, which sometimes doesn't seem to be conversant with the realities of our time and space. Can art be so bereft of contemporary concerns?

In the era before Independence and soon after, the idea of nation-building inspired many artists. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar embarked upon a mission to teach music and create content that he felt would be appropriate for the audience. Though Kumar Gandharva did not directly engage with mainstream political issues, the selection of his repertoire was no less than a statement. Today, several musicians are busy composing and performing songs to eulogise many government schemes like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Beti Padhao Beti Bachao. This amounts to sheer opportunism to appease a political regime.

Some years ago, at a literary festival in Mumbai, Shubha Mudgal composed and sang Dushyant Kumar's *Kaha Toh Tai Tha* and I witnessed an artist expressing her anguish through music. While we could avoid reducing music to political sloganeering, it can be used and heard for more than raag, sur and taal. Perhaps that's the kind of music many of us are seeking today.

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FAQ

Oil swings and the economy

As India depends on imported crude oil, global trends have a big impact

K. BHARAT KUMAR

What factors influence crude oil price?

Global demand for oil, decisions by major producing nations to raise/cut supplies and the global political environment are key to oil prices.

Why are crude oil prices falling now?

Prices have swayed from above \$160 per barrel in June 2008 to about \$35 in January 2016. After breaching \$85 a barrel in early October, they plunged 8% last Friday to reach their lowest in more than a year. They have since recovered to above the \$60 level. The recent fall has been attributed to two main factors: higher supply and volatility due to uncertainty about the global economy. Fears of the consequences of a full-fledged trade war between the U.S. and China have

rattled speculators. However, oil prices are estimated to regain some lost ground and stabilise above \$75 next year, according to an S&P Global Platts survey of top bankers and oil traders. Key support factors for oil prices would be anticipated production cuts as well as U.S. sanctions against Iran. Also, automobile demand has risen globally, and as internal combustion engines still rule the roost, demand for oil is not expected to plummet yet.

Media reports cite the International Energy Agency pegging non-OPEC output at 2.3 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, while demand was expected to grow to 1.4 million bpd next year. OPEC is expected to cut production after a meeting on December 6 in Austria. It may push for a cut of as much as 1.4 million bpd.

What's the Indian basket of crude?

It is the weighted average of Dubai and Oman (sour) and Brent (sweet) crude. It's the indicator of the price of crude imports for India and the index has a bearing on price rise in the country, in general. The price of the Indian basket averaged at almost \$70 for April this year, and had risen to breach \$80 in October.

How does crude oil price affect the rupee?

India imports more than 80% of its crude oil requirements, and it has to pay for these imports in foreign currency, mainly dollars. If international crude prices rise, refiners in the country need to spend more in dollars. If there is volatility and uncertainty about which way prices will sway, refiners tend to buy more oil and stock up. As rupees are exchanged for the U.S.

currency in this exercise, it generates a demand for the dollar, thereby weakening the rupee. On October 1 this year, the Indian basket price was \$82 and the rupee rate was 72.8 to a dollar. By November 20, the Indian basket had eased to \$64.8 and the rupee, almost in tandem, strengthened to 71.3.

How do fuel prices influence inflation?

Prices of goods are determined as much by their supply as by the cost of transportation. Apples from Himachal Pradesh are eaten in Kerala, for instance. Rise in fuel costs are passed on by truck fleet owners down the chain to consumers. Accelerating inflation influences the central bank to raise rates thereby making it costlier to borrow. Higher interest rates keep supply of money in check and hence control inflation.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 29, 1968

10,200-crore outlay for private sector

The Planning Commission has boosted the estimate for private sector investment in the Fourth Plan from Rs. 7,500 crores, indicated earlier, to Rs. 10,200 crores. The increase is based on the Commission's discussions with industrialists and economists over the past few months. Meanwhile the Standing Committee of the National Development Council meeting here [New Delhi] to-morrow [November 29] is likely to determine the overall size of the Fourth Plan in addition to discussing questions relating to the States' resources. The Committee, consisting of all State Chief Ministers and members of Planning Commission is headed by the Commission's Deputy Chairman, Dr. Gadgil.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 29, 1918.

Anti-Hookworm Campaign.

His Excellency Lord Ronaldshay addressed this morning [November 28, in Calcutta] the Special Committee of the Sanitary Board constituted to advise measures against hookworm disease. In the course of his address the Governor said that he had been struck with the extreme inadequacy of the machinery which they possessed for dealing with the vast and vital question of public health. It seemed to him that they should possess in each district a public health organisation. The first step in this direction must necessarily be the appointment in each district of a properly qualified Health Officer. Continuing, His Excellency said: I have decided to ask the local self-governing bodies follow the example set by the District Board of Burdwan and to appoint after a specified date fully qualified health officers for their districts. This brings to the fore the question of the training of young medical men in sanitation and hygiene. Calcutta ought most assuredly to have a first rate school of hygiene and we are taking steps to see that her requirements in this respect are no longer neglected.

CONCEPTUAL

Savanna principle

PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to the hypothesis that the human brain is adapted primarily to the conditions in which human ancestors survived once upon a time rather than to the modern age. The term was coined by American evolutionary psychologist Satoshi Kanazawa in an academic article published in 2004 to state that the human brain may be adapted to the time when human ancestors lived in the African savannas. The Savanna principle has been used to explain why a lot of human behaviour in the modern age seems irrational. Since the modern age is relatively recent in evolutionary terms, the human brain may not have evolved sufficiently to deal with the modern environment.

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