

Savarna parties have once again isolated Dalit voices

by Suraj Yengde

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Commentators and political party leaders seem to habitually attack Dalits for exercising their right to vote and choosing whom to support. These offhand remarks are usually made to psychologically pressure Dalit voters

to get agitated with their leaders. The mistrust, clubbed with critiques of opponents, cements the view that Dalit politics is doomed and, thus, a better option is to choose between the lesser evil.

The lesser evil is a system that benefits people with certain last names and their cabal. They are found in all political parties and social movements. It is this hidden state that the Ambedkarite political sphere can decipher, for they have seen first-hand how exploitation is managed by the iron fist of handlers who now claim political leadership.

The success of the [2024 general elections was the return of coalition governments](#). Dalit-led parties that fought as coalition partners like the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, Lok Janshakti Party and Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) made gains in their vote share and even have their leaders in Parliament.

However, two parties suffered major electoral setbacks: the Mayawati-led [Bahujan Samaj Party](#) (BSP) and an experimental [Maharashtra](#)-based Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) led by Prakash Ambedkar. Both gained the feared suspicion of the media and Savarna parties. They did not win the mandate but circumstantially established their impetus. Ironically, both are absent from popular social movements. There are many reasons for their defeat. Besides distancing of urban middle-class Dalit voters, acquiescing to unfavourable parties and attitudinal drawback of the leadership, propaganda against these parties also played a role.

Dr Ambedkar envisioned a non-hegemonic force that could act as a power broker and force the ruling dispensation to act in their favour. The Scheduled Caste Federation's Manifesto before the 1952 polls resolved to not have an alliance with "Congress, Hindu Maha Sabha, R.S.S., Communist Party and Jan Sangh". In 1956, the Republican Party of India's foundation was also based on similar ideals. Kanshi Ram famously interpreted this as "mazboot nahi, majboor sarkar chahiye (we need a helpless government, not a strong one)". The logic was that this would force the majoritarian party to not act in self-indulgence. The purpose of Ambedkarite parties has been to protect their interests and rule the country. This is against the belief of the political class, which prefers a subordinate leader as opposed to an articulate one.

The Congress, with its divisive agenda, has once again isolated independent Dalit political voices, calling them second-rank subalterns of the [BJP](#). The very Congress that was against Ambedkar and preferred Jagjivan Ram as an ideal opponent now acknowledges the former's credibility. With that, it has taken upon itself to become the custodian of Ambedkar and his people — like a new convert trying hard to denounce anyone and anything that appears inconsistent with their newfound religion.

Slandorous epithets directed against Ambedkarite parties are a testimony to similar interests embraced by the Congress and BJP. Their records demonstrate their agenda to establish a feudal-Brahminical model that leverages the human resources of the backward classes, Dalits and Adivasis to meet their goals. To do this, they also need unquestionable loyalties of reserved seats. They did not treat BSP or VBA with desirable respect in seat-sharing or make enough attempts to bring them on board. The consequence of which they're suffering now.

The BJP and Congress's fear tactics triumphed because Mayawati and Prakash Ambedkar failed to convince Muslim and backward class voters they relied on. Then, there is their working styles, both vastly different. The BSP is pathetic when it comes to communication and its reliance on old style of activism,

something that has cost it its future. The lack of innovation and creativity to get influential masses on its side has isolated leaders from those who speak louder.

Though attachment to the Ambedkar family lineage still draws the rural masses, the people I have interacted with in political circles and urban voters have expressed dismay over Mayawati and Prakash Ambedkar's politics and nature of interactions. However, by using the Vanchit Bahujan formula to the 'nagnath-saapnath' referencing, Prakash Ambedkar seems to have embraced Kanshi Ram's radical vision. Will the setback alarm the party leadership or will they invent new ways to blame the Opposition and the government?

Suraj Yengde, author of 'Caste Matters', curates Dalitality, has returned to Harvard University

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