

The politics of development: Uttar Pradesh's pivotal role

Situated in the north of India, Uttar Pradesh (UP) occupies a special place in India's democracy. Being one of the biggest states in the country, UP sends the largest number of elected representatives to the lower house of the Indian Parliament. Seven Prime Ministers of India were elected from this state. Most people in the state belong to Hindu and Muslim religions, with smaller sections of Sikhs and Christians. It has all major caste groups—Dalits, OBCs (Other Backward Classes), and high castes.

DEEPENING OF DEMOCRACY

Since the 1990s, democracy has deepened in UP. Dalits, a group of previously untouchable low castes, have come to occupy a leading role in the politics of the state. They not only have a party—the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), or the party of the majority, whose policies are inspired by the saints, philosophers, social reformers born in the low castes, especially Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule—and in Mayawati, they also have a party leader from their community.

As a BSP leader, Mayawati has been chief minister of UP in 4 governments out of 11 since 1989, and she continues to rule. It is important to underscore that the rise of Dalits in UP has not been sudden. The rise is the culmination of a social and cultural process, which started as far back as the late 1950s. Denoting the impact of ideas and life of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, this process can be termed *Ambedkarisation*. The Ambedkarisation process is indicative of the social transformation and the empowerment of Dalits. Actually, the rise of Dalits in UP politics has taken place along with the rise of another group of subaltern castes—the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). However, the OBCs, despite intermittent setbacks, began to occupy dominant positions earlier than the Dalits, from the late 1960s until the 1980s.

BY JAGPAL SINGH

Jagpal Singh is an associate professor in the Faculty of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, at the Indira Gandhi National Open University in Maidan Garhi, New Delhi.

Uttar Pradesh . . . occupies a special place in India's democracy. Being one of the biggest states in the country.

Since the 1990s, the Dalits have become the dominant force in UP politics.

THE PARADOX

The deepening of democracy in UP, however, is not matched by a similar level of progress on the development front. UP is one of the five BIMARU states (an acronym for the most backward states) of India. There are regional variations in the level of development of the four regions into which the UP has been officially divided—western, central, eastern, and Bundelkhand. On the one hand, there is prosperous western UP, which along with neighbouring states of Haryana and Punjab witnessed a green revolution in the 1960s, which contributed to making the country self-sufficient in food production. On the other hand, it consists of some of the most economically and socially disadvantaged districts of the country located in the central, eastern, and Bundelkhand regions. Despite regional variations in the levels of development, the expansion of democracy to more sections of the society including the Dalits has taken place across the regions. The rise of Dalits in

UP has been accompanied by economic reforms however the state continues to suffer from a fiscal crisis and economic stagnation. Generally, its growth rate per annum has been half that of the national average.

EMERGENCE OF AN INFORMAL ECONOMY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT

The economy of UP has been largely agrarian, with more than 60 percent of the population depending on agriculture to varying degrees. However, the agricultural sector in India is going through a phase of crisis, and UP is not insulated from this crisis. The number of farmer suicides is large, especially in Bundelkhand; farmers' agitations in western UP; and the migration of people particularly from the eastern, central, and Bundelkhand regions to metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and to the more prosperous states of Punjab and Haryana are indicative of the crisis. Indeed, the informal economy that has emerged as a parallel source of employment could be more accurately classified as "disguised unemployment" and "underemployment." This trend is not confined to the poorest regions of the state. Even in the most prosperous region of western UP, like in Punjab and Haryana, an informalization of occupations has occurred in the post-green revolution period.

Every morning one can witness this scene in Delhi and other cities of north India. Large numbers of poorly clad people, including migrants from UP, gather at specific locations known as "informal labour markets." Here they look for someone to buy their labour power in return for any kind of manual job—plumbing, making/repairing houses, repairing broken items, packing, transporting items from one place to another, street/pavement vendors, pavement tailors, *riksha*-pullers, taxi drivers,

or any other kind of wage labour. The mainly urban, upper-middle-class people who need their services bargain, usually on their terms and conditions, with the informal labourers. Some at the informal labour market get work, while others do not. These people do not perform a specific job in a specific sector; they perform whatever assignment they get.

POLITICS OF MIGRATION

Migration from UP has been a burning political issue both in UP and in the places to which people have immigrated. Although the migrants from the central, eastern, and Bundelkhand regions of UP, along with those from Bihar, have long been targets of political games in several parts of India, during the past five years, they have been subjected to violence and humiliation in Mumbai, the capital city of Maharashtra state. The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), a political party, headed by Raj Thakre, a splinter group of Shiv Sena, accused the migrants from UP and Bihar of having usurped the economic opportunities of the natives of Maharashtra. The MNS launched a violent broadside against the migrants, which evoked sharp reaction in eastern UP and Bihar. A group of politicians from UP attributed the migration from their region to Mumbai to the lack of opportunities in their home state. They contended that their region remains disadvantaged because of the discriminatory policies of central and state govern-

[T]he informal economy that has emerged as a parallel source of employment could be more accurately classified as “disguised unemployment” and “underemployment.”

ments, and that the solution to this lies in providing overall development for the region. However, such development requires that the region become a state.

DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

While migration is an issue of concern, the mainstream political parties have not put forward viable policy initiatives. Nevertheless, development or underdevelopment is an issue for those leaders demanding the creation of separate (regional/subnational) states for three major regions of UP: western UP, eastern UP, and Bundelkhand.

There is a development dilemma in the state; development in UP, as in several Indian states, has become embroiled in competitive politics. In the political

process, development has been relegated to the background. An insightful example of this can be seen in the politics of land acquisition for the development of roads and residences. Any move, whether by the government or the private sector, to introduce development policies provokes opposing reactions informed by electoral and populist considerations.

So the development dilemma in UP remains unresolved. All traditional occupational sectors—agriculture, service, traditional handicrafts—defined by the traditional *jajmani* (patron-client) system either have become unattractive or have collapsed. This has occurred along with the erosion of the traditional caste hierarchy. The result is an increase in workers in the informal economy and increased long- or short-distance migration.

What might the alternatives be—heavy industries, cottage industries, or service sector as a part of development model in the state? Three legacies, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s, Chaudhari Charan Singh’s (ex-prime minister of India, a source of inspiration for the OBCs and peasantry), and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia’s (the social leader and an ideologue of the OBCs), which have inspired social engineering in UP, have more differences than similarities. The competitive politics and populism, which their followers and others engage in, pushes the development agenda in the state to the background. 

LEARN MORE ABOUT
CanadaWatch
AND THE
ROBARTS CENTRE FOR
CANADIAN STUDIES
www.yorku.ca/robarts

Separatist movements continued from page 39

investments have increased as high as 35 percent in recent years. India’s labour force is likely to increase annually by 1.7 percent for the next 30 years. On the other hand, demand for labour in several countries will go up because of a decline in their birth rates. This will provide opportunities for Indian skilled workers and professionals to work abroad and encourage brain gain from which India too will benefit greatly.

India’s middle class, which is a strong force for sustained growth, is likely to increase from a current 10 percent of the

population to 90 percent of the population by 2039.

Continuity and change will condition the dynamics of India’s rise. High growth rates are by no means preordained; but the next decades will surely witness the gradual rise of democratic India to the top of the pyramid. Devising much-needed technological innovations, and developing consensus concerning the right ideas for economic reforms, policies, and development programs will help in the realization of this immense promise. 