THE WANING OF SUBALTERN SOLIDARITY FOR HINDUTVA

**The migrant labour crisis offers fertile ground for political change
but the will to execute it is missing**

As the plight and precarity of migrant workers take centrestage, a pertinent question is about its political bearings. The fact that an overwhelming majority of those precariat are subalterns or Dalit-Bahujans, who, since 2014, shifted to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindutva in a big way, merits the question whether they would rethink their saffron link and return to the fold of non-BJP parties. Understanding this puzzle requires a brief engagement with the structure of subalterneity and its dynamic interplay with the Hindutva and Muslim question in India.

Contrasting claims

There are two contrasting claims of subalterneity — one oppositional to Hindutva and the other conciliatory towards it. There is a deep fraternity towards Muslims in the oppositional view as they are believed to be low caste Hindus who converted to Islam to escape from Brahmanical Hinduism. Pasmanda politics of the Muslim community is a reciprocal response to this claim of oppositional subalterneity.

On the other hand, the conciliatory subalterneity which is friendly to Hindutva, heralds a phenomenon which I term as subaltern Hindutva, which at present is the dominant political discourse in the western, central and northern States of India, and of late has made a remarkable entry in the east, particularly in Bengal by winning over a majority of Dalits and tribes. It takes a constructivist approach of myth building and argues that Muslim rule and a secular discourse of minority appeasement is responsible for their precariat position. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-endorsed three volume book by BJP Dalit leader Bizay Sonkar Shastri claiming Dalits to be upper castes before the advent of Islam in India is a case in point.

Back to 2014

To decipher the expected political behaviour of the subalterns in the wake of the current crisis engulfing reverse migration-bound workers, one needs to go back to 2014 to deconstruct the phenomenon of the mainstreaming of subaltern Hindutva which overwhelmed the democratic discourse of India except in the southern and northeastern States. It led to most non-dominant Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Dalits abandoning social justice-centric parties and rallying behind the BJP. Three factors explain this shifting alliance of the subalterns in 2014.

One, with the deepening identitarian turn in the democratic discourse since the mid-1980s, the numerically weaker subaltern castes, particularly in the western, central and Hindi heartland States, were aspiring to carve a niche for themselves within the discourse of subalterneity. Since, the oppositional subalterneity was vanguarded by dominant OBC and Dalit caste leaders, the weaker subaltern caste members felt relatively deprived.

Two, the BJP witnessed an electoral decline at the national level in the 2000s until 2014. However, in its six year stint during National Democratic Alliance-I, the party had effectively quelled its image as being anti-Mandal and anti-reservation.

Three, by late 2013, when the Modi phenomenon appeared on the political horizon with a package of subalterneity, Hindutva and development, the target was two-fold: the secular and the oppositional subalterneity. Since both had an indispensable Muslim constituency, they became clubbed as one, their ideological incommensurability notwithstanding. The majority of non-dominant OBCs and Dalits nurturing a sense of relative deprivation eagerly embraced both the BJP and Hindutva. It was an active political choice by majority of the subalterns against the secular. It is in this context that since 2014 we have witnessed the emergence of a new dialectic — of 'the secular vs the subaltern'.

A discourse of solidarity

What is at stake for the BJP and Hindutva in the wake of the ongoing migrant crisis? In other words, if subalterns came to the fold of the BJP by willing to bypass secular parties for order, certainty and opportunity packaged as Hindutva's model of social justice, would the turmoil in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic change it?

The answer lies in the discourse of solidarity that lies behind the spectacular success story of Hindutva's subaltern outreach. Subaltern Hindutva is premised on the claims of cultural and political solidarity among Hindus across the spectrum. Thus, it is the perpetual need and demonstration of solidarity across the Hindu spectrum that is indispensable for the hegemony of subaltern Hindutva.

It must be remembered that unlike Savarkarite Hindutva which signified ideological dogmatism of upper caste Hindus, subaltern Hindutva weighs more on the instrumental side. The latter is an outcome of an active political bargain between the subalterns and traditional proponents of Hindutva. Subalterns carry a thick deal of political legitimacy and hence they are needed. Hindutva has the accommodating space which subalterns need to satiate their democratic desire for political representation. The leadership profile of the BJP as a party from the top to the rank and file, has an impressive presence of the subalterns. Other parties have had to give a substantial share of these spaces to Muslims; in the BJP's case, it shares them with subalterns and other caste Hindus, thereby placing the party in an advantageous position to offer the best deal. Hitherto, the Prime Minister's personal charisma, his claim to conciliatory subalterneity and the corresponding trust factor have created a sense of solidarity between him and the majority of subalterns. Therefore, much of the political attack on him became a collective attack on the subalterns. Criticism of his government and its policies from the vantage point of secularism versus communalism metamorphoses into one of secularism versus subalterneity.

Impact on States, Opposition

This throws a semantic challenge for the non-BJP parties endeavouring to employ the language of political economy to privilege material politics over the cultural one. In the past, the cultural solidarity of subalterns with Hindutva, particularly in the Hindi heartland, the prime suppliers of inter-State migrant workers depending upon cash and labour intensive informal sector, sustained the shock therapy of demonetisation.

However, equations seem to be changing now. Media reports and feedback from the ground in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, where migrant workers have returned show that the political mood is layered. Unambiguously, they are not happy with the Prime Minister and the way in which they were treated. Hence, there is a clear sign of a waning of the sense of solidarity which they had for him in the past. There is a feeling of being abandoned by the state. Nevertheless, there is an interesting twist here. While they are not happy with the Prime Minister, they are more angry with the State governments and their leaders. Hence, in Bihar it is Nitish Kumar and in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee. A section of subaltern section in Bengal apparently believes that Ms. Banerjee on a few occasions relaxed lockdown norms for the benefit of the Muslim community.

This means, the waning of subaltern solidarity to Hindutva and the Prime Minister does not translate into a significant change of political action as there are no alternative solidarities. In fact, given that there is a greater degree of anger against the regional parties in the western and northern States along with West Bengal, it is plausible that the BJP may not suffer much therein. Economic precarity and material politics do not succeed in the absence of a powerful anchor. In the past, the Opposition was able to defeat the cultural politics of the BJP on a material plank in States such as Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh as it had State-level anchors who acted as a bridge between material crisis and its electoral translation. However, the same may not be true about the national scenario as the Prime Minister combines both, persuasion and policy. It is persuasion that holds the ground perpetually leaving policy weaknesses on the high road to nowhere. On the other hand, the prime Opposition party, the Congress, seems to be a party lacking both an effective anchor and programmatic action. True, the ongoing crisis is fertile ground for

political change, but the will to execute it is missing. The crisis and political action do not seem to interact. They exist in parallel.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

❖ **waning** (noun) – decrease, lessening, weakening, disappearance, deterioration.

❖ **subaltern** (adjective) – relating to the lower status/ranking (people) in a social or political hierarchy.

❖ **solidarity** (noun) – unity, unanimity, harmony, cooperation.

❖ **fertile ground** (noun) – a condition which generates/produces a lot of something (opportunities, results etc,.).

❖ **will** (noun) – desire/wish, preference, intention, inclination.

❖ **plight** (noun) – difficult situation, trouble/difficulty, quandary.

❖ **precarity** (noun) – the state of being uncertain/insecure/unsafe.

❖ **centre stage** (noun) – centre of attention, spotlight, public eye.

❖ **pertinent** (adjective) – relevant, appropriate, applicable.

❖ **bearing** (noun) – relevance/significance, pertinence, connection.

❖ **overwhelming** (adjective) – very great/ large, huge, enormous.

❖ **precariat** (noun) – people who are in the state of being uncertain/insecure/unsafe.

❖ **subaltern** (noun) – the lower status/ ranking people in a social or political hierarchy.

❖ **in a big way** (phrase) – to a great extent; to a high degree.

❖ **merit** (verb) – deserve, warrant, justify.

❖ **fold** (noun) – group, community.

❖ **puzzle** (noun) – mystery, contradiction, irregularity/anomaly.

❖ **engagement** (noun) – participation, taking part, involvement, association.

❖ **subalterneity** (noun) – the state of being lower status/ranking (people) in a social or political hierarchy.

❖ **dynamic** (adjective) – active, powerful, strong, effective.

❖ **interplay** (noun) – interaction, interchange, compromises, cooperation.

❖ **question** (noun) – matter, concern, subject, topic, point at issue.

❖ **contrasting** (adjective) – differing, dissimilar, contradictory, varying.

❖ **conciliatory** (adjective) – appeasing, pacifying, peacemaking.

❖ **fraternity** (noun) – friendship, mutual support, companionship.

❖ **pasmanda** (noun) – 'Pasmanda', a Persian term meaning "those who have fallen behind," refers to Muslims belonging to the *shudra* (backward) and *ati-shudra* (Dalit) castes.

❖ **reciprocal** (adjective) – corresponding, returned, correlative; mutual, common, shared.

❖ **herald** (verb) – signal, indicate, foretell; acclaim.

❖ **phenomenon** (noun) – occurrence, event, happening.

❖ **discourse** (noun) – communication, talk, expression, discussion.

❖ **of late** (phrase) – recently, lately, newly.

❖ **win over** (phrasal verb) – persuade, convince, induce, sway.

❖ **constructivist approach** (noun) – it refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves. It is a theory of learning suggesting that learners create their own knowledge of the topics they study rather than receiving that knowledge as transmitted to them by some other source. Constructivist teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information.

❖ **myth building** (noun) – myth making; nation-building myths often develop in a time of crisis, for example if there is a war, or a period of great political or ideological upheaval.

❖ **secular** (adjective) – non-religious.

❖ **appeasement** (noun) – conciliation, pacification, concession/accommodation.

❖ **advent** (noun) – arrival, appearance, emergence.

- **case in point** (phrase) – example, instance, case.
- **decipher** (verb) – interpret, comprehend, understand.
- **in the wake of** (phrase) – as a result of, in the aftermath of, as a consequence of.
- **engulf** (verb) – overwhelm, inundate, swamp, overtake, affect powerfully.
- **deconstruct** (verb) – disassemble, take apart, dismantle.
- **mainstream** (noun) – something (certain beliefs/ideas/activities) which are accepted or recognized by most people as a normal or typical.
- **bound** (adjective) – going towards a particular place.
- **rally** (verb) – come together, get together, work/act together.
- **deepening** (adjective) – increasing, intensifying, escalating.
- **identitarian** (adjective) – relating to identitarianism/ identitarian politics. it refers to political positions based on the interests and perspectives of social groups with which people identify.
- **heartland** (noun) – the most important part of a field of activity; the central part of something.
- **aspire** (verb) – desire to, aim to, hope to, long/yearn to.
- **carve (out) a niche** (phrase) – create a space for oneself.
- **vanguard** (verb) – spearhead, lead, be the driving force.
- **relatively** (adverb) – comparatively, to a certain extent, somewhat.
- **deprive** (verb) – dispossess, strip of, deny, prevent from having.
- **stint** (noun) – spell, period, term/time (in office).
- **quell** (verb) – crush, stifle, suppress, end.
- **anti-Mandal** (adjective) – against the Mandal commission's recommendation of reservations for the backward castes.
- **by late** (phrase) – at the end.
- **on the horizon** (phrase) – imminent, impending, approaching, near/close, just around the corner.
- **two-fold** (adjective) – having two parts/ elements.
- **premise on** (verb) – base on (something).

- **indispensable** (adjective) – essential, significant/important, necessary.
- **constituency** (noun) – the people (voters) in a particular area (who vote to elect a legislator).
- **club** (verb) – combine, group, join, merge.
- **ideological** (adjective) – relating to a system of ideas.
- **incommensurability** (noun) – it explains that the two competing or opposite quantities/theories/paradigms are said to have no common measure/basis because they use different concepts and methods to address different problems.
- **notwithstanding** (adverb) – nevertheless, nonetheless, anyway, at any rate.
- **nurture** (verb) – encourage, promote, foster.
- **relative** (adjective) – some, reasonable, considerable.
- **deprivation** (noun) – poverty, impoverishment, hardship, neediness.
- **embrace** (verb) – welcome, accept, adapt, take up.
- **context** (noun) – circumstances, conditions, situation.
- **dialectic** (adjective) – reasoning, argumentation, logic; the art of investigating/discussing the truth of opinions.
- **at stake** (phrase) – at risk, at issue, in question.
- **bypass** (verb) – avoid, keep out of, dodge, circumvent, get round.
- **certainty** (noun) – confidence, sureness, positiveness, conviction, reliability.
- **turmoil** (noun) – disorder, turbulence, confusion, trouble, chaos.
- **lie in** (phrasal verb) – be present, exist.
- **lie behind** (phrasal verb) – be the actual (mostly concealed) reason for something.
- **outreach** (noun) – the level of reaching out/activity/effort; involvement.
- **spectrum** (noun) – wide range, gamut, ambit.
- **perpetual** (adjective) – continuous, unceasing; sustained.
- **hegemony** (noun) – leadership, dominance, authority.
- **dogmatism** (noun) – authoritarianism, high-handedness, rigidity, intolerance.

- ❖ **weigh on** (phrasal verb) – lie heavy on, press down on, hang over.
- ❖ **instrumental** (adjective) – influential, contributory; helpful, useful, conducive.
- ❖ **bargain** (noun) – agreement, arrangement, understanding, deal.
- ❖ **proponent** (noun) – advocate, supporter, upholder/promoter.
- ❖ **accommodating** (adjective) – cooperative, helpful, considerate, agreeable.
- ❖ **satiate** (verb) – another term for sate; fully satisfy.
- ❖ **leadership profile** (noun) – it designates the attributes/ characteristics a leader within a party/ company/group should have.
- ❖ **rank and file** (phrase) – ordinary members of a party.
- ❖ **hitherto** (adverb) – previously, earlier, so far/ thus far, until now.
- ❖ **charisma** (noun) – strength of character, individuality, personality.
- ❖ **vantage point** (noun) – viewpoint, standpoint, opinion.
- ❖ **secularism** (noun) – the belief that religion should not have a strong influence in education or other public parts of society.
- ❖ **communalism** (noun) – adherence/ obedience to one's own ethnic group (against the principle/practice of living together in a wider society).
- ❖ **privilege** (verb) – give a special advantage.
- ❖ **material politics** (noun) – it refers to the way that material- including money- oriented things, items, articles for an activity – shapes society and political opinion, and gives rise to social, economic and legal realities.
- ❖ **cultural politics** (noun) – it refers to the way that culture – including people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs and perspectives, as well as the media and arts – shapes society and political opinion, and gives rise to social, economic and legal realities.
- ❖ **metamorphose** (verb) – transform, change, convert/alter.
- ❖ **semantic** (adjective) – lingual, linguistic.
- ❖ **endeavour** (verb) – try, attempt, seek, undertake.
- ❖ **inter-** (prefix) – between.
- ❖ **-intensive** (adjective/usually in combination) – (in business) concentrating on a particular thing.
- ❖ **informal sector** (noun) – informal economy, grey economy is the part of an economy that is neither taxed, nor monitored by any form of government.
- ❖ **sustain** (verb) – undergo, experience, go through, suffer, endure.
- ❖ **shock therapy** (noun) – shock treatment; sudden, extreme & harsh steps taken to tackle difficult situation.
- ❖ **demonetisation** (noun) – the act of deprive currency unit (note/coin) of its status as money.
- ❖ **equation** (noun) – association, connection; the situation.
- ❖ **unambiguously** (adverb) – undeniably, unquestionably, undebatably.
- ❖ **apparently** (adverb) – obviously, clearly, seemingly.
- ❖ **occasion** (noun) – (a particular) time, moment, point.
- ❖ **plausible** (adjective) – convincing, effective, influential, strong.
- ❖ **therein** (adverb) – in that place.
- ❖ **anchor** (noun) – mainstay, cornerstone, bulwark, chief support.
- ❖ **plank** (noun) – a piece of timber (used in building).
- ❖ **bridge** (noun) – link, connection, bond.
- ❖ **translation** (noun) – change, conversion, transformation, metamorphosis.
- ❖ **persuasion** (noun) – persuading, urging, convincing, brainwashing, sweet-talking, i.
- ❖ **stand/hold one's ground** (phrase) – be resolute, insist, be determined.
- ❖ **perpetually** (adverb) – constantly, permanently, endlessly.
- ❖ **a road to nowhere** (phrase) – a plan or course of action that seems to produce no useful results.
- ❖ **programmatic** (adjective) – methodical, disciplined, systematic.
- ❖ **in parallel** (phrase) – happening at the same time.