

Songs of UP elections: Ka ba, Sab ba, maangat ba Akhilesh ke and Maya bahin ke jitiyaha

 theprint.in/opinion/songs-of-up-elections-ka-ba-sab-ba-maangat-ba-akhilesh-ke-and-maya-bahin-ke-jitiyaha/816401

January 30, 2022



A still from the BJP's election song featuring Ravi Kishan. | @YouTube

It is impossible to have an election in Uttar Pradesh without its accompanying song and dance. With the rise of social media, what we are seeing is a sophisticated coming together of propaganda and parochialism. Between articulating distress and hope, worshiping of leaders and 'jai shri Ram', and evoking Bharat Mata and Jyotiba Phule, the election songs fight to find room in the crowd space of democracy, literature, performing arts and resistance. From Neha Singh Rathore's *UP mein ka ba* to Ravi Kishan's *Sab ba*, all have a target audience.

The *UP mein ka ba* song has roused various socio-political issues ranging from Covid deaths to the Hathras case. And the opposition seems to be reiterating this independent artist's song louder than their own manifesto. There is something unique about its composition. The song has raised some of the most pertinent issues that received substantive attention, including Covid mismanagement, religious polarisation, unemployment, law and order. Above all, it brings the debate of temple vs development to the election table.



Loaded: 3.64%

That the song's message seems to have gone home is evident in the ruling party's response. Besides the trolls, the folk singer has received many versions of her rendition as parodies that are being circulated widely on social media. But it is Ravi Kishan's UP mein sab basong that has vocalised the BJP and counted the achievements of the Yogi Adityanath government.

While the political contestation through songs add to the election fervor, it will be interesting to see what such compositions have meant for the Dalit-Bahujan community in the state.

Also read: Let them eat communalism: Yogi's poll pitch may work but heartland's jobless fury endangers India

Reading election songs

Election songs in a democracy are a significant way of capturing not only voters' mood but also reflect how political ideologies are shaped through conflicts and social pressure. Political symbols are powerfully used in these songs and it is through them that the public memory is created.

But in the run up to 2022 polls, songs of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) betray their original Bahujan-backward first approach and project the leadership over ideology.

With unlimited datapack comes the power as seductive as voting right itself. And that is the power of making an election song go viral.

Also read: Yogi is Baba, Mahant, or Gorakhnath. Akhilesh's image is all about 'change with continuity'

Songs and the social movement

Uttar Pradesh has a history of ‘mission songs’ started by Kanshi Ram in the 1980s. The word ‘mission’ is a vocabulary of local singers and audiences with songs that are dedicated to contemporary anti-caste social movements. The term ‘mission’ was also used by Kanshi Ram to refer to the Bahujan movement of the 1980s. These songs are sung particularly by artists who have attained a degree of professionalism in music or are culturally associated with such performances.

The parties dedicated to Bahujan Mission such as the BSP and the Azad Samaj Party are using the symbols and icons of the anti-caste movement overtly in their election songs. Behind the making of symbols and icons, there is a lot of social history as well. One of the seasoned Bahujan singers of the BSP, Kishore Kumar Pagla is famous for singing songs of Kanshi Ram Mission. In fact, election songs during the 90s and 2000s were one of the mediums to popularise the Bahujan Mission. A former Lalit Kala Academy Member, Kishor Kumar Pagla is best known for his songs ‘Sarv Samaj ke liye do kadam’, ‘Ambedkar Babasaheb ke pujela’ to mention a few, has devoted his entire life for promoting the idea of Bahujan.

Also read: *Not civil servants, engineers, or teachers, politicians always dine at poor Dalit homes*

Symbolism in election songs

The election songs have strong symbolism embedded in them. The BJP’s UP election song 22 mein Yogi ji 27 mein bhi Yogi ji by Dinesh Lal Yadav starts with the invocation of Bharat Mata. In the video, an image of *jai shri Ram* buzzes now and then. Even the Ravi Kishan song UP mein sab ba represents a Brahminical grandeur with the tilak, chanting of Bharat Mata, and saffronised visuals. The symbolism of Akhand Bharat is deeply intact in all election songs of the BJP. The ideological commitment is a strength that the party has not compromised with.

Ironically, Ravi Kishan’s image of dining with a Dalit family also went viral on social media. It would have been great had such an image been part of the election song as well.

For Congress, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has become the face of the UP election and her Ladki hu ladd sakti hun song reflects the question of bringing women issues to the center of the UP’s election agenda.

The recordings of older Bahujan songs — part of the public performances — are not archived but singers such as Malti Rao, Kishor Kumar Pagla, A.R. Akela from the older generation of BSP recall the carnival-like solidarity that was visible during the election rallies during 90s and early 2000s. While these songs had an appeasement flavour to them, strong anti-caste and Bahujan solidarity remained major themes.

Also read: Priyanka Vadra's women-centric campaign long shot in UP. BJP must look at its male hierarchy.

Party-wise election songs

The recent songs reflect new realities and it is evident across party lines. Songs by parties based on Bahujan ideology have focused more on the personality cult rather than ideology itself. In SP election song Janta Uttar Pradesh ke, mangat ba Akhilesh ke, button dabiyha cycle ke, by Samar Singh, the idea of Bahujan seems to have taken a back seat, and instead the composition has counted on the image of the leader Akhilesh Yadav:

*“Akhilesh Yadav jindabad, (*5)*

*Bhayia-Bauji Chacha chachi sab milke, (*2)*

Jake Button Dabihya, cycle ke”

There are no anti-caste Bahujan icons used. Even icons belonging to OBC and Yadav community such as Periyar Lalai Singh Yadav or Jyotiba Phule are absent. If a song is targeted to contest national parties and invoke the public memory, it should bring anti-caste icons from previous social movements. Merely eulogising leadership face is not sufficient to lure voters to have an emotional attachment with the parties.

Similarly, in the election song of BSP, Maya bahin ke jitiyaha by Umesh Chakravarti, misses out on the iconography of anti-caste leaders and instead overtly focuses on Mayawati's image. However, the cadre of BSP has not missed out on the anti-caste icons such as Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, and Jyotiba Phule. It is also worth mentioning that the cultural base of the BSP is so diverse and strong that across UP, the cadre, supporters, and singers have come up with party songs even if they received little support from the party's top brass.

For parties that have genesis in Lohiaite or Ambedkarite ideology, overtly relying on personality cult rather than ideology can be a drawback as cadres and voters who are drawn to such parties have an emotional attachment and ideological commitment.

The newly formed Azad Samaj Party in its election song has given enough space to Kanshi Ram's struggle and the idea of Bahujan. This is a welcome step to reassure the party's ideological grounding. The song by Nisha Bouddh, Sansad mein bithyegi Bharat mein Bhim Army, sings:

“Manuvad Mitayegi, Bharat mein Bhim Army

Sansad mein Bithyegi Bharat mein Bhim Army

... tufaan ye nikla hai Sarkar banae ko

Samvidhan bacheygi, Bharat mein Bhim Army”

The Bahujan icons are well intact in the song and there is a resonance of social justice by invoking images of the Constitution, Parliament, and Ambedkar. It is also encouraging to see young voices finding space in the election songs.

Also read: [Don't write BSP off in UP just because Mayawati didn't hold big rallies. See cadres on ground](#)

Going the folkway style

While all parties aim to show their best side in these songs, the compositions skip ideological genesis and development discourse. [UP me ka bahas](#) managed to bridge this gap. In all its colloquial taste and Bhojpuri accent, it has brought the audience together. Rathore says that through her singing, she wants to take out the vulgarity of Bhojpuri songs and make them echo development issues. Ravi Kishan's response has failed to touch the voter's mood in the same way because for the popularity of an election song it has to be true to the spirit of democracy — that is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Rathore has also popularised her image as jan-kavi, an artist who upholds the voice of people. Her choice to highlight issues concerning the everyday lives of people has become the most encapsulating voice in the election cacophony and resonates with the aam aadmi.

So instead of countering, copying, or trolling Rathore's song, parties need to rethink on ideological and development paradigm that can have a calling in the minds of voters. There is a need to have a real connection with the voters rather than merely focusing on creating the brand value of leadership faces.

Kalyani is Ph.D. holder in Sociology from the Center for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She tweets at @FiercelyBahujan. Views are personal.

(Edited by Anurag Chaubey)

Support Our Journalism

India needs fair, non-hyphenated and questioning journalism, packed with on-ground reporting. ThePrint – with exceptional reporters, columnists and editors – is doing just that.

Sustaining this needs support from wonderful readers like you.

Whether you live in India or overseas, you can take a paid subscription by clicking [here](#).

[Support Our Journalism](#)