

Urban Politics: A Case Study of Delhi

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Abstract

The term urban politics refers to the diverse political structures which reflect its complex socio-cultural set-up. It incorporates all the socio-political processes of urban and semi-urban areas, and the on-going changes in the pattern of urbanisation. It also includes diverse topics of political discourses, which also distinguishes it from the rural areas and defy the common notion of universal patterns of political activity and their impact upon the society. Sometimes urbanisation has been referred to as a natural activity which is beyond human control. It was even explained as a sign of economic growth and progress which transforms a largely agrarian society into an urbanised one. Studying urban politics becomes a daunting task keeping in view of the on-going process of urbanisation and incorporation of new elements in its political spectrum. The present study primarily focuses on the diverse socio-economic and cultural spectrum of Delhi and its impact over its politics and political discourse. It is an attempt to understand and analyse the incessant evolution of Delhi as a megacity, its heterogeneous nature, altering character, complex socio-cultural composition, growing economic profile and its political insinuations.

Key Words: Delhi, Diversity, Demography, Migrant, Urban Politics

Introduction

Urbanisation is not a new development and the urban revolution has taken place in an independent form at many places at different points of times. Urbanisation has a long history, and presently it has also been referred to as a phase of urban revolution keeping in view of growth and expansion of urban centers around the world. It seems to have developed first in Mesopotamia, in ancient Sumer, as early as 5000 BP. Later on, cities appeared in Egypt, Northern China and in India in the form of Indus Valley civilization with Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa emerging as

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major urban centers. (Urban Revolution, 2016) The term urban revolution was introduced by the archaeologist V. Gordon Childe in the 1930s and it refers to different processes by which agricultural village societies were developed into socially, economically, and politically complex urban societies. Economic liberalization and globalization played a critical role in the growth and lateral expansion of urban centres around the world. Urbanisation is generally considered as a sign of development and economic growth. There is a robust relationship between urbanization and per capita income as nearly all countries become at least 50 percent urbanized before reaching middle-income status and all high income countries are 70-80 percent urbanized (Vaidya, 2009).

India is the largest, one of the most complex and vibrant democracies of the world. At the time of independence Indian society was largely agrarian, poor and illiterate and it was even predicted that as a democracy it would fail in near future. Some thinkers have predicted that Indian democracy would have a similar fate, as witnessed, in case of Pakistan. With the spread of education and economic activity in the post-independence period India's process of urbanisation has started and rural areas gradually transformed into new urban or semi-urban areas. The existing urban centers further expanded have attracted large scale inter and intra-state migration due to rampant poverty and unemployment in their home states and local areas and lack of adequate educational and other facilities. Delhi was one of the most attractive cities of India because of its geographical location and being the centre of all political and bureaucratic activity it has vast potential of socio-economic development.

Urban Politics- Key Factors

The politics of urban areas is different from the politics of rural areas in many ways. Generally, in urban areas the population is comparatively more educated, more diverse, culturally and socially more complex, economically uneven and politically aware. For example in Delhi the population is tremendously diverse on grounds of caste, class, religion, language, ethnicity, region, race etc., while in rural areas certainly there was some dominant caste, linguistic, ethnic or religious community. The

bigger the city, the more diverse the population is, in urban areas. It happens mainly because of the reason that urban areas are the centre of regional or sometimes even national and international human activity. It gives the place a lot of exposure in terms of social mobility, economic and political activity, cultural and religious events which make it both complex and stimulating.

Keeping in view of the heterogeneous nature of urban society the following are some of the key factors that play an important role in urban politics:

1. **Diversity of Population:** In comparison to rural areas the urban population is quite diverse and complex which leaves a scope for different socio-cultural organisations and associations to play a crucial role in their political mobilisation. People belonging to various castes, class, ethnicity, regions, religious and linguistic groups shared the same territorial space to meet their life expectations. It forced the political parties to adjust their ideology, behaviour and strategy to win their electoral support. Different groups of peoples and members of different communities have their loyalties and allegiance to different political parties and socio-cultural organisations. They also affect the policy making process as the state have to satisfy the interest and expectations of such a diverse population. Class composition in urban areas is also very diverse that presents a contrasting socio-economic profile. The challenge of urban poor, socio-economic disparities and conflicting class interest also gets reflected in its political milieu.
2. **Level of Political Awareness:** Population of urban areas have better literacy level and better educational facilities in comparison to rural areas. Their level of political awareness is also higher. Media plays an important role in shaping people's political behaviour and keep them well informed. Media also acts as a strong check on the wrongdoing of the authorities and makes them accountable towards the people. Being the metropolis it always remains in media highlights and subject of judicial scrutiny. Since most of the educated class already have strong political opinions regarding things; it is hard to influence the upper and upper middle class urban voters, and political parties, especially the new entrants,

mainly rely on the slum dwellers and poor migrant population that largely work in the unorganised sector.

3. **Migrant Population:** Contrary to rural locations urban areas attract large scale migration. For example nobody can deny the fact that Delhi is a migrant state and there is no single caste, community, ethnic, linguistic or religious group or surrounding neighbouring state that can claim its natural proprietorship. Being the capital of India and a prominent centre of educational and employment opportunities it appeals not just all the Indians; but also to foreign nationals and dignitaries. On one hand it seems an entirely encouraging phenomenon, but on the other hand it also accounts for many of the problems of the state- be it water, electricity, education, housing, food, sanitation, infrastructure or law and order related problems. Due to democratic compulsions and vote bank driven politics most politicians and political parties avoid blaming the migrant population for the capital's constant woes and persistent challenges. The same migrant population also adds to its diversity, vibrancy, and economic, social and cultural profile.
4. **High Level of Political Expectations-** People of urban areas, especially of metros and other major cities, have very high expectations from the system. They want everything in place and want to see their city having a comparative edge over others and secure a suitable ranking in comparative surveys and ratings. Similarly, migrants want proper housing and other basic amenities of life, women are concerned for their safety and security, youth wants more and more lucrative jobs, students want world class education facilities, commuters want best of transportation with less congestion on roads, the middle class people expect quality of life, less corruption and lesser inflation, the young generation wants more and more freedom and liberties and so on. The list is endless, and the authorities have to face the challenge of fulfilling most, if not all of their expectations; and that also with limited resources and accountability.

Delhi: A Demographic Profile

Delhi being the capital city of India has always remain a centre of attraction for the people of all the neighbouring states and continuously

shown an upward trajectory of growth both in terms of its territory and population. The national capital territory of Delhi has shown an impressive 20.44 per cent growth in its urban area during 2001-2011. The ever growing pace of urbanisation was responsible for the reduction in the number of villages in Delhi from 300 in 1961 to just 112 in 2011. (Economic Survey, 2018-19)

Delhi as a city steadily evolved in the post- independence time period and emerged as a megacity that attracted large scale migration not only from other Indian states; but from foreign countries also. Being a centre of political and economic activity it has grown with a remarkable pace that has not only changed its demographic composition, but also the nature of its political discourse, economic profile and governance model. Its ever expanding infrastructure failed to match its growing population that gives birth to newer demands, rising expectations and populism.

The population of Delhi has grown extraordinarily and according to the census data of 2011 its population was around 1.68 crore as against around 1.39 crore in 2001. Around 97.50 per cent of its populations lived in urban areas in 2011 and it has one of highest decadal growth rate in the country. (Census, 2011) For more details please refer to Table 1.

Table1.

POPULATION OF INDIA AND DELHI & ITS GROWTH DURING 1951-2011
(Lakh)

S.No.	Years	Delhi		India		Share of Delhi's Population in All India
		Population	Growth (%)	Population	Growth(%)	
1.	1951	17.44	--	3610.88	--	0.48
2.	1961	26.59	52.44	4392.35	21.64	0.61
3.	1971	40.66	52.93	5481.60	24.80	0.74
4.	1981	62.20	53.00	6833.29	24.66	0.91
5.	1991	94.21	51.45	8464.21	23.87	1.11
6.	2001	138.51	47.02	10287.37	21.54	1.35
7.	2011	167.88	21.20	12108.55	17.70	1.39

Source: Economic Survey of Delhi 2018-19

Delhi is a home for people practicing various religions. Hinduism is majority religion in Delhi city with 80.21 % followers. Islam is second most popular religion in city with approximately 12.78 %, followed by Christianity 0.96 %, Jainism 1.39 %, Sikhism 4.43 % and Buddhism 4.43% (Delhi Religion, 2011). Demographic profile of Delhi broadly highlights

its cosmopolitan character, diverse background of its voters, economic and infrastructural challenges and political preferences.

Delhi- A Migrant Cosmopolitan City

Delhi has always been a melting pot of heterogeneous population, cultural diversity and civilizational differentiation due to its geographical location and political significance in India's political history. Over the period of time it has developed a rich cultural heritage which makes it one of the most vibrant cities of the world. It became a natural home of invaders, foreign visitors and surrounding neighbouring population and the most happening place of political, administrative and economic activity. Delhi has been termed as a truly cosmopolitan city keeping in view of its large scale migrant population, foreign nationals, diverse cultural and religious traditions, difference cuisines, languages, festivals and so on. Since a significant part of Delhi's population is constituted by the migrants and most of its expansion has taken place in the surrounding rural areas, nobody could actually claim it onto the basis of language, ethnicity, religion or other regional basis as in case of Mumbai, Kolkata or Chennai where language, ethnicity or sons of the soil theory (Weiner, 1978) are at work. However, ironically, in terms of language Delhi is still not as cosmopolitan as other metros such as Mumbai, where less than 50% of the population speaks Marathi and Bangalore, where less than half speak Kannada (Mukerji, 2011).

The migrant population started flooding Delhi as early as 1911, when it has become the capital of India. The first wave of mass migration was witnessed soon after Partition from 1947 to 1951 when a huge population of Sikhs and Hindus have flocked to Delhi ("Cosmopolitan Delhi", 2013). The large scale migration which during 1946-47 didn't stop there and rather became an unending phenomenon. The administrative machinery of the newly independent India has been set-up in Delhi and people from across the country were offered official postings in government offices. Infrastructural development for government officials and business purposes has given the city a new look. Over the period of time it became an educational hub and land of opportunities for students, professionals, workers and business community.

According to an estimate, nearly 40 per cent of the city's population is constituted of migrants, accounting for nearly 3- 3.5 million migrant voters in Delhi (Kumar, 2013). Contrary to the popular perception, Delhi, not Mumbai is the most sought after city for the people of India. The primary reasons for such a huge flow of migrants to Delhi are its highest per capita income among all metros, quality infrastructure, relatively high quality of public services, and access to quality education and career opportunities.

The migrant population, however, have changed Delhi's economic status in a significant way. The recent migrants to Delhi, especially from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have migrated in search of better livelihood opportunities and large part of them belongs to the lower economic class. For example of all the migrants from Bihar, nearly 63 per cent are poor while another 30 per cent belong to the middle class. Similarly, of those who migrated from UP, 46 per cent are poor and another 45 per cent are belong to the middle class (Kumar, 2013). This is in sharp contrast to that large population Punjabis and Sindhis who migrated in the city as refugees at the time of partition of India, which now belong to the upper and middle classes. Delhi now no longer remains a city of rich people and it has a sizable lower middle class population and a large number of poor people who lived in slums and unauthorised colonies which have scattered all over Delhi and has strongly influenced the political calculus of different political parties in the recent assembly elections.

People came to Delhi for different reasons which were dominated by employment and finding better livelihood opportunities. Among other reasons are the shifting of the household permanently, marriage and better educational opportunities. Among the push factors in the surrounding neighbouring states is their inability to create better educational facilities and generating employment for their inhabitants both in the organised and unorganised sectors. Despite landing in slums and working in the unorganised sector, the migrants, mainly from UP and Bihar, find the city lucrative due to its high per capita income and other facilities such as access to good roads, bridges, flyovers, better healthcare facilities, better transportation such as buses and Metro services, and also the charm of living in the capital of India. Most of these people have settled in the Trans- Yamuna area and the urban

periphery of Delhi. Apart from that Delhi has also attracted people from Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh etc. and many of them have settled here for generations.

The Issue of Illegality of Urban Poor

Delhi has never been planned in a systematic way in the post-independence period. Even during the British period the new capital city was just an extension of the older city of the same name, designed and partially developed for administrative purposes only. But they have still given central Delhi a decent look and made proper arrangements for all official and political offices and residences. But after independence nothing has happened in terms of urban planning which can be categorised as a sincere effort in the direction of making it a world class city.

Although in the post New Economic Policy period attempts have been made to make Delhi a better place to live in. With the growing profile and relevance of New Delhi in world affairs, remarkable performance of its economy, availability and affordability of resources and a desire to compete with the best cities of the world has forced the political leadership of both the state and the central government to work sincerely in that direction. The creation of DMRC and introduction of Metro has solved the traffic woes of the citizens irrespective of their economic class. Master plan has been prepared and a lot of development work has been done during the Commonwealth Games. The on-going Central Vista development project is going to be a major milestone in Delhi's infrastructure as it'll not only improve the productivity and efficiency of the government and administration; but also gives the city a new look and world class office infrastructure. But despite that the problem of urban poor due to large scale migration keeps haunting all the development work as the city was crumbling under the excessive burden over its resources- both economic and physical.

The state attracts migrants in huge numbers and over the period of time they have settled and became voters and started gaining political importance due to their significant numbers. Political parties have also raised their issues, mainly relating to housing and other basic public services to life such as water, electricity, sanitation, education, healthcare infrastructure and so on. Among others the issue of housing

and regularisation of unauthorised colonies and notified slums became so prominent that none of the political parties dare to talk about the removal of illegal settlements and encroachment of public spaces. Activism, litigation and populism have further aggravated the situation. It has given birth to a debate between the urban poor's right to shelter which has been explained in the spirit of Article 21 and the issue of illegality and encroachment of public land which has created innumerable problems for the state authorities and its inhabitants. It became a highly debatable topic in public discourse and attracts judicial scrutiny. The central government has even introduced a scheme named as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) to check inter-state migration of people. The scheme provides livelihood security in rural areas by ensuring at least 100 days of employment to every household in a financial year. But it has a limited impact and still a lot more needs to be done, primarily by the state governments to ensure better education and generate employment both for its educated and uneducated population.

In order to reduce congestion, discourage migration and give the city a better look the civic authorities and the government have to run demolition drives against illegal encroachments of public places. Between 2004 and 2007 alone, however, at least 45,000 homes were demolished, and since the beginning of 2007, eviction notices have been served on at least three other large settlements. (Bhan, 2009) Interestingly, in the recent past these evictions were also not the result of planning directives or actions initiated by either municipal or city level state authorities; but as final verdict of several Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed in Delhi courts by non-poor resident welfare and trade associations. It can also be seen in the light of inaction and indifference of different political parties towards Delhi's crumbling infrastructure and excessive burden over its resources due to vote bank politics. This gradual change in the attitude of the judiciary has surprised many and the champions of human rights of slum dwellers that once lauded the judicial protection, have started criticising their verdicts.

Political Trends and Voting Behaviour in Delhi

One of the lesser known facts about Delhi's political history was that Chaudhary Brahm Prakash of Congress party became the first Chief Minister of Delhi in 1952 when Delhi became a Part-C state of the Indian union. As a popular leader who was known for his organizational and administrative skills, he became the Chief Minister at a very young age of 34 years. (Roy, 2013) His tenure lasted only for three years and he was succeeded by Gurmukh Nihal Singh in 1955 that remained in power for one year. The States Reorganisation Act, 1956 made Delhi a Union Territory under the control of the central government. It was only in 1993 when Delhi became the National Capital Territory with its own Legislature and Chief Minister ("Delhi's Chief Ministers", 2020).

Since 1993, Delhi has witnessed seven assembly elections. Like the rest of India, Congress has a strong presence in Delhi, being Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) the main opposition party till 1971. Bhartiya Lok Dal (BLD) has replaced BJS in the 1977 general elections and gave Congress the first electoral jolt by winning all the seven parliamentary constituencies. After the failed Janata Party experience the party made a comeback and again dominated the political space in 1980 and 1984 Lok Sabha elections. But since 1989 Lok Sabha election, the dominance of Congress has been challenged by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). It has polarised the state into two main political parties, the Congress and the BJP. The BJP posed a serious challenge to Congress in Delhi, especially in the parliamentary elections of 1991, 1996, 1998 and 1999 when the party won five, five, six and seven seats respectively. The Congress made a comeback in 2004 Lok Sabha elections when it won six out of seven seats and again improved its tally to a clean sweep (seven out of seven) in the 2009 general elections. However, in the last two parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019 the BJP riding on a NaMo wave have registered a thumping majority by winning all the seven seats. The Congress candidates were not even on the second spot as some of them were replaced by the AAP.

The assembly elections although presents a continues shift in power and political equations and the BJP has never been able to regain a clear majority ever since 1993 when the party had won 49 seats out of 70 and secured 42.8 per cent of the vote share. In next three assembly elections of 1998, 2003 and 2008 the Congress has registered a handsome victory under the leadership of Sheila Dixit and the party had won 52, 47 and 43 seats respectively, although, with a shift and declining vote share of 47.8, 48.1 and 40.3 per cent of the popular votes. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has emerged as a third political force in the capital during the 2008 state assembly elections, when the party has secured 14.1 per cent of the total vote share. Although, the party was able to win only two seats, it has played a crucial role in polarising the Dalit votes which were traditional Congress supporters.

The political fight in Delhi largely remain concentrated between these two key political parties until the state assembly elections of 2013, when the 'Anti- Corruption Movement' born Aam Aadmi Party has challenged the traditional brand of politics and emerges as the second largest party, pushing Congress at the third spot. The AAP has surprised all by winning 28 seats in their maiden election and secured 29.1 per cent of the votes share. The BJP has won 31 seats with 33.1 per cent of the vote share and the Congress made a dismal performance and was able to win only 8 seats despite having a 24.6 per cent of vote share. The AAP has registered a landslide majority in the last two assembly elections of 2015 and 2020 by winning 67 and 62 assembly seats respectively. In terms of AAP's vote percentage a marginal decline of 0.77 percentages has been registered between 2015 and 2020 and in the recent assembly elections it has secured 53.57% of votes. Now, the two cornered fight has translated into a triangular contest and in this seems to remain so in near future.

Voting Behaviour and Political Support Base of Different Political Parties

Delhi has been a traditional supporter of the Congress party due to its all-encompassing character and ever since India's independence they have voted the party in power, both in centre and the state, until they were first challenged by the Janata Party in 1977, and later during late 1980s by the BJP. Caste and ethnic cleavages were supposed to be

dominant factors during the elections, not just in Delhi but in entire India, and a number of researches have proved that how mobilisation of castes have changed the dynamics of electoral politics. In the initial phase, the Congress party got the support of different caste groups and minority communities. Especially, the Dalits, backward castes and the Muslims of the city were the strong supporters of the party.

The BJP was largely popular among the upper castes such as the Brahmins, the Rajputs, Vaishya/ Bania and the Punjabi- Khatri community and they have given their consistent support to the party even during the adverse circumstances, when the party perform badly in elections. Among others the Jats have also preferred the BJP in the assembly elections. On the other hand, the political mobilisation of the Dalits of UP under the BSP and their remarkable electoral success have also mobilised them upto some extent in Delhi. Keeping in view of their sizable population, (17 per cent) they can't be ignored in Delhi's politics. Traditionally they were Congress supporters; but BSP's entry in Delhi's politics has divided their votes between the Congress and the BSP. The impact of caste hierarchies is not limited merely to fixing the social ranking; but it also have an economic aspect and generally people belonging to higher caste groups are also professionally, economically and socially better off. Therefore, economic variables also reflect caste hierarchies and voting preferences.

The new entrant AAP, although, have mobilised the people cutting across caste lines; but it was largely dependent upon the support of the backward communities including the Dalits and the Muslims. The migrants or say primarily the people who're poor and living in urban slums, unauthorised colonies and settlements have voted in large numbers in AAP's favour. The AAP shares most of its support base with Congress and may be it is because of the last fifteen years of anti-incumbency, huge corruption charges, high inflation, increasing crime against women, political arrogance and dissatisfaction of Congress party's traditional supporters that now they have shifted their loyalties towards the AAP. Almost 60 percent urban poor have voted for AAP in the assembly elections of 2015. A dominant segment of the migrant population that comes from Eastern Uttar Pradesh/Bihar (Poorvanchalis) have also preferred AAP over BJP and the Congress. AAP's much hyped success in reforming the school education, primary

healthcare via mohalla clinics, freebies and a clear chief Ministerial candidate have played a major role in its electoral success in the assembly elections of 2020.

If we analyse the class wise composition of the support base of different political parties then the Congress party always gets the support of the middle, the lower middle class and the economically backward or say the poor sections of the society, and until the emergence of AAP they have always voted for the Congress. The BJP was mainly popular among the upper and the upper middle class, which includes the government officials, professionals, traders and other business community. From 2008 assembly election onwards a new trend has been observed when the class solidarity has started taking prominence over caste based support. Over the years there was a lot convergence of caste and class based votes between the BJP and the Congress, but with the advent of AAP a clear shift was visible during the 2013, 2015, 2020 state assembly elections when people preferred their class considerations over their caste based loyalties.

With its remarkable performance in the last two assembly elections AAP has changed the direction of politics in urban areas, particularly in metro cities. The cosmopolitan migrant nature of these cities, class identity of people, huge population of urban poor, addressing the question of very basic amenities of life, freebies, populism and reaching out to the people directly through traditional politics could turn the entire political game upside down. Grabbing the nerve of the city, AAP has emerged as a key political force in the capital and will remain so in times to come.

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