

**By Sidharth Mishra**



No political move in India is driven without a caste consideration. Similarly, no analysis of an initiative, administrative, social or political is complete without putting it through the prism of caste. Social scientists, known for their overt anti-BJP bias, have once again gone to town ridiculing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push, this time for appearing in 'chowkidar avatar' in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

These social analysts chosen the oft repeated line of upper caste and backward caste divide. Identifying the rich with the upper castes, they have tried to paint the initiative as mocking at the Dalit and other backward caste communities. In their premise they have concluded that the poor lower castes have been reduced to playing doormats for the upper caste rich.

This is a faulty premise, coloured as is the world view of these scientists with their anti-Modi bias. A random survey of the security guards in the national Capital would show that nine of the 10 'chowkidars' belong to the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. More telling is the further finding that if not more about seven out of these 10 'Chowkidars' are either upper caste Rajput or Bhumihar or Brahmin and in some cases even Baniya and Kayastha.

By the turn of the century these migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh effectively came to replace the Nepali Bahadurs as the guards in the city. It's not just the BJP MP Ravindra Kumar Sinha, who too comes from Bihar, owns a big security agency. In fact, a large number of security guard companies are today being managed by Purvanchali contractors and those from Central UP districts of Etah, Etawah and Mainpuri.

There is a reason for it. These contractors find it easy to source guards from these districts of central UP and the Purvanchal areas. These are the districts where the upper caste rural masses have been greatly affected by the empowerment of the Dalits and OBCs. The upper

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caste rural youth, there are several historical evidences to it, in the past made to the police and para military forces in large numbers.

With the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, the upper caste positions have been usurped, if not by the Dalits certainly by the OBCs especially the dominant intermediate castes of Yadavs and Kurmis.

In Bihar, the story has been worse. With the rise of Lalu Prasad Yadav in Patna and the Maoists in the hinterland, the upper caste youth had to face the double-whammy and preferred shifting out and Delhi NCR, being the El Dorado, being the destination.

Some social scientists may point that migration from these districts of Uttar Pradesh and several districts of Bihar was not community specific. That's true but the people from the other backward castes, especially the extremely backwards, came with their skills of barber, carpenter, mason, cook, so on and so forth.

Those not from the skill possessing communities came with the ability of hard labour, thus were quickly absorbed as unskilled workers in industrial estates and on real estate sites. On the other hand, bereft of any such attributes, the 'able bodied' (ironical) and 'handsome' (a major consideration for recruitment) upper caste uprooted youth found nourishment in the security agencies. With some ability at reading and writing, these youth possessing qualities of personal hygiene, were found to be most apt for guarding the gates, which also entailed maintaining logbooks.

With their forefathers having adorned the khaki or the olive-green uniforms, to them wearing the Chowkidar's dark blue and/or light blue provided some restoration of self-esteem and massage of the personal ego. They agreed to work for abysmally low wages in the chowkidar's job as they well understood their shortcomings and the opportunity their job provided them to maintain 'surveillance' over industrial workers, safai karamcharis and domestic helps, who mostly come from the backward communities.

One of the major features of this new urban 'chowkidar' community is that even as they live as a closely-knit diaspora in Delhi and other urban refuges, they maintain a close home connect. No wonder, the security agency owners are at their wit's end to meet the demands of workload

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during the Holi and Chhath festivities and summer marriage seasons. These events coincide with sowing and harvest seasons, when these 'chowkidars' travel homeward in large numbers.

This also vouches for their poor urban working conditions, which forces them to maintain their home connect. But for some accredited large security companies, most of the agencies hire them on daily basis for 12-hour-long shifts. There is no concept of weekly offs or leave of any nature be it casual, earned or medical. There are no pensions or social security cover for them. Thus, the need to fall back upon their communities for sustaining themselves both in their place of work and back home.

Coming back to the Prime Minister's 'chowkidar avatar'. These security guards are important for the BJP as most of them continue to be voters in their hometowns. The candidates use the security agency contractors to source their campaign to woo these voters to the polling booths.

With the Narendra Modi government providing 10 percent reservation for the poor among the upper castes, transferring funds from PM pension schemes into the bank accounts of the farmers and pushing ahead with the Ayushman Bharat Yojana for urban poor, the BJP in the chowkidars could well have their counter to the caste combinations build by the Opposition Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh and the UPA in Bihar.

The Opposition would do well to put their heads together to read the message which the Prime Minister seeks to deliver through the chowkidars. They can ignore it at their own peril.

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