

Changing Socio-Political Dynamics of Delhi: Role of Migrants

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Abstract

This article emphasises the changing social and political scenario that has transformed the role of migrants in Delhi. The socio-political and economic dynamics of Delhi has witnessed a sea change due to rapid influx of migrants in the city. The rise in number of slums and unauthorized areas over time which have migrants as main occupants has a direct impact on the agendas of political parties. The results of elections held since 2013 reveals that the pro-poor agenda had translated into votes for political parties besides the traditional vote bank. Apart from this, the political aspiration of migrants is also crucial for electoral fortunes of political parties. This research paper examines the causes and impact of rapid migration on Delhi's socio-political milieu. It also focuses on the economic and political behaviour of Delhi in the recent past. The research work has used both primary and secondary sources for the purpose. This paper foregrounds a descriptive as well as statistical analysis of Delhi's demography, composition and basis of birth, about the colonies and electoral politics and moreover the dominance of migrants has been highlighted in such a manner that an analysis of the statistical data with descriptive perusal makes it more reliable and understandable.

Keywords: *Delhi, Socio-Political, Demography and Delhi, Dominance and Delhi, Migrants, Delhi Migrants, Changing Delhi, Electoral Politics*

Introduction

The National Capital Territory of Delhi is the capital city of Union of India and one of the important cities of the world in present times. It carries an unparalleled importance in all spheres of life. Over its history of many

thousands of years it assumed many names and colours and was attacked, ruined and resettled a number of times by different rulers from different parts of the world since the Mahabharata Period¹. However, Delhi has preserved its overall original character narrating its social, political and economic depth and importance.

The present day socio-cultural composition of Delhi makes it representative of the whole nation emanating a national, social, cultural and political portrait of India. People living in Delhi belong to diverse colours, languages, regions, religions and professions from all over the world. They have been professing and pursuing their interests and lives fearlessly (at least since the Independence) portraying the huge diversity in all the spheres of life reflecting India's cultural and philosophical heritage and legacy. Each and every event in this city has an important message for everyone and has a huge national impact.

Just after independence the demographic dynamism of Delhi started changing when it received more than 4,70,000 refugees from Pakistan whereas 3,20,000 Muslims migrated to Pakistan in 1947². However, since 1982 there has been a remarkable change in its demographic character when India hosted the Asian Games. To make this event successful so as to showcase the prowess of India, the government of that time had thrown all its weight behind the event. It invited dignitaries from across the world and as a result, Delhi witnessed a huge inflow of experts and professionals. People from India and other countries made Delhi their home during the period and many of those people (mainly Indians) did not return and became a part of Delhi.

People from different parts of India mainly Uttar Pradesh and Bihar came as skilled and unskilled labourers who eventually settled in different parts of Delhi changing the demographics of Delhi forever. This demographic change has been reflected in the social, cultural and political life of Delhi as well as leading to new forms of social grouping mainly on the basis of region. The newly migrated population eventually became an important vote bank for every political party in Delhi.

People from different states and regions have settled in specific areas of Delhi over time, turning them into powerful political groups in those areas. This has resulted into a number of groups such as Poorvanchali (Natives of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), Uttrakhandi, Haryanvi, Kashmiri, Oriya, Bengali, Assamese and Keralites etc. Rao (1986) found that

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Migrants belonging to a particular region, language, religion, caste and tribe tend to live together in separate neighbourhood in cities and they form ethnic groups on the basis of shared elements of culture and ideology, merging lower levels of differences based on sub-caste or sub-religion³.

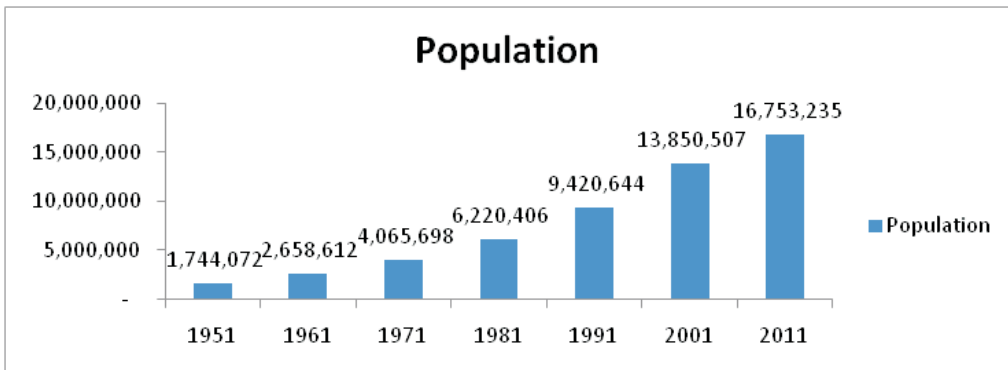
According to the census of 2011, nearly 80 lakhs and around 47% of the total population in Delhi are migrants from different states of which the share of Uttar Pradesh is the highest and Bihar is catching up and the collective population from these two states is around 41% making it the most powerful vote bank in Delhi politics. This reflects the changing nature of politics in Delhi. Gimpel & Jason also found this in their study, “Migration is said to have a lot of effect in electoral politics. It is often said to be one of the several underlying political change⁴.

Demographic Dynamism of Delhi

The population of Delhi has witnessed remarkable change over time from 1951. Its population has increased by around 10 times in the last 60 years. Population in 1951 was around 1.74 million that increased to 16.75 million in 2011 and at present (2016) it is around 17.8 million. This has brought a lot of changes in the overall demographic composition.

Table 1

Population ⁵		
Year	Population	Decennial Growth
1951	17,44,072	90%
1961	26,58,612	52%
1971	40,65,698	53%
1981	62,20,406	53%
1991	94,20,644	51%
2001	1,38,50,507	47%
2011	1,67,53,235	21%

Table 2

Delhi which happens to be the destination for government employees, professionals and students from upper class strata, started finding an inflow of unskilled and semiskilled workers and students even from middle and lower middle classes⁶. Mal-governance, poor economy and rising unemployment pushed the landless labourer, semi-skilled craftsmen and workers to join the migration late when the economy of Bihar and then Uttar Pradesh reached the pinnacle of dysfunction. The breaking of caste system in metro cities for livelihood which allowed higher caste to work as vegetable vendors and rickshaw pullers etc. encourages migration⁷. These factors have contributed to the change in demographic composition of Delhi. At present around 47% of Delhi's population consist of migrants.

Demographic Composition of Delhi on Basis of Birth

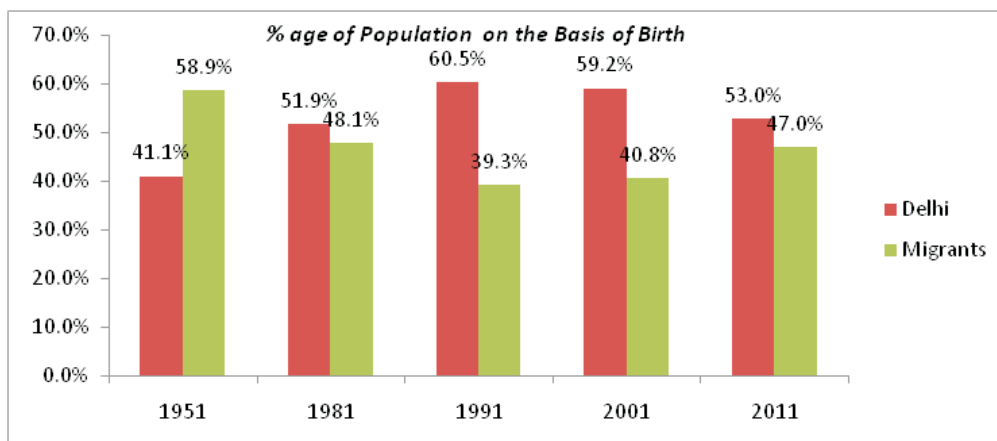
Since 1951, on the basis of the place of birth, Delhi has been a city of migrants. 58.9% of Delhi residents were migrants in 1951 of which a huge number comprised of refugees from Pakistan. But the inflow from different parts of the country and world to Delhi sustained in the following years and most of those people became permanent residents of city but at the same time they remained committed to their respective native places from where they migrated and in fact have assumed regional identities like Poorvanchali, Uttrakhandi, Bihari, Bengali, South Indian and Kashmiri etc. on the basis of shared values, culture and interests⁸. As per the 2011 census the proportion of migrant population is 47% of the total population. Also the huge migration from Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh to Delhi has increased the share of migrant population in Delhi and this has resulted into domination of Poorvanchali population in Delhi at around 41% of the total population.

Table 3

Demographic Composition on the Basis of Place of Birth⁹					
	1951	1981	1991	2001	2011
Delhi	7,17,310	32,31,285	57,00,000	82,04,230	88,79,215
Migrants	10,26,762	29,89,121	37,00,000	56,46,277	78,74,020
Total	17,44,072	62,20,406	94,20,644	1,38,50,507	1,67,53,235

Government of Delhi, 2012, Delhi Statistical Handbook

Table 4



Delhi as a Political Entity

Delhi is one of the seven union territories of India and has its own Vidhan Sabha as a unicameral law making body with seventy Members of Legislative Assembly, seven Lok Sabha members and 3 Rajya Sabha members under the Indian constitution. Since the first legislative assembly which was constituted on 7 March 1952 with 48 members, it has been dominated by the Congress till 2013 when Aam Adami Party (AAP) came into power except during the period from 1993 to 1998 when Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) was in power. With the arrival of AAP, the politics of Delhi has witnessed a sea change. The role of JJ clusters, unauthorized colonies and migrants have changed in Delhi politics from just a voter to political activists and this is considered to be the turning point of Delhi politics.

J J Clusters, Unauthorized Colonies and Electoral Politics of Delhi

Delhi is one of the largest urban settlements of the world with a population of around 17.5 million. Government agencies in the city have tried their best to provide proper residential and civic infrastructures but their efforts have not been enough to satisfy the swelling city whose population has increased by ten times in the last six decades. According to the 2010 estimate by Municipal Corporation of Delhi, around 49% of the total population lives in JJ Clusters and unauthorized colonies in different parts of Delhi and around 87 lakh people are living in these areas, increasing their political importance.

Table 5

JJ Cluster and Unauthorized Colonies¹⁰			
	No of Colonies/Clusters	No of Families	No of People
Unauthorized Colonies	1155	7,50,000	48,00,000
JJ Clusters	675	4,00,000	20,00,000

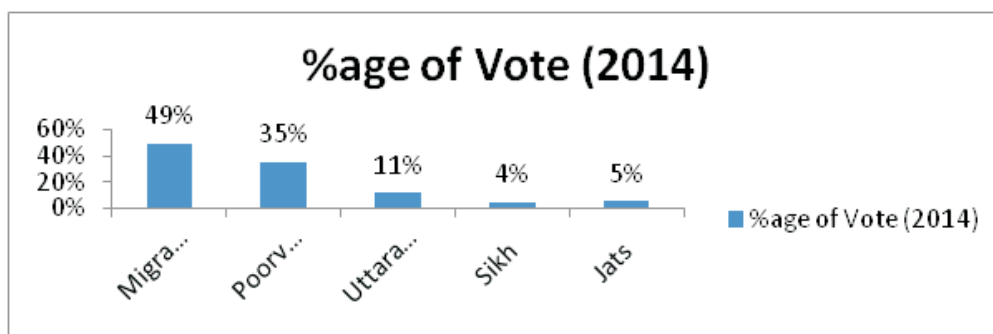
Government of Delhi, 2018, Economic Survey of Delhi 2016

Since long JJ clusters and unauthorized colonies has been very important for the electoral fortunes of political parties in Delhi. There was a popular perception that Congress was the party of the poor and its policies were often pro-poor and BJP to be the party of middle class and business community¹¹. But the arrival of AAP and emergence of BJP in national politics seems to have changed the electoral dynamics of Delhi. The popular perception is that deprived off most from the basic civic amenities, the residents of these settlements go behind promises of better civic amenities in these areas and the results of 2015 Legislative Assembly seems to confirm the same. AAP came up with the most lucrative and pro-poor agenda and swept the election limiting BJP to just three members and Congress to zero members. Although the promises made by AAP have long term civic consequences but people in these areas have ignored these.

Dominance of Migrants

About 80 lakhs people from other states live in Delhi which is 47% of the total population of the national capital¹² and these migrants comprise of people from all parts of the country and the world. As far as electoral participation is considered, the population from every state or region of India is a considerable number which is capable of affecting electoral results but for most of these migrant groups it is limited to one or a few assembly constituencies¹³. Although there are a few groups which have altered the political grammar of the state, those are primarily from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. People from Uttarakhand comprise of nearly 10 to 12 per cent in 10 constituencies with a vote bank of around 13 lakhs and thus are able to decide the fate of the candidates effectively.

Table 6



There are over 30 lakh voters from Bihar and Eastern UP region in Delhi of the 1.15 crore electorate. Their numbers are as high as 25-48 per cent in over 30 assembly constituencies of Delhi's total 70 Assembly constituencies, implying the decisive role they would play in these localities. For example in Deoli constituency of South Delhi, this percentage stands at a staggering 48%. Similarly Uttam Nagar in West Delhi has 41% of voters from Purvanchal. More than a dozen other seats have more than 30% Poorvanchali voters. These include Sangam Vihar, Vikaspuri, Patparganj, Shahdara, R K Puram, Matiala, Kirari, Burari, Dwarka, Palam, Badli, Karawal Nagar, Laxmi Nagar, Ghonda, Mangolpuri and Badarpur etc among others. Also there are more than a dozen assembly constituencies that have Poorvanchali voters up to 20-30%. This clearly indicates that any alignment on the basis of regional identities can

significantly change the electoral fortunes of any political party¹⁴. And if two dominant migrant groups, namely, Poorvanchali and Uttarakhandi, come together, they themselves can completely change the electoral fortunes in Delhi. Perhaps that is the reason why all the political groups have been trying to attract these two groups along with others to their respective camps.

The Way Ahead

It is imperative for any political organization to have a strong support base in the areas it aspires to remain a force. Moreover if it wants to be in power, it has to ensure that their support base in most of the groups remains intact. It is important for the political leadership of Delhi to understand the needs of the poor migrants who are mostly engaged in earning their bread and butter. The leaders are required to come out with viable schemes to facilitate the poor migrants in settlement and betterment of their lives. The situation in Delhi has changed and these people are settled in the city for some time and have enough awareness about their collective bargaining power. Their ability and importance in political power play is well recognised. The migrants play a significant role as a pressure group. But in the recent past, their aspirations and demands has led to a change in their perspective. From a mere vote bank and pressure group they have been demanding a more participative and responsible role for themselves. Because of their economic stability and social recognition now, they have been gradually demanding positions in party organisations. They are also in the fray of tickets from political parties in elections. AAP has recognised the strength of the migrants and Poorvanchalis. In the two assemblies, one parliamentary and corporation elections in which AAP has participated, it has recognised and provided chance to the migrants to contest elections on the AAP tickets. However, this trend of recognising the presence and influence of Poorvanchalis in Delhi's political dynamics is well recognised by both Congress and BJP. But giving them enough opportunities to contest the elections on party symbol has not been given due care and attention. The symbolism is there by way of giving party tickets hither and thither to the Poorvanchalis but the demand from the migrants for their share in the political cake is yet to be met.

A lot of water has flown in the river Yamuna since 2013 assembly elections. The political scene in Delhi seems to have changed as AAP was the second largest party in assembly election. But in the Parliamentary election, BJP swept the poll

by winning all the seven constituencies in 2014. But strangely in 2015, AAP sent 67 members to assembly out of 70 leaving only 3 for BJP and Congress could not score at all. The result of Municipal Corporation on the other hand clearly speaks louder about AAP's unpopularity. In the recently concluded Municipal Corporation elections in Delhi, the BJP has successfully retained all the three corporations by winning 181 seats and 36.08% of popular votes. While AAP could maintain the distant second by winning just 48 seats and its votes share has drastically come down to 26.23%. The Congress could win just 30 seats and 21.09 % of the popular votes¹⁵. It is rightly said that politics is the game of making impossible possible. But from these electoral and political developments there is a message. In Delhi politics now, the BJP and AAP are the two main forces and Congress seems to have been losing its ground. In such a situation, political parties like BJP, Congress and AAP have to respond to the new realities. If these parties want to remain in power or to regain the lost position, they have to garner support from every possible corner in general but they certainly require some specific strategies to attract migrant groups in particular. Their focus must be on all the possible migrant groups but they have to devise better plans to win back and maintain the Poorvanchali and Uttarakhandi groups. This was well established by the results of assembly elections 2013 and 2015 and emergence of AAP on political scene of Delhi. The results also suggest that these groups have not only worked as vote banks or informal groups but they have played an important role in shaping and providing political representation to these regional interest groups.

Conclusion

Precisely over the period of last three decades, the migrants have shaped the socio-economic and political scenario of Delhi. Although initially they migrated as casual labourers and government servants but later on education, livelihood and business opportunities became the major reasons of attracting the people from the different parts of the country. In the last three decades in general, the migrants started participating in politics in large numbers. The politics of inclusion of migrants by BJP in early 1990s had resulted into formation of first government of BJP after 1993 Delhi assembly elections. The rise of Congress to power in 1998 and continuation for three consecutive terms from 1998 to 2013 was a result of association of newly migrant population to the Congress party. The phenomenal emergence of AAP and its success in two consecutive assembly

elections of 2013 and 2015 was only possible due to new alignment of migrant population in Delhi's politics. Abysmal performance by both Congress and BJP in the assembly elections of 2015 has prompted definite organisational changes in both the parties. Elevation of a Poorvanchali (migrants whose origin could be traced to eastern UP and Bihar) to the post of Delhi state party president in 2018 is the testimony of the changing role of migrants in the Delhi's politics. The bold step by BJP in the recent past has resulted in an immediate electoral dividend. Thumping victory of BJP in MCD elections of 2018 by a huge margin could be interpreted as realignment of migrants in Delhi politics. The use of Poorvanchalis as mere vote bank is the thing of the past. They are now the faces of the main political parties like AAP, BJP and Congress in Delhi. Their role has drastically changed in the recent past. Thus the change in demographic profile of Delhi has resulted in the changing role of the migrants in Delhi's socio-political dynamics which is clearly visible since last three decades. The present socio-political scenario and assertion of migrants will continue. This assertion is clearly visible within the party structure and outside amongst the electorates. There is a pressing demand from this newly emerged pressure group to accommodate their aspirations and to provide them with opportunities so that the slogan, "*Vote hamara raj tumhara, nahichalega*" (Our votes and your rule, no more) could be nullified and neutralised. The incorporation and assimilation of migrants will pave the way for a harmonious and prosperous National Capital Territory of Delhi.

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