

# **Public policies fail when they do not deliver political messages: Role of political organizations in delivering public policies**

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## **Abstract**

*In a competitive democratic system, the re-election of a political party in the government depends on the ability of public policies to deliver a political message, which the party wants to convey to people. The message aims at legitimizing the party's claim for power, persuading its existing support bases to continue their electoral favor and expanding it further. The paper argues that the success or failure of a policy does not depend only on the ability of implementing agencies, but also on the ability of the party organization in delivering the political message. The party organization establishes an interface between the party and people and delivers the message. The paper, theoretically, takes a shift from the conservative approach of analyzing public policy, i.e. top-down and bottom-up approaches, policy processes, administrative capacities, analysis of systems and sub-systems, etc., to organizational strength of the party in power.*

## **Introduction:**

The conventional literature on public policy defines it as a tool for delivering public benefits or services through public administration. The literature conceptualizes public policy in terms of specific political and economic contexts, political and bureaucratic actors, and systems and sub-systems. Public policy has also been discussed in terms of its inherent relationship with the politics and political actors of the land. However, the literature limits itself to policy making processes and government actions while defining and discussing the relationship of public policy with politics and political actors (Dye, 1969; Jenkins, 1978; Hill 1993). Further, while defining public policy as a process, literature does not extend its description beyond political processes taking place within the realm of political system, which confines itself to the businesses conducted by government and its apparatuses (Easton, 1965; Rose, 1969; Gilliat, 1984). The more recent discussions on public policy has widened its scope and covered various issues including trade and liberalization, migration, taxation, technological advancement, social

services, development and inequalities, etc (Rosenthal, 2004). Such discussions also readily appear through media and other open information sources.

The entire range of literature, however, notwithstanding the literature related to populist policies and broader political environment, does not provide enough focus on the importance of a public policy for specific political party and its electoral impact by engaging local level organizational structure of the party in power. The debates regarding the interface of politics with public policy encompass identifying policy problems, formulating exclusive policies, influence of lobbying, politics of resource distribution and who gets the benefits (Singh & Kumar, 2012). An important area of local politics and its involvement with the public policy is still uncovered. We do not have much information available to reflect as to how different layers of the organization of the party in power interact with the public policy. This paper tries to understand the relationship of local level party organization with the public policy. Paper also tries to understand the patterns of such relationship and its impact on the implementation of the policy at the ground level.

The argument that the paper puts forward is that the party organization has an important role in disseminating the information about the policy among people and encouraging them to take benefit of it. Role of the district, sub-divisional and village level organizations of the party becomes more crucial because not only these organizations have to disseminate relevant information to the people but also facilitate people in availing the benefits of the policy. These organizational setups of the party also need to communicate to the people as to why party is delivering these policies and what interests of people would be fulfilled through these policies. The paper argues that the success or failure of a policy does not depend only on the ability of implementing agencies to deliver policy benefits, but also on the ability of the party organization in delivering the political message. The party organization establishes an interface between the party and people and delivers the message. If party organization at the local level fails to deliver the message, party's electoral prospects in future may get affected. This becomes even more important in the context of India where political parties have used specific public policies, particularly social policies, for electoral gains. Social policies carry political significance to political parties in power. The success or failure of such policies has the potential to affect the political life of the party that designs them.

To investigate above discussed argument, the paper discusses a case of Uttar Pradesh (UP) state of India where *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) was in power during 2007-12. The paper looks at the implementation of social policies related to education, health and housing in UP. UP, since early 1980s, has witnessed a

strong wave of fragmented politics and cemented relationship between political parties and social groups based on material benefits and incentives. Social policies in UP has been used to deliver exclusive benefits to specific social groups to retain their support for the party in power. BSP is one among such party that has practiced such politics and has used social policies to empower, socially and economically, particular sections of the society.

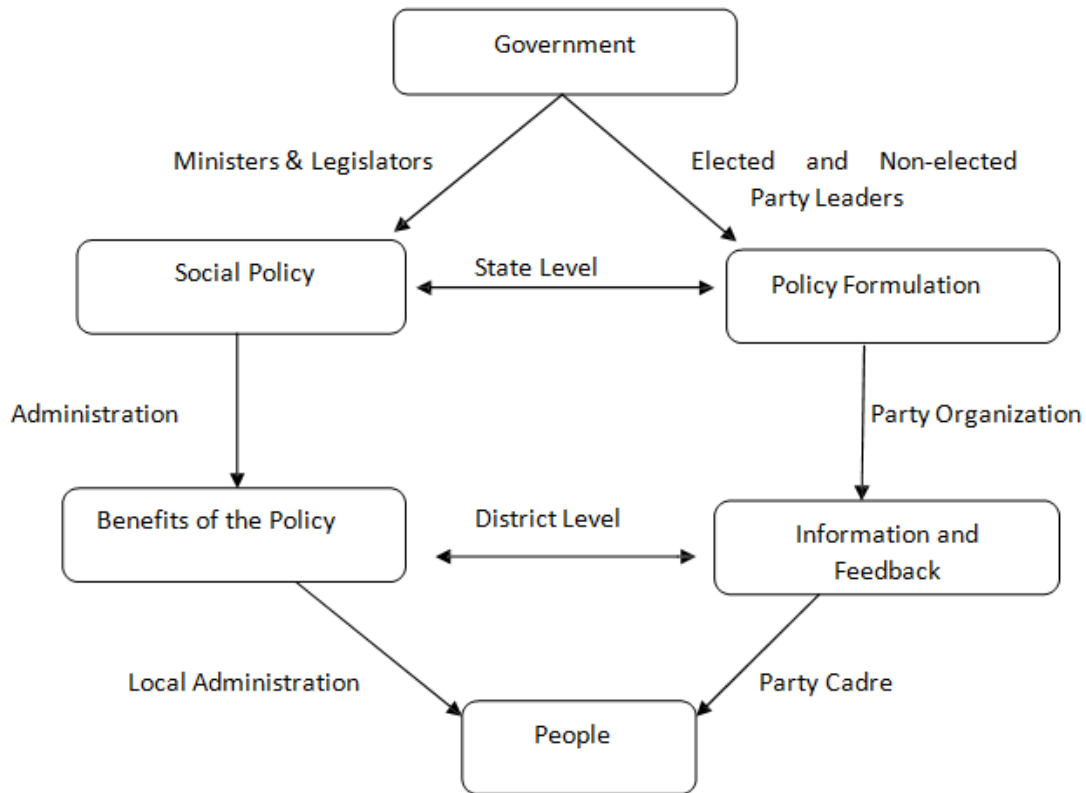
**Framework:**

The role of party organization in the delivery of the social policy benefits is vital. Studies have shown that failure of social security and welfare related schemes, especially those are related to poverty alleviation, is a reason of weak organizations of political parties (Kohli, 1987 & Manor, 1988). Studies on local and district level organizations of political parties have shown that parties with strong organizations at the district level have been able to gather public support and stayed in power for long (Brass, 1964). The implementation of a public policy, technically, does not take into account the local political dynamism. Schemes and programmes are formulated with an assumption that a well functioning system of governance exists and it would deliver benefits to right people. But this does not happen in reality. Local administration in India, more often, is found corrupt and there are intermediary actors who try to divert or extract the benefits of the policy. In this case, a well-organized and cohesive organization of the party at the local level becomes an overseer to ensure that such schemes and programmes fulfill political objectives of the party. Local party cadre ensure that benefits are reaching to right people. Local party cadre tries to persuade people that party in its best of ability is trying to fulfill their aspirations. If this message is conveyed to the people, people show their satisfaction with the political party and the party would have greater chances to stay in the power for long. But if it does not happen, people show their dissatisfaction towards the incumbent with greater chances of fallout of the electoral support and even loss of political power.

In India, local administration under the decentralize system of governance have defined layers of administrative units from district to village level: district, sub-divisional, village. Political parties also organize their structures at the same levels. These party organization units have greater opportunities to interact parallelly with the local administration and common people. While, the district level party organization more often deals with the district level officials in order to provide feedback to the administration as well as to upper layers of party leadership and government about the issues at the ground related to the implementation of schemes and programmes, party units at the sub-division and

village village deliver policy related awareness and information to local people and help them in accessing policy benefits.

**Figure 1: Delivering Political Message to People**



**Methodology:**

The study analyses implementation of social security programmes in three social sectors - education, health and housing. The study was carried out in six villages in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in India. The paper is based on primary data and information collected through field visits, structured and unstructured interview schedules, non-participatory observation and Informal interactions at the district, sub-division and village levels. At the village level, beneficiaries of the social security programmes, BSP cadre and local-government functionaries were interviewed with structured interview schedules. Sample size of the study was 200, divided into 100 beneficiaries of social security schemes and 100 party cadres of the BSP at the village level. In addition to the data collected through interview schedules, unstructured interviews were conducted with elected local government leaders, local

government officials and those government functionaries who were involved in the delivery of different social security benefits. Informal discussions were held with the officials at the sub-division and district level officials and leaders of the BSP.

### **An Introduction of BSP:**

BSP is the product of the dalit<sup>1</sup> movement grown up during 1970s in the state to oppose social and economic discrimination against dalits. BSP was established on April 14, 1984 by Kanshi Ram, a well-known dalit leader who led the dalit movement in UP. Kanshi Ram had earlier established BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation) which became a base for BSP's membership. The BSP started its political journey by advocating dalits' social and economic rights and recording strong opposition against the discrimination exercised by upper castes who enjoy higher status in the social hierarchy. The top political priority of the BSP was to capture the state power and improve dalits' economic and social conditions by providing them different benefits. Since dalits are only 21.5 percent of the total population of UP, BSP could not get absolute majority in the state assembly elections and BSP was compelled to form three short-lived coalition governments in 1995, 1997 and 2002 in the state. During these tenures, BSP spent considerable amount of funds on dalit oriented social security programmes. Along with the exclusive policy prescription to dalits, BSP kept identity politics as one of the important political strategies. BSP constructed monuments, statues and parks on the name of dalit icons who have contributed to the dalit movement in the past.

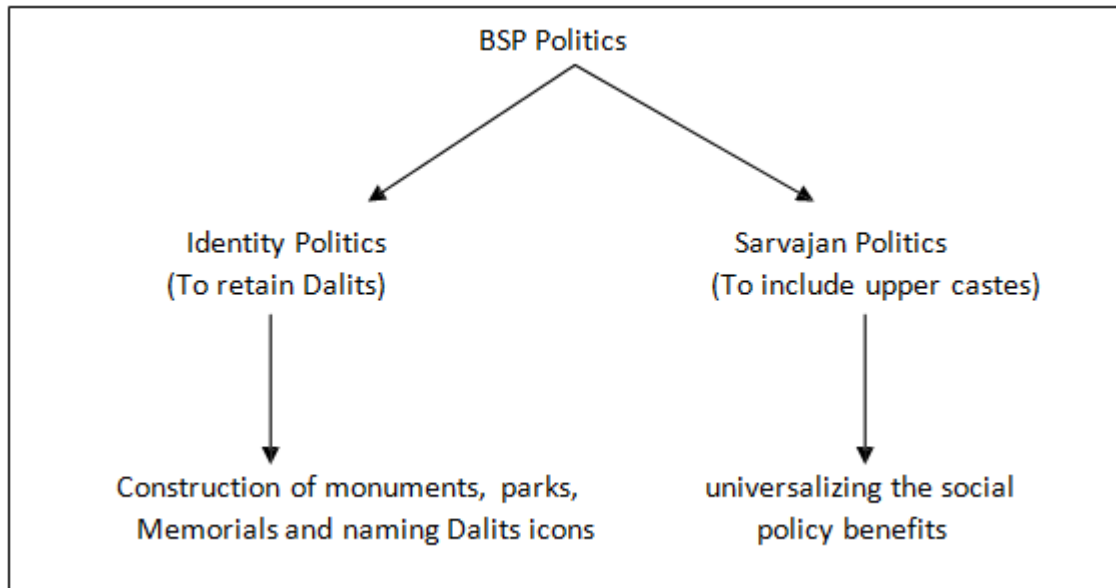
The exclusive political focus of the BSP on dalits imposes severe limitations on further expansion of electoral appeal of the BSP. It was impossible for the BSP to get political power entirely based on dalits' support. Therefore, BSP launched *Sarvajan* policy to bring other social groups with the party. *Sarvajan*, a Hindi word, means "all people". BSP tried to change its political identity from being dalits' party to 'party of all'. The Party established '*Brotherhood Committees*' in every district for developing cordial relations between the Brahmins, an upper caste, and the dalits (Verma, 2007). These committees worked for gathering political support for the BSP in assembly elections 2007. Though, principally, *Sarvajan* includes all social groups and castes, BSP focused much on bringing upper caste groups with the party. This policy got considerable success and BSP formed a majority government in UP in 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> Dalit is a lower caste in India social hierarchy. Administratively, it is referred as Scheduled Caste.

The BSP's new move resulted in the shift in the policy priorities of the BSP. This was evident in the social policies initiated after the BSP got power in UP in 2007. BSP avoided giving exclusive benefits to dalits, as it did earlier. In the new government, social security benefits were made available to all sections. However, BSP continued with its cultural policy aiming at retaining dalits' support to the party. But this was a peculiar mix of policies and difficult to convey to the local party cadre. Figure 2 projects the BSP's politics under the *Sarvajan* policy during 2007-12.

**Figure 2: BSP Politics**



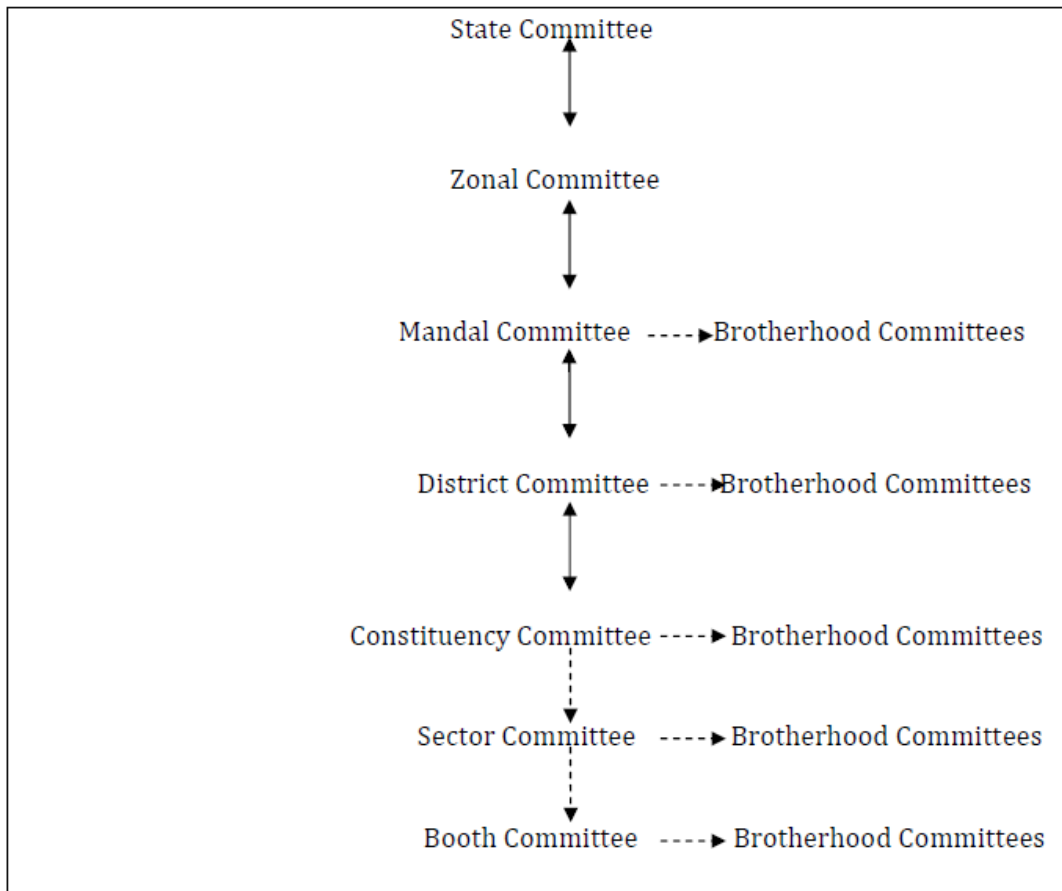
**Organizational Structure of the BSP:**

After the establishment of the party in 1984, BSP has taken a long time to develop formal organizational party structure. During early 1990s, the party contested elections without having party organizations at the local and district levels. Emergence of other regional political parties in UP created a compelling situation for the BSP to develop a formal organizational structure in the state. Current organizational structure of the BSP is shown in the figure 3.

The lowest formation of BSP party's structure is the Booth Committee. This committee consists of generally six or seven party cadre including one President and one Secretary. These committees are formed at the level of every polling booth in both rural and urban areas. The number of Booth Committees depends on the number of polling booths in a village. In one village, there could be several Booth Committees. Booth Committees are generally active only during the election time. Booth members work mainly to mobilize people in favour of the party. These members also help in gathering

the people in election rallies and campaigns. The second lowest organizational structure of the BSP is the Sector Committee. Generally, this committee consists of five or six members, including President, General Secretary and Sector-in-Charge. The work responsibility of this committee is same as Booth Committee. Sector committee also becomes active during election time and rest of the time they are workless. Sector Committees are constituted according to the size of town/city/rural area.

**Figure 3: Organizational Structure of BSP**



Third layer of the party organization is the committee at the constituency level. This committee is constituted in every constituency. The committee consists of three officials: a President, a Secretary and an In-charge. District Committee is the fourth layer of the party's organizational structure from the below and is the highest organizational body of the party at the district level. District Committee consists of a President, a Vice-President, a General Secretary, a Treasurer and a few Secretaries depending on the number of constituencies in the district. Two other organizational structures come in

between the State committee and district committees – Mandal<sup>2</sup> and Zonal. At the Mandal level, committee consists of a President who functions as a Coordinator. The state is divided into five zones - East, West, North, South and Central. Every zone includes a few Mandals. The organizational structure of the party at the zonal level is the same as at the Mandal level. Highest level of the organizational structure is the State committee that includes State President, Vice-President, Treasurer and a few Secretaries. State level committee functions directly under the command of party chief. Since, BSP's political base is limited within the territory of UP, there no such national level organizational structure has emerged yet.

BSP has also set up Brotherhood Committees starting from Booth level to Mandal level to connect non-dalit social groups with the party. These committees have been formed for each major social group separately including a few dalit members in each committee. Hierarchical relation and administrative responsiveness between the formal structure of the BSP and Brotherhood Committees are not clear. However, members of Brotherhood Committees take part in the district and constituency level formal meetings. These committees are more active during elections, though they exist all the time. Generally, more active parts of the entire organization is the District and State committees. BSP also has a national level committee, but it is not exclusively separated from the state level committee as party's influence is limited to UP only.

#### **Role of the BSP Cadre in the Implementation of Social Security Schemes:**

Indian governance system works on the principle of separation of power. Implementation of any policy is exclusive responsibility of administration and bureaucracy. Political actors or party cadre can not participate directly in the governance processes. Local party organization usually work as a channel of communication to the party leaders at high positions by providing them relevant information and feedback. Such information and feedback help party in taking further political and policy actions. Keeping party cadres 'on message' is very important to deliver party's political motives and their benefits to people and to know what political dynamism prevails at the local level.

Observations of this study reveal that party cadres of the BSP in the villages have rarely been involved in the implementation of social security schemes. The very first reason of this is that there is a disconnection between the top level party leadership involved in the decision making process in the

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<sup>2</sup> it is a revenue division consisting a few districts.



government and the party organization at the local level. Out of 100 BSP cadre, 79 said that they did not help people in getting benefits of the social security schemes and programmes. Party cadre at the village level do not get any instruction or information from the top leadership of the party or government. Local party cadre said that during earlier tenures of the BSP government in the state, they used to get printed information from the party about government's different initiatives, policies and actions. Party cadre were directed to help poor in getting benefits of different schemes and programmes. Party cadre used to advertise such information among the people. This was working effectively, as common information about policies and other public initiatives are not easily available through administration.

A total of 96 BSP cadres said that they were not informed about the Government's initiatives on social welfare (table 1). Though party cadre can access to such information through electronic and print media, access to such information channels are rare in rural areas. Only those (4 per cent) who are very closer to influential party leaders or well connected to the party office at the district level and state level get information. Many cadre believe that party's attention on the effective implementation of social security schemes and programmes has got reduced (table 1).

**Table 1: Access of Local BSP Leaders to Information about Existing Schemes**

Questions	Responses from the Local BSP Cadre	Frequency	Percentage
Do you get information from the party office about the schemes and programmes initiated by the BSP government?	Yes	4	4
	No	96	96
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
If no, did you use to get such of information during earlier tenures of the BSP Government?	Yes	42	43.8
	No	54	56.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>
If Yes, why are you not getting such information now?	Party's attention on the effective implementation of schemes had reduced	26	61.9
	Party does not have time to do these kinds of work	5	11.9
	Party sends but middle level leaders block it	11	26.2
	Other	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: primary Survey

There is a lack of systemic efforts within the BSP to guide party cadre to engage with the people politically. But, on the contrary, there are instances of informal (not directed by the party) involvement of the party cadre in the process of distribution of social security benefits. These party cadre, generally, are influential within the political and administrative circles. Out of 100 beneficiaries, 38 claimed that they got help from BSP leaders in receiving the benefits because either they were part of the factional group of the leader or they paid bribe to them. Official and from Local administration confirmed that most of the recommendations coming from the BSP leaders favoured either their relatives or their own supporters.

### Has Sarvajan Policy Delivered?

The main objective of the *Sarvajan* policy was to include non-dalits, especially upper castes, into the party's support base. BSP never projected *Sarvajan* policy as a political formula to win over the elections, but as a social coalition between dalits and other castes to bring about social change (Verma, 2005). In fact, Brotherhood Committees were used as a tool to execute this policy. However, party cadre, which are mainly dalits, are suspicious about the outcomes of the policy. The discomfort of the party cadre with the *Sarvajan* policy is visible clearly in table 2. A majority of party cadre (49) clearly feel that upper castes may not vote for the BSP in future. A total of 38 party members are not sure about the future support. It means that out of 100 party cadre, 87 (49+38) are reluctant about the support of the upper castes to the party. On the question of potentiality of the *Sarvajan* policy to bring about social change in the relationship between dalits and upper castes, 99 party members (93-No + 6-Not Sure) said that the policy had not shown any sign of positive change in existing state of relationship between both sections of society.

**Table 2: Future Prospect of Upper Caste Voting to the BSP**

Question	Responses	Frequency/Percentage
Will upper castes vote for BSP in future?	Yes	13
	No	49
	Not Sure	38
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
Has <i>Sarvajan</i> policy resulted any positive change in the relationship between dalits and upper castes	Yes	1
	No	93
	Not Sure	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary Survey

As far as the sustainability of this policy is concerned, 59 party members said that this policy may not stay for long, 27 per cent of cadres said they were not sure about the future of the policy (Table 3). Party cadre were of the opinion that the idea of bringing dalits and upper castes along with other social groups would cause a loss only to dalits. Local party cadre of the BSP is not relying on the Dalit-upper castes coalition.

**Table 3: Sustainability the *Sarvajan* Policy**

<b>Opinions</b>	<b>Frequency/Percentage</b>
Policy will not stay for long	59
Policy will stay for long	14
Not sure about the future	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary Survey

**Conflicting factors: Intra-party Democracy, internal communication and relationship with administration**

Intra-party democracy and internal communication are two different but interlinked issues. Smooth and continuous flow of communication from top to bottom and from bottom to top layers of the party depends on the level of intra-party democracy within the party. An indicator of measuring intra-party democracy is the selection of leaders on various position in the party organization. BSP did not held elections to elect party positions till 1997. In 1997, only the chiefs of the State units were elected and they continued to select the members of the State executive committees and district bodies (Pai, 2002). Most of party positions are filled by without holding elections as candidate get elected unopposed. This happens because the party's higher leadership already indicates its wish for a certain candidate and no one else contest election against him/her. Party President nominates the members of State Executive Committee. Selection of the office bearers at the zonal, mandal and district levels is done in same fashion.

In terms of decision making within the party, Party president always has her last wish. The functioning of the party structure of the BSP is more informal and decisions are made personally by the President. The lower level party units/committees are supposed to be answerable to the higher committees. However, the flow of the responsibility is hardly maintained. Two of the lowest layers of the party organization, i.e., Sector Committee and Booth Committee are never included in the party's decision-making process. There is no flow of information from top to bottom in the case of the two committees. District level

party leaders accept that they get face in accessing information from the upper level leadership and they hardly allowed to involve in any decision making processes. Since middle level leaders are not provided independent space, they are not able to guide/instruct local party cadre as well. This makes a chain of unguided leadership.

The lack of intra-party democracy also hampers the communication among various levels of party organization. Leaders at the district level said that it was very difficult to arrange a meeting with state level leaders because of the lack of proper communication between them. Local party cadre shared that they were always asked to send various information to higher leadership, but in turn, they hardly got any response or appreciation from the top. Similarly, lower level functionaries cannot meet the top leadership directly regarding party related issues. All requests, information and complaints from the lower levels must reach to the top through the middle level party structure. It means if any party member of the village or assembly level organisation of the BSP wants to interact formally with leaders at the Zonal or State level, his/her request must go through the District President of the party. This process not only takes much time but also makes the party member hesitant in expressing his/her concerns to the top leadership. For example, many partymen said that complaints against influential party leaders of the party do not reach party President or the State Committee because middle level leaders block such complaints. This practice discourages members of the party from taking their concerns to the next level.

BSP, during its earlier tenures in the government in the state, had appointed government officials of its choice, so that leading policies of the party can be implemented without any hurdles. In 1995, BSP Government in UP transferred 1500 officers in 136 days of the government tenure (Jaffrelot, 1998). During this time (2007-12), because of the *Sarvajan* Policy, BSP Government refrained itself from appointing favourable administration fearing of sending politically wrong messages to other social groups of the society. Transfers are seen as a punishment to an officers. Since BSP avoided transferring officers because of political compulsions, the hold of the the government as well as party on the administration got slacken off. This was one potential reason as to why local BSP cadre was not able to engage with the administration to facilitate the delivery of the benefits to people. Another reason was the breaking off the relationship with the BAMCEF, which was an ideologue organization for the BSP. BAMCEF is consist of bureaucrats and administrative officers from dalit community. Being a part of

administration, members of the BAMCEF had provided professional as well as technical advices to the BSP at the state, district and local level.<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Observations of the role of BSP cadres in the implementation of the social security schemes and programmes indicate that party cadres in the villager could not communicate the policies of the BSP government. BSP had lost the assembly elections of UP in 2012. A first hand analysis carried out by National media was that BSP was not able to implement its Sarvajan policy for which it got power in 2007. Local BSP cadre had failed to deliver political message which the party wants to convey to common people. Party cadres lack in playing a critical role in terms of providing necessary information about ongoing schemes and programmes, facilitating poor to get the benefits without paying bribe, and ensuring benefits reaching real beneficiaries. Lack of coordination between the administrative structure involved in the implementation of social security schemes and programmes and the BSP leaders caused a deficit on part of BSP cadre facilitating people to access the different policy benefits.

Poor state of coordination and communication also exists among the BSP leaders at the district level and party cadres in the villages. Since the party has included upper castes in the organizational structures of the party, traditional party cadres, i.e. dalits, felt uncomfortable working with higher castes without achieving any solution of social discrimination practiced by upper castes. Active and strong party organisations can compel administration to implement policies properly, as it is found that administration has not been transparent and effective in delivering social security benefits under the BSP government.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Discussions with BAMCEF members of Auariaya district of the state.

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