



## Dalits Movements and Organisations

DR. BALKAR SINGH

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR (History), I.G.U. MEERPUR (REWARI)

SUPRIYA DHANDA

RESEARCH SCHOLAR (HISTORY), I.G.U. MEERPUR (REWARI)

### KEYWORDS : –

#### INTRODUCTION

Dalit Movements and Organizations in India the problem of untouchability and exploitation of Dalits in social, economic and political areas has been a stark reality of Indian society. Various efforts have been made so far by visionaries in this direction by launching movements and forming organizations to highlight and find solution of the problems of the Dalits in India. As a result we can see a constant growth of awareness among the Dalits who have started asserting their identity and demanding their due share in power. Here an attempt has been made to give an account of various Dalits movements and organizations in India. If we look at the history of Dalit movements organized in different parts of the country, it becomes clear that a number of socio-political organizations, struggles and various types of activities of the Dalits had emerged out of different socio-economic and political conditions in the past to ameliorate their wretched condition. These movements have led to some alleviation in the plight of the Dalits and resulted in breaking of various social barriers. A number of leaders raised their voice against the upper caste exploitation of the Dalits. Jyotiba Phule, E.K. Nayar, B.R. Ambedkar, M.K. Gandhi, Mangoo Ram etc. were particularly noticeable for their struggle for the Dalits. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was the first leader of notice to emerge, who worked to uplift the Dalits and fought for their rights. After Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, well known as Constitution maker and 'MESSIAH' of Dalits, represented the Dalits at Round Table Conference in London. It is to be noted that before Ambedkar the personalities who raised their voice against the society did that from the social aspect but Ambedkar did the same from the social as well as political aspect. In 1932, British Government presented the 'Communal Award' concerning the depressed classes. In this Award two types of vote system and separate electoral was awarded. Ambedkar wanted a guarantee for Dalits as a pre-condition of self rule. But M.K. Gandhi was against the separate representation of Dalits and he had to resort to fast unto death. Initially, Ambedkar was against Gandhi's proposition. But later on they agreed with each other and reached at the connivance which is known as 'Poona Pact'. This pact was similar to Communal Award; more seats were reserved for the Dalits. But candidates were left to be chosen by joint electorates of both Hindu and Dalits. In the annals of Indian politics there have been a few independent Dalit movements and parties. Some of the important movements are chronicled below:

#### Ad-Dharm Movement

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a series of political developments which interalia led to the formation of movements in different parts of colonial India. The main objective of these movements was to liberate the so called untouchables so that they could lead a life of dignity and equality with the so called twice born. The Ad-Dharm movement which was one of the most important movements of the Dalits started in 1925 under the direction of Mangoo Ram and other depressed class leaders. The first organizational meeting of the Ad-Dharm occurred in Jalandhar in 1925. Speeches were made by Swami Shudranand, Vasant Rai, Thakur Chand and other lower caste leaders. The Ad-Dharm was contemporary to the Mahar Movement in Maharashtra led by B.R. Ambedkar. It was a movement which rejected Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam and made efforts to establish a distinct identity of Dalit castes. The main objectives of the Ad-Dharm movement were to carve out an independent identity for the untouchables and to blot out the stigma of untouchability. Within a short period, it became popular in the Dalits of Punjab. However, in 1929, the Ad-Dharm split into two factions, one the All India Ad-Dharm Mandal

which was headed by Vasant Rai and other Ad-Dharm Mandal which was headed by Mangoo Ram. Infact, Vasant Rai was lured back by Arya Samaj in 1929, but the Mangoo Ram's group played an active part in the politics of Punjab for more than two decades. The contribution of Ad-Dharm movement was crucial. It helped the Dalits to seek social recognition through the process of cultural transformation on the one hand and spiritual regeneration on the other hand. It carved out a new identity and gave them a new name. The Ad-Dharm movement succeeded in raising the consciousness among the down trodden people of the Doaba region in particular and of the entire state in general. But Ad-Dharm movement failed to change the attitude of the upper castes. Dalits continued to face discrimination and oppression.

#### Independent Labour Party

(I.L.P.) B.R. Ambedkar himself tried to wrest space for Dalit emancipation at religious, social, economic and political realms. In 1936, he gave the political movement a specific focus by establishing the 'Independent Labour Party'. This was the first political party of Dalits. This was necessary because the existing political parties, dominated primarily by upper castes, were capable neither of representing the interests of the Scheduled Castes nor fighting for their cause. The absence of any political party which could represent Dalits in first election of 1937 encouraged B.R. Ambedkar to establish Independent Labour party. It was intended to champion the cause of the workers and to advance the welfare of labouring classes and of depressed classes also. All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISC) In 1942, B.R. Ambedkar founded the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, a political organization for the Dalits. He reformulated his political plans. He formed a new political party the AISC and limited it to the untouchables in the hope of uniting all the untouchables in a new battle for political power. With the objectives of securing political rights and representation for the Dalit people, he established the AISC at an All India depressed classes Conference in Nagpur in July 1942. The AISC, being a rival organization to the Congress, it used to constantly challenge the Congress claim to represent the Dalit interest. In the initial period, its main area was Bombay but in a very short period it was spread all over India. The main purpose of AISC was to unite the Dalits and fight against the untouchability. Republican Party of India (RPI) The Republican Party of India came into existence out of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation by changing latter's name. The RPI was the first political party formed by the post Ambedkar leadership in India on October 03, 1957. The RPI accorded acceptance to the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution such as justice, freedom, equality and brotherhood for the citizens of India. The objective of the party was to organize the oppressed and to fight against the atrocities committed on the Dalits and to get their disabilities removed. It took up many issues that appealed to the Dalits. It lobbied for installing the portrait of B.R. Ambedkar - the Constitution maker, in the Central Hall of the Parliament. It also argued that idle and wasteland must go to the landless labourers and full justice be done under the untouchability Act to them. The RPI initially did some good work and tried to get the problems of Dalits resolved. RPI played an important role in the formation of workers organizations, students' organizations, women organizations, etc. Unfortunately the tempo and the revolutionary zeal of the party leaders got lost in mutual conflicts as every leader was posing as a junior Ambedkar. In this competition, they failed to carry forward the momentum of the Dalit movement which led to party's decline. After some time the party split in many groups. The splits in RPI had no ideological basis but they were due to clash of personalities and personal political ambitions. So, the party

failed to recognize and address the root cause of the problems of the Dalits. Dalit Panther Movement The disintegration of the 'Republican Party of India' created discontentment among the Dalits and Dalit youth in particular. The Dalit youth came forward and took up the task of bringing all the Dalits on a single platform and mobilize them for the struggle for their civil rights and justice. This gave rise to the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra, 1970.

### DALIT PANTHER MOVEMENT

The most fundamental factor responsible for the rise of Dalit Panther Movement was the repression and terror under which the oppressed Dalits continued to live in the rural area. The programme of the Dalit Panther Movement was incorporated into the manifesto published nearly one year after the formation of the Dalit Panther Movement. Their Manifesto stated: "All those who are victims of political, social and economic suppression are our allies; power, money and prestige are our enemies. "The Panther Movement was based on the ideology of B.R. Ambedkar. But in later stages, at least a faction of the Panthers was found inclined to the leftist, especially the Marxist ideology. So, the Dalit Panther Movement split and got divided into two parts. The Panther leaders failed to provide proper leadership to the movement and their slogans and aims remained glued to paper only. Further, no serious efforts were made by either of the two factions to follow the significance of issues mentioned in their manifesto and programmes. After the split in the movement, in 1974, some Panthers again united and continued the Dalit Panther Movement under the leadership of Arun Kamble and Gangadhar Gade, S.L. Viridi etc. They took initiative on the problems of reservation and other concessions granted to the Dalits in various parts of the country. But the whole leadership of Panther Movement has in mobilizing the Dalits at large.

### Backward And Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF).

In the early 1970s, Kanshi Ram emerged as a dynamic leader after B.R. Ambedkar who gained all India significance by establishing the Dalit organizations. With a handful of educated employees from Pune and Delhi, he set up the All India Backward and Minority Community Employees Federation (BAMCEF) in 1973 and aspired to give it an all India dimension in the next five years. For some years the BAMCEF was working informally until Kanshi Ram launched it formally on 6 Dec. 1978 in Delhi. Kanshi Ram made the BAMCEF 'A Pool of Brains, Talents and Funds'. The basic object of this organization, which consisted of educated Dalits who had been able to make use of the fruits of government policies, was to pay back to the more oppressed and exploited section of the society to which they belonged. The BAMCEF, consisting of government employees did not launch rallies but only held seminars. In the political field the main function of the BAMCEF was to supply the funds and dedicated workers to the Bahujan Samaj Party, which was founded in the early eighties. Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharash Samiti (DS-4) Although BAMCEF was regarded by some as a pool of Brains, talents and funds, it kept a low profile because of service rules restrictions on public employees. For the furtherance of its objective, Kanshi Ram proceeded to set up a new organization known as Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharash Samiti.

### DALIT SOCHIT SAMAJ SANGHARASH SAMITI.

On Dec. 6 1981, Kanshi Ram founded a new organization which was a non political agitational arm of his movement. Its primary purpose was to create awareness among the Dalits. The DS-4 consisted mostly of students, unemployed professionals like engineers, lawyers etc. who provided local leadership. The DS-4 was initially conceived as a non-political body, but it soon became a political organization. The DS-4 tested the political water by contesting the election of Haryana Assembly in 1982, Delhi Metropolitan Council and Corporation in 1982 and also of Jammu & Kashmir Assembly election in 1983. None of the DS-4 candidates won in these elections. But it encouraged the Dalits and Dalit leaders to strive for getting their share in political power.

### Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

The rise in the political standing of any party can be equated with the rise of the political fortunes of its leaders and the political experience and using the BAMCEF and DS-4 as base organization, Kanshi Ram decided to lay the foundation of political party, the BSP on April 14, 1984 on the birth anniversary of B.R. Ambedkar to fulfill the political aspirations of the Dalit people. The party adopted Ambedkar's ideolo-

gy and soon became the political voice of the Dalits in India. BSP gave a new hope to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in creating a strong platform in Indian politics under the leadership of their own community leaders. In Punjab, the influence of the BSP as a political force was felt during the February 1992 Assembly elections when it managed to capture 9 seats, thus becoming the main opposition party in the Vidhan Sabha. The BSP candidates were runner up in 34 seats. It also won a Lok Sabha seat in February 1992 elections. With the November 1993 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, Kanshi Ram led BSP emerged as a political force at the national level to be reckoned with. Especially in Uttar Pradesh the BSP-SP alliance who won a majority of the seats to form the government. These elections showed an upward mobility among the downtrodden of India. It raised the prospects of BSP to further strengthen its influence. The BSP leaders in the beginning believed that any seat sharing arrangement with its rival political parties might weaken its stance on the depressed classes. But in the later years, it has done exactly the opposite. The BSP unhesitatingly indulged in compromises for the sake of maximizing their political gains. The 1993 Uttar Pradesh state elections, the formation of BSP-SP coalition government and its subsequent demise and BSP-BJP combine are vivid examples of such a flexible political strategy. BSP has been successful in a rather short span of time in arousing a marked socio-political consciousness among the backward and depressed classes about their degrading status. The BSP commands considerable influence among the Dalits living in urban and rural areas of North India. Dalits were the traditional vote bank of the Congress and now they seem to have shifted the affiliation from the Congress and other upper caste parties.

These were some movements and parties who raised their voice against the upper caste and against the social and political exploitation of the Dalits. But at the same time there have been other numerous small and large organizations of Dalits all over the country such as: Self Respect Movement, the Dalit Sangharash Samiti in Karnataka, Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala, Dalit Maha Sabha and Dalit Sena in Andhra Pradesh etc. which have been playing significant role to raise the consciousness among the Dalits. However, none of these could make a recognizable impact.

### REFERENCES

1. K.S. Shukla and B.M. Verma, Development of Scheduled Castes and Administration, Upper Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993.
2. R.K. Kshirsagar, Dalit Movements in India and its Leaders, M.D. Publishers, New Delhi, 1994.
3. M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and Other Essays, Asia Publication house, New Delhi., 1977.
4. B.R. Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables, Thacker and Co. limited, Bombay, 1946.
5. S.N. Singh, Reservation Policy for Backward Classes, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 1996.
6. Sunder Lal Sagar, Hindu Culture and Caste System, Uppal Book Store, Delhi, 1975.
7. Iravati Karve, Hindu Society-An Interpretation, Decan College, Poona, 1961.
8. G.S. Ghurey, Caste and Race in India, Popular Prakashan Bombay, 1969
9. Ekta Singh, Caste System in India, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2005
10. Anil Bhatt, Caste, Class and Politics, Manohar Book Service, Delhi, 1975
11. S.V. Ketkar, History of Castes in India, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1979
12. A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular Parkashan Bombay, 1976
13. E. A.H. Blunt, Caste System of Northern India, S. Chand & Company, Delhi. 1969.
14. Vivek Kumar, Dalit Leadership in India, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2002,
15. P.G. Jogdand, Dalit Movement in Maharashtra, Kanak Publishing, New Delhi, 1991