



Dalit Movements in India After 1947

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ABSTRACT

The word "Dalit" may be derived from Sanskrit, and means "crushed", or "broken to pieces". It was perhaps first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the Hindus. Mohatma Gandhi adopted the word "Harijan," translated roughly as "Children of God", to identify the former Untouchables. According to the Indian Constitution the Dalits are the people coming under the category 'Scheduled castes'. Currently, many Dalits use the term to move away from the more derogatory terms of their caste names, or even the term "Untouchable." The contemporary use of "Dalit" is centered on the idea that as a people, the group may have been broken by oppression, but they survive and even thrive by finding meaning in the struggle of their existence. Dalit is now a political identity

KEYWORDS

Major Causes of the Dalit Movement

The Dalit Movement is the result of the constant hatred being generated from centuries from the barbaric activities of the upper castes of India. Since Dalits were assigned the duties of serving the other three Varnas, that is all the non- Dalit, they were deprived of higher training of mind and were denied social-economic and political status.

The division of labour led to the division of the labourers, based on inequality and exploitation. The caste system degenerated Dalit lives into pathogenic condition where occupations changed into castes.

For centuries, Dalits were excluded from the mainstream society and were only allowed to pursue menial occupations like cleaning dry latrines, sweeping etc.

They lived in the Hindu villages hence did not have advantage of geographical isolation like tribes. They were pushed to the outer areas of villages whereas, the mainland was occupied by the Brahmins. They were barred from entering into those mainland areas in every sense, they were prohibited to wear decent dress and ornaments besides being untouchable. Many of the atrocities were committed in the name of religion. Besides, the system of Devadasi they poured molten lead into the ears of a Dalit, who happened to listen to some mantra. To retain the stronghold on people, education was monopolized.

The most inhuman practice is that of untouchability, which made the Dalits to live in extreme inhuman situations. This has made the Dalits to rise and protest, against the inhuman practices of Brahmanism. The Dalits began their movement in India with their basic demand for equality.

The Dalit movement that gained momentum in the post independence period, have its roots in the Vedic period. It was to the Shramanic -Brahmanic confrontation and then to the Bhakti Movement.

With the introduction of western language, and with the influence of the Christian missionaries, the Dalits began to come across the ideals of equality and liberty and thus began the Dalit Movement in modern times. The frustrated Dalit minds when mixed with reason began confrontation against the atrocities of Brahmanism.

Dalit movement was fundamentally the movement to achieve mobility on part of the groups which has logged behind. They were a reaction against the social, cultural and economic preponderance and exclusiveness of other class over them.

Educated Dalit, gradually begin to talk about the problems of poor and about exploitation and humiliations from the upper castes. They also got a fillip through British policy of divide and rule in which census operation played a sufficient role (British policy of classifying caste). This provided an opportunity for making claims for social pre-eminence through caste mobilisation.

Improved communication network made wider links and combination possible; new system of education provided opportunity for socio-economic promotion, new administrative system, rule of law undermined certain privileges enjoyed by few and certain economic forces like industrialization threw open equal opportunities for all dismantling social barriers.

All these factors contributed to the shift in position of untouchables. Social reform movement such as those of Jyotiba phule in Maharashtra and Sri Narayan Guru in Kerala also began to question caste inequality.

Gandhiji integrated the issue of abolition of untouchability into national movement and major campaign and struggles such as Varkom and Guruvayur Satyagrah were organized. Gandhiji's effort was to make upper caste realise severity of injustice done via practice of untouchability.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emerged as major leader of Depressed Classes by late 1920's. He formed All Indian Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942. He also cooperates with colonial government on understanding that he could get more benefits for SCs. The All India S.C. Federation also contested election, but its candidates lost to Congress.

Others strands also emerged in different regions in Punjab the Adi Dharm, in U.P.the Adi Hindi and in Bengal the Namashvedsas.

In Bihar, Jagjivan Ram who emerged as the most important Congress leader formed Khetmajoor Sabha and Depressed Class League.

In early 1970's a new trend identified as Dalit Panthers

merged in Maharashtra as a part of country wide wave of radical politics. The Dalit Panthers learned ideologically to Ambedkar's thought. By 1950's Dalit Panther had developed serious differences and the party split up and declined.

In North India new party BSP emerged in 1980's under Kanshi Ram and later Mayawati who became the chief minister of U.P.

Acharya Ishvardatt Medharthi (1900–1971) of Kanpur supported the cause of the Dalits. He studied Pali at Gurukul Kangri and Buddhist texts were well known to him. He was initiated into Buddhism by Gyan Keto and the Lokanatha in 1937. Gyan Keto (1906–1984), born Peter Schoenfeldt, was a German who arrived in Ceylon in 1936 and became a Buddhist. Medharthi strongly criticised the caste system in India. He claimed that the Dalits ("Adi Hindus") were the ancient rulers of India and had been trapped into slavery by Aryan invaders.

Dynamics of Dalit Movement: Sanskritization

The strategies, ideologies, approaches of Dalit movement varied from leader to leader, place to place and time to time.

Thus, some Dalit leaders followed the process of 'Sanskritization' to elevate themselves to the higher position in caste hierarchy. They adopted Brahman manners, including vegetarianism, putting sandalwood paste on forehead, wearing sacred thread, etc. Thus Dalit leaders like Swami Thykkad (Kerala), Pandi Sunder Lai Sagar (UP), Muldas Vaishya (Gujarat), Moon Vithoba Raoji Pande (Maharashtra) and others tried to adopt established cultural norms and practices of the higher castes. Imitation of the high caste manners by Dalits was an assertion of their right to equality.

Adi-Hindu movement

Treating Dalits as outside the fourfold Varna system, and describing them as 'outcastes' or 'Panchama' gave rise to a movement called Adi-Hindu movement. Thus, certain section of Dalit leadership believed that Dalits were the original inhabitants of India and they were not Hindus. That Aryans or Brahmins who invaded this country forcibly imposed untouchability on the original inhabitants of this land. They believed that if Hinduism was discarded, untouchability would automatically come to an end.

That Dalits began to call themselves Adi-Andhras in Andhra, Adi- Karnataka in Karnataka, Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, Adi-Hindus in Uttar Pradesh and Adi-Dharmis in Punjab. Dalits also followed the route of conversion with a purpose of getting rid of untouchability and to develop their moral and financial conditions.

Conversions

A good number of Dalits were converted to Christianity, especially in Kerala. Some of the Dalits, especially in Punjab were converted to Sikhism. They are known as Mazhabis, Namdharis, Kabir Panthis etc.

Dalits also got converted to Buddhism. Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with his millions of followers at Nagpur in 1956.

Finding Sects

As a protest against Hinduism some of the Dalit leaders founded their own sects or religions. Guru Ghasi Das (MP) founded Satnami Sect. Gurtichand Thakur (Bengal) founded Matua Sect. Ayyan Kali (Kerala) founded SJPY (Sadha Jana Paripalan Yogam) and Mangu Ram (Panjab) founded Adi Dharam.

Ambedkar's activism

Attempts were also made to organize Dalits politically in order to fight against socio-economic problems. Dr. Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party in 1936. He tried to abolish the exploitative Khoti system prevailing in Kolan

part of Maharashtra, and Vetti or Maharaki system (a wage free hereditary service to the caste Hindus in the local administration). He tried to convince the Government to recruit the Mahars in Military. Ultimately he became successful in 1941 when the first Mahar Regiment was formed.

With the growing process of democratization, Dr. Ambedkar demanded adequate representation for Dalits in the legislatures and in the administration. Government of India Act, 1919, provided for one seat to the depressed classes in the central Legislative Assembly. In 1932, British Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald announced the 'Communal Award'. The award envisaged separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. Mahatma Gandhi went on a historic fast in protest against Communal Award especially in respect of depressed classes. The issue was settled by Poona Pact, September 1932. It provided for reservation of seats for depressed classes out of general electorates sets. The Constitution of India now provides for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes in proportion to their population in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha under Article 330 and 332.

Dalit Literary Movement

At a time, when there was no means of communication to support the Dalits, pen was the only solution. The media, newspapers were all under the control of the powerful class – the Brahmins. Given that the Brahmins would never allow the Dalits voice to be expressed, as it would be a threat for their own survival, the Dalits began their own magazine and began to express their own experiences.

Dalit literature, the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness, emerged initially during the Mukti movement.

Later, with the formation of the Dalit Panthers, there began to flourish a series of Dalit poetry and stories depicting the miseries of the Dalits the roots of which lies in the rules and laws of Vedas and Smritis. All these literature argued that Dalit Movement fights not only against the Brahmins but all those people whoever practices exploitation, and those can be the Brahmins or even the Dalits themselves.

New revolutionary songs, poems, stories, autobiographies were written by Dalit writers. All their feelings were bursting out in the form of writings.

Educated Dalit and intellectuals begin to talk about the problems without any hesitation and tried to explain to the other illiterate brothers about the required change in the society.

Dalit literature tried to compare the past situation of Dalits to the present and future generation not to create hatred, but to make them aware of their pitiable condition.

Power as Means to Attain Dignity

Power can be cut by only power. Hence, to attain power, the first thing required is knowledge. It was thus, Phule and Ambedkar gave the main emphasis on the education of the Dalits, which will not only bestow them with reason and judgement capacity, but also political power, and thereby socio-economic status and a life of dignity. They knew that the political strategy of gaining power is either an end in itself or a means to other ends. In other words, if the Dalits have power, then they do not have to go begging to the upper castes. Also they will get greater economic and educational opportunities.

The upper castes enjoy social power, regardless of their individual circumstances with respect to their control over material resources, through their linkages with the other caste fellows in the political system – in the bureaucracy, judiciary and legislature. And so, the Dalits require power to control the economic scenario and thereby the politics of the country.

Phule thus added that without knowledge, intellect was lost; without intellect, morality was lost; without morality, dyna-

mism was lost; without dynamism, money was lost; without money Shudras were degraded, all this misery and disaster were due to the lack of knowledge. Inspired by Thomas Paine's "The rights of Man", Phule sought the way of education which can only unite the Dalits in their struggle for equality.

The movement was carried forward by Ambedkar who contested with Gandhi to give the Dalits, their right to equality. In the words of Ambedkar, Educate, Organize and agitate. Education, the major source of reason, inflicts human mind with extensive knowledge of the world, whereby, they can know the truth of a phenomena, that is reality. It therefore, would help to know the truth of Brahmanism in Indian society, and will make them to agitate against caste based inhuman practices. Only when agitation begins, in the real sense, can the Dalit be able to attain power and win the movement against exploitation.

Gandhi's politics was unambiguously centring around the defence of caste with the preservation of social order in Brahmanical pattern. He was fighting for the rights of Dalits but was not ready for inter-caste marriage.

Post-Independent Dalit Movements B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhist dalit Movement

Babasaheb Ambedkar has undoubtedly been the central figure in the epistemology of the dalit universe. It is not difficult to see the reason behind the obeisance and reverence that dalits have for Ambedkar. They see him as one who devoted every moment of his life thinking about and struggling for their emancipation; who sacrificed all the comforts and conveniences of life that were quite within his reach to be on their side; who conclusively disproved the theory of caste based superiority by rising to be the tallest amongst the tall despite enormous odds, and finally as one who held forth the torch to illuminate the path of their future.

Upon India's Transfer of Power by British Government on 15 August 1947, the new Congress-led government invited Ambedkar to serve as the nation's first Law Minister, which he accepted. On 29 August, he was appointed Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, charged by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution. The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar argued for extensive economic and social rights for women, and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a system akin to affirmative action. India's lawmakers hoped to eradicate the socio-economic inequalities and lack of opportunities for India's depressed classes through these measures.

Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet in 1951 following the stalling in parliament of his draft of the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to expound gender equality in the laws of inheritance and marriage. Ambedkar independently contested an election in 1952 to the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha, but was defeated in the Bombay constituency by a little-known Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar. He was appointed to the upper house, of parliament, the Rajya Sabha in March 1952 and would remain as member till death.

Conversion to Buddhism

Ambedkar had considered converting to Sikhism, which saw oppression as something to be fought against and which for that reason appealed also to other leaders of scheduled castes. He rejected the idea after meeting with leaders of the Sikh community and concluding that his conversion might result in him having a "second-rate status" among Sikhs.

He studied Buddhism all his life, and around 1950, he turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Ceylon (now

Sri Lanka) to attend a meeting of the *World Fellowship of Buddhists*. While dedicating a new Buddhist vihara near Pune, Ambedkar announced that he was writing a book on Buddhism, and that as soon as it was finished, he planned to make a formal conversion to Buddhism.

Ambedkar twice visited Burma in 1954; the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955, he founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha. He completed his final work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, in 1956. It was published posthumously. After meetings with the Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Saddhatisa, Ambedkar organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporters in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Ambedkar completed his own conversion, along with his wife. He then proceeded to convert some 500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. He then travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. His work on *The Buddha or Karl Marx* and "Revolution and counter-revolution in ancient India" remained incomplete.

His allegation of Hinduism's foundation of caste system, made him controversial and unpopular among the Hindu community. His conversion to Buddhism sparked a revival in interest in Buddhist philosophy in India and abroad. Ambedkar's political philosophy has given rise to a large number of political parties, publications and workers' unions that remain active across India, especially in Maharashtra.

The Buddhist movement was somewhat hindered by Dr. Ambedkar's death so shortly after his conversion. It did not receive the immediate mass support from the Untouchable population that Ambedkar had hoped for. Division and lack of direction among the leaders of the Ambedkarite movement have been an additional impediment. According to the 2001 census, there are currently 7.95 million Buddhists in India, at least 5.83 million of whom are Buddhists in Maharashtra. This makes Buddhism the fifth-largest religion in India and 6% of the population of Maharashtra, but less than 1% of the overall population of India. The Buddhist revival remains concentrated in two states: Ambedkar's native Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh — the land of Acharya Medharthi and their associates.

Acharya Medharthi retired from his Buddhapuri school in 1960, and shifted to an ashram in Haridwar. He turned to the Arya Samaj and conducted Vedic yajnas all over India. His follower, Bhoj Dev Mudit, converted to Buddhism in 1968 and set up a school of his own.

Rajendranath Aherwar appeared as an important Dalit leader in Kanpur. He joined the Republican Party of India and converted to Buddhism along with his whole family in 1961. In 1967, he founded the Kanpur branch of "Bharatiya Buddh Mahasabha".

The Dalit Buddhist movement in Kanpur gained impetus with the arrival of Dipankar, a Chamar bhikkhu, in 1980. Dipankar had come to Kanpur on a Buddhist mission and his first public appearance was scheduled at a mass conversion drive in 1981. The event was organised by Rahul Ambawadekar, an RPI Dalit leader. In April 1981, Ambawadekar founded the Dalit Panthers (U.P. Branch) inspired by the Maharashtra Dalit Panthers.

Dalit Panthers

Dalit Panther as a social organization was founded by Namdev Dhasal in April 1972 in Mumbai, which saw its heyday in the 1970s and through the 80s.

Dalit Panther is inspired by Black Panther Party, a revolutionary movement amongst African-Americans, which emerged in the United States and functioned from 1966-1982. The name of the organization was borrowed from the 'Black Panther' Movement of the USA. They called themselves "Panthers" because they were supposed to fight for their rights like pan-

thers, and not get suppressed by the strength and might of their oppressors.

The US Black Panther Party always acknowledged and supported the Dalit Panther Party through the US Black Panther Newspaper which circulated weekly throughout the world from 1967-1980.

Its organization was modelled after the Black Panther. The members were young men belonging to Neo-Buddhists and Scheduled Castes. Most of the leaders were literary figures. The controversy over the article "Kala Swatantrata Din" (Black Independence Day) by Dhale which was published in "Sadhana" in 1972 created a great sensation and publicised the Dalit Panthers through Maharashtra. The Panther's full support to Dhale during this controversy brought Dhale into the movement and made him a prominent leader. With the publicity of this issue through the media, Panther branches sprang up spontaneously in many parts of Maharashtra.

The Dalit Panther movement was a radical departure from earlier Dalit movements. Its initial thrust on militancy through the use of rustic arms and threats, gave the movement a revolutionary colour.

Going by their manifesto, dalit panthers had broken many new grounds in terms of radicalising the political space for the dalit movement. They imparted the proletarian – radical class identity to dalits and linked their struggles to the struggles of all oppressed people over the globe. The clear cut leftist stand reflected by this document undoubtedly ran counter to the accepted legacy of Ambedkar as projected by the various icons, although it was sold in his name as an awkward tactic.

The pathos of casteism integral with the dalit experience essentially brought in Ambedkar, as his was the only articulate framework that took cognisance of it. But, for the other contemporary problems of deprivations, Marxism provided a scientific framework to bring about a revolutionary change.

Although, have-nots from both dalits and non-dalits craved for a fundamental change, the former adhered to what appeared to be Ambedkarian methods of socio-political change and the latter to what came to be the Marxian method which tended to see every social process as the reflection of the material reality. Both caused erroneous interpretations. It is to the credit of Panthers that the assimilation of these two ideologies was attempted for the first time in the country but unfortunately it proved abortive in absence of the efforts to rid each of them of its obfuscating influence and stress their non-contradictory essence. Neither, there was theoretical effort to integrate these two ideologies, nor was there any practice combining social aspects of caste with say, the land question in the village setting. This ideological amalgam could not be acceptable to those under the spell of the prevailing Ambedkar-icons and therefore this revolutionary seedling in the dalit movement died a still death.

The reactionaries objected to the radical content of the programme alleging that the manifesto was doctored by the radicals – the Naxalites.

There is no denying the fact that the Naxalite movement which had erupted quite like the Dalit Panther, as a disenchantment with and negation of the established politics, saw a potential ally in the Panthers and tried to forge a bond right at the level of formulation of policies and programme of the latter. But even if the Panthers had chosen to pattern their programme on the ten-point programme of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the USA, which had been the basic inspiration for their formation, it would not have been any less radical. The amount of emphasis on the material aspects of life that one finds in the party programme of the BPP could still have been inimical to the established icon of Ambedkar.

Radicalism was the premise for the very existence of the Dalit

Panther and hence the quarrel over its programme basically reflected the clash between the established icon of Ambedkar and his radical version proposed in the programme. The fact that for the first time the Dalit Panther exposed dalits to a radical Ambedkar and brought a section of dalit youth nearer to accepting it certainly marks its positive contribution to the dalit movement.

There were material reasons for the emergence of Dalit Panthers. Children of the Ambedkarian movement had started coming out of universities in large numbers in the later part of 1960s, just to face the blank future staring at them. The much-publicised Constitutional provisions for them turned out to be a mirage. Their political vehicle was getting deeper and deeper into the marsh of Parliamentarism. It ceased to see the real problems of people. The air of militant insurgency that had blown all over the world during those days also provided them the source material to articulate their anger.

Unfortunately, quite like the BPP, they lacked the suitable ideology to channel this anger for achieving their goal. Interestingly, as they reflected the positive aspects of the BPP's contributions in terms of self-defence, mass organising techniques, propaganda techniques and radical orientation, they did so in the case of BPP's negative aspects too. Like Black Panthers they also reflected 'TV mentality' (to think of a revolutionary struggle like a quick-paced TV programme), dogmatism, neglect of economic foundation needed for the organisation, lumpen tendencies, rhetoric outstripping capabilities, lack of clarity about the form of struggle and eventually corruptibility of the leadership. The Panthers' militancy by and large remained confined to their speeches and writings.

One of the reasons for its stagnation was certainly its incapability to escape the petit bourgeois ideological trap built up with the icons of Ambedkar. It would not get over the ideological ambivalence represented by them. Eventually, the petit-bourgeois 'icon' of Ambedkar prevailed and extinguished the sparklet of new revolutionary challenge. It went the RPI (founded by Ambedkar) way and what remained of it were the numerous fractions.

The Dalit Panther phase represented the clash of two icons: one, that of a radical 'Ambedkar', as a committed rationalist, perpetually striving for the deliverance of the most oppressed people in the world. He granted all the freedom to his followers to search out the truth using the rationalist methodology as he did. The other is of the 'Ambedkar' who has forbidden the violent methods and advocated the constitutional ways for his followers, who was a staunch anti-Communist, ardent Buddhist. As it turned out, the radical icon of Ambedkar was projected without adequate conviction. There was no one committed to propagating such an image of Ambedkar, neither communists nor dalits. Eventually it remained as a veritable hodgepodge.

Phenomenon of Kanshiram and Mayawati (Bahujan Samajwadi Party)

In 1971 Kanshiram quit his job in DRDO and together with his colleagues established the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities Employees Welfare Association. Through this association, attempts were made to look into the problems and harassment of the above-mentioned employees and bring out an effective solution for the same. Another main objective behind establishing this association was to educate and create awareness about the caste system. This association turned out to be a success with more and more people joining it.

In 1973, Kanshi Ram again with his colleagues established the BAMCEF: Backward And Minority Communities Employees Federation. The first operating office was opened in Delhi in 1976 with the motto-"Educate Organize and Agitate". This served as a base to spread the ideas of Ambedkar and his beliefs. From then on Kanshi Ram continued building his network and making people aware of the realities of the

caste system, how it functioned in India and the teachings of Ambedkar.

In 1980 he created a road show named "Ambedkar Mela" which showed the life of Ambedkar and his views through pictures and narrations. In 1981 he founded the Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti or DS4 as a parallel association to the BAMCEF. It was created to fight against the attacks on the workers who were spreading awareness on the caste system. It was created to show that workers could stand united and that they too can fight. However this was not a registered party but an organization which was political in nature. In 1984, he established a full-fledged political party known as the Bahujan Samaj Party. However, it was in 1986 when he declared his transition from a social worker to a politician by stating that he was not going to work for/with any other organization other than the Bahujan Samaj Party. Later he converted to Buddhism.

The movement of Kanshiram markedly reflected a different strategy, which coined the 'Bahujan' identity encompassing all the SCs, STs, BCs, OBCs and religious minorities than 'dalit', which practically represented only the scheduled castes.

Kanshiram started off with an avowedly apolitical organisation of government employees belonging to Bahujana, identifying them to be the main resource of these communities. It later catalysed the formation of an agitating political group creatively coined as DS4, which eventually became a full-fledged political party – the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

Purely, in terms of electoral politics, which has somehow become a major obsession with all the dalit parties, Kanshiram's strategy has proved quite effective, though in only certain parts of the country.

He has given a qualitative impetus to the moribund dalit politics, locating itself into a wider space peopled by all the down-trodden of India. But he identified these people only in terms of their castes and communities. It may be said to his credit that he reflected the culmination of what common place icon of Ambedkar stood for.

Kanshiram shrewdly grasped the political efficacy of this icon that sanctioned the pursuit of power in the name of down-trodden castes. The religious minorities which potentially rears the sense of suffering marginalisation from the majority community could be easily added to it to make a formidable constituency in parliamentary parlance. Every one knew it but none knew how to implement. Kanshiram has seemingly succeeded in this task at least in certain pockets.

The careful analysis will show that the combination of certain historical developments and situational factors has been behind this success. As Kanshiram has amply experienced, it is not replicable elsewhere. It is bound to be short-lived and illusory unless this success is utilised to implement a revolutionary programme to forge a class identity among its constituents. If not, one will have to constantly exert to recreate the compulsions for their togetherness and allegiance.

In absence of any class-agenda, which is certainly the case of BSP, these compulsions could only be created through manipulative politics for which political power is an essential resource. BSP's unprincipled pursuit of power is basically driven by this exigency. It is futile to see in this game a process of empowerment of the subject people as could be seen from the statistical evidence of the cases of atrocities, and of overall situation of the poor people under its rule.

The imperatives of this kind of strategy necessarily catapult the movement into the camp of the ruling classes as has exactly happened with BSP. BSP's electoral parleys with Congress, BJP, Akali Dal (Mann) that reached the stage of directly sharing State power in UP recently, essentially reflect this process of degeneration and expose its class characteristics today.

It seems to have sustaining support from the icon that BSP itself created, where Ambedkar was painted as the intelligent strategist who could turn any situation to his advantage, who used every opportunity to grab political power to achieve his objective.

Kanshiram's reading of Ambedkar ignores the fact that Ambedkar had to carve out space for his movement in the crevices left by the contradictions between various Indian political parties and groups on one side and the colonial power on the other. For most of his time, he sought maximisation of this space from the contending Muslim League and Congress, and eventually brought dalit issue to the national political agenda.

Kanshiram stuffs his Ambedkar icon entirely with such kind of superfluity that it would look credible to the gullible dalit masses. This icon approves of his sole ideology that political power to his party could solve all dalit problems. He did not care for democracy. To some extent this non-democratic stance spells his compulsions to have unitary command over his party structure as without it, his adversaries would gobble it up. He did not have any utility for any programme or manifesto, his sole obsession is to maximise his power by whatever means. In the rhetoric of empowering Bahujans, he does not even feel it necessary to demonstrate what exactly this empowering means and what benefits it would entail them. The obsession with capturing power robbed him of certain fundamental values that Ambedkar never compromised.

The underlying value of the movement of Ambedkar was represented by liberty, equality and fraternity. Kanshiram does not seem to respect any value than the political and money power.

For Ambedkar political power was a means, to Kanshiram it appears to be the end. Notwithstanding these broad differences, he has succeeded in luring the dalit masses in certain pockets of the country by projecting an Ambedkar icon that sanctioned his unscrupulous pursuits of power.

The crux of Kanshiram can be traced to his superfluous attempt to replicate Ambedkar's movement of 1920s. When Ambedkar realised the potency of political power, he launched his Indian Labour Party that reflected his urge to bring together the working class, transcending the caste lines. It is only when the political polarisation took communal turn that he abandoned his ILP project and launched the Scheduled Caste Federation. Ambedkar joined hands with a few political parties – one the communists (while joining the strike of mill workers) and the other is the Praja Samajwadi Party of Ashok Mehta in the 1952 elections. Although, he accepted the Congress support and offered to work in their government, he never tied up his political outfit to the Congress. Kanshiram's record so far clearly shows that he is ready to join hands with any one promising him the share of political power. Ambedkar pointed at the capitalism and Brahminism as the twin enemy for his movement but Kanshiram enthusiastically embraced them.

Apart from these broad political trends, there are many regional outfits like Dalit Mahasabha in Andhra Pradesh, Mass Movement in Maharashtra, Dalit Sena in Bihar and elsewhere, etc., some of which dabble directly into electoral politics and some of them do not. So far, none of them have a radically different icon of Ambedkar from the ones described above. They offer some proprietary ware claiming to be a shade better than that of others.

Did State really helped?

The post-1947 State, which has never tired of propagandising its concern for dalits and poor, has in fact been singularly instrumental in aggravating the caste problem with its policies. Even the apparently progressive policies in the form of Land Ceiling Act, Green Revolution, Programme of Removal of Poverty, Reservations to Dalits in Services and Mandal Commission etc. have resulted against their professed objectives.

The effect of the Land Ceiling Act, has been in creating a layer of the middle castes farmers which could be consolidated in caste terms to constitute a formidable constituency. In its new incarnation, this group that has traditionally been the immediate upper caste layer to dalits, assumed virtual custody of Brahminism in order to coerce dalit landless labourers to serve their socio-economic interests and suppress their assertive expression in the bud.

The Green Revolution was the main instrument to introduce capitalisation in agrarian sector. It reinforced the innate hunger of the landlords and big farmers for land as this State sponsored revolution produced huge surplus for them. It resulted in creating geographical imbalance and promoting unequal terms of trade in favour of urban areas. Its resultant impact on dalits has been far more excruciating than that of the Land Ceiling Act.

The much publicised programme for Removal of Poverty has aggravated the gap between the heightened hopes and aspirations of dalits on one hand and the feelings of deprivation among the poorer sections of non-dalits in the context of the special programmes especially launched for upliftment of dalits. The tension that ensued culminated in increasingly strengthening the caste – based demands and further aggravating the caste – divide.

The reservations in services for dalits, notwithstanding its benefits, have caused incalculable damage in political terms. Reservations created hope, notional stake in the system and thus dampened the alienation; those who availed of its benefit got politically emasculated and in course consciously or unconsciously served as the props of the system. The context of scarcity of jobs provided ample opportunity to reactionary forces to divide the youth along caste lines. Mandal Commission, that enthused many progressive parties and people to uphold its extension of reservation to the backward castes, has greatly contributed to strengthen the caste identities of people. In as much as it empowers the backward castes, actually their richer sections, it is bound to worsen the relative standing of dalits in villages.

Dalits and Contemporary Indian Politics:

While the Indian Constitution has duly made special provisions for the social and economic uplift of the Dalits, comprising the scheduled castes and tribes in order to enable them to achieve upward social mobility, these concessions are limited to only those Dalits who remain Hindu. There is a demand among the Dalits who have converted to other religions that the statutory benefits should be extended to them as well, to overcome and bring closure to historical injustices.

Another major politically charged issue with the rise of Hindutva's (Hindu nationalism) role in Indian politics is that of religious conversion. This political movement alleges that conversions of Dalits are due not to any social or theological motivation but to allurements like education and jobs. Critics argue that the inverse is true due to laws banning conversion, and the limiting of social relief for these backward sections of Indian society being revoked for those who convert. Many Dalits are also becoming part of Hindutva ideology.

Another political issue is over the affirmative-action measures taken by the government towards the upliftment of Dalits through quotas in government jobs and university admissions. The seats in the National and State Parliaments are reserved for Scheduled Caste and Tribe candidates, a measure sought by B. R. Ambedkar and other Dalit activists in order to ensure that Dalits would obtain a proportionate political voice.

Anti-Dalit prejudices exist in fringe groups, such as the extremist militia Ranvir Sena, largely run by upper-caste landlords in areas of the Indian state of Bihar. They oppose equal or special treatment of Dalits and have resorted to violent means to suppress the Dalits.

A dalit, Babu Jagjivan Ram became Deputy Prime Minister of India In 1997, K. R. Narayanan was elected as the first Dalit President. K. G. Balakrishnan became first Dalit Chief Justice of India.

In 2007, Mayawati, a Dalit, was elected as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India. Some say that her 2007 election victory was due to her ability to win support from Dalits and the Brahmins. However, Caste loyalties were not necessarily the voters' principal concern. Instead, inflation and other issues of social and economic development were the top priorities of the electorate regardless of caste.

Dalit who became chief Ministers in India are Damodaram Sanjivayya (Andhra Pradesh) , Mayawati four times chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Jitan Ram Manjhi, chief minister of Bihar.

Some Dalits have been successful in business and politics of modern India.

Despite anti-discrimination laws, many Dalits still suffer from social stigma and discrimination. Ethnic tensions and caste-related violence between Dalit and non-Dalits have been witnessed. The cause of such tensions is claimed to be from economically rising Dalits and continued prejudices against Dalits.

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