

THE PROCESSES OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AMONG DALITS IN MODERN NORTH INDIA

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Introduction

Dalit Movement, Dalit Assertion, Dalit Emancipation and Dalit Mission all these words gained some momentum in recent years and they also may have some different-different connotations. But all these words strike on the emancipation of Dalits not only from the long lasting and centuries old Brahminical, hierarchical and unjustifiable social disorder or structure but also the present day social, religious and cultural inequalities. Therefore the agenda of Dalit mobilization can be divided into several folds today i.e. political, social, religious, cultural etc. But the two major folds or parts remain the social and cultural mobilization and assertion of Dalits in modern India. The present article revolves around these two kinds of categories of Dalit movement in modern north India.

Historical Overview

The history of Dalit movement in India is as old as the civilization history of India itself is, one can argue that since from the post Vedic age the caste discrimination started from and in the ancient India the Dalits were denied even from the very basic rights i.e. right to reside, right to worship, right to shelter in residential area, liberty and Equality of all kinds. They fought for basic amenities and rights, without which life was impossible on earth. At this stage the Upanishad age and the rise of Buddhism gave them the rays of hope through which they started their resistance and mobilization.

In the medieval India the Dalit movement turned to be religious from the basic social nature. Now the Bhakti saints like Guru Ravidass, Guru Nanak Dev, Kabir, Banka, Namdev and others started criticising the ridiculous or orthodox Hindu rituals like, Bali pratha, caste hierarchy, child marriage, murti pooja etc. and demanded equal status for lower caste or Dalits through their critical verses and hymns.

In the modern time the Dalit movement is going on in a very-2 compressed manner. Irrespective from the ancient and medieval periods now the movement has turned to be a multi-dimensional assertion. For example in ancient India it was a resistance for basic social amenities and in medieval India it revolves around religious movement supported by bhakti saints. But in modern India the Dalit movement is not easy to understand since it became a movement for social reconstruction and reimagining of Dalit identity. Dalits are fighting for political mobilization and economic-empowerment now. So in the limited theme of the present paper the author would like to define the Dalit movement in terms of social-political and economic mobilization rather than going into the traditional form of Dalit movement.

Social Mobilization of Dalits in Modern India

Caste is the core reality of Indian society and politics. Since the ancient time caste has played an important role in both social and political structures in India. As politics is a mass based phenomenon, the articulation and support organization is to be done through the institutions and cultural idioms lived with by the masses. Since caste is the most pervasive institution of Indian society, they can easily be and have always been mobilized on the caste line. Although Dr. B.R. Ambedkar does not want the annihilation of caste but he himself mobilized Dalits on the basis of caste so he was the first to mobilize Dalits on the basis of caste in modern India.

The pan-Indian Dalit movement in modern India at an organized level started in 1926 at the all India depressed classes leaders' conference held at Nagpore, where the All India Depressed Classes Association was formed, with Rai Bahadur M.C. Rajah as its first elected president. Dr. Ambedkar, who did not attend the conference, was elected one of its Vice Presidents. Therefore, in 1930 Ambedkar resigned from the association and founded his own All India Depressed Classes Congress at a conference in Nagpore (Bandhyopadhyay, 2000).

After this Ambedkar started opposing many policies and politics of Congress i.e. he demanded separate electorate for depressed classes but Gandhi Ji and Congress was not in good turn of it, so the idea had been shut down. But the joint electorate with Hindu, with the provision of reservation of seats on the basis of population was unanimously accepted in February 1932, in a meeting of all India depressed classes association. Meeting of all India depressed classes association and later on this was incorporated into 1935 Government of India Act. But the Congress and Ambedkar again started moving in different directions. While Gandhi Ji's Harijan Sewak Sangh was involved in social issues the other Congress leaders were hardly interested in it. Rather they needed a political front to mobilize Dalit voters to win the reserved seats provided for in the new Act of 1935. For this purpose, they founded in March 1935 'The All India Depressed Classes League', with Jagjivan Ram a protégé of the Bihar Congress leader Rajender Parsad as a President, and the Punjab Dalit leader, Prithvi Singh Azad as the General Secretary. Ambedkar on the other hand founded in 1936 his Independent Labour Party, in a bid to mobilize the poor and the untouchables on broader bases than caste alone. In the election of 1937, his party won a spectacular victory in Bombay, winning 11 of the 15 reserved seats. It did well also in the central provinces. But it was limited only to the western India (Ibid.)

When it became clear that the Britishers are going to withdraw from India, in such a contingency the Dalits had to find a place within the new political structure of free India. At the stage Dr. Ambedkar said that there should not be transfer of power, unless and until the depressed classes elevated in education, economic and social position to the level of the other more fortunate sections of India. But he was very clear about that is not going to happen. So he was interested in some constitutional safeguards for the oppressed classes.

So in 1942 Ambedkar started his All India Scheduled Castes Federation, with its constitution claiming the scheduled caste to be distinct and separate from the Hindu and through this organization he claimed and ensured the special rights and safeguards to freedoms of scheduled castes. Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay – transfer of power and the crisis of Dalit politics in India, 1945-47 (2000 Modern Asian Studies, 34,4 pp. 893-942). But it had not been a simple and straight forward journey for Ambedkar the Congress party and Gandhian programme of Harijan upliftment has seriously opposed Ambedkarite Movement or politics and to much extent they succeeded too in wooing or winning the loyalty of Dalits. But Ambedkar was also very self confident and confident to win the real democracy and freedom for depressed classes.

One can also argue about Dr. Ambedkar that he wishes to establish social democracy in India. Dr. Ambedkar expanded the meaning of political freedom by incorporating in its fold the less talked about issue of freedom from internal colonialism-caste based social exclusion. He assigned special importance to the principles of social democracy by championing the cause of the socially excluded sections of the Indian society. He wanted to strengthen the emerging sphere of political democracy in India by substantiating it with the institutionalization of the less talked about phenomenon of social democracy (Ram, 2010).

Dr. Ambedkar define social democracy as:-

“... a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to be defeat the very purpose of democracy (Three Historical Addresses, 1999: 53, pg.3).

Ambedkar’s Notion of social justice or social democracy is also directly related to the question of nationalism in India. As noted by Gopal Guru that Ambedkar’s Notion of Nationalism results primarily from the dichotomy between the political and the social. As it is well known the nationalist leaders and more particularly the Hindu Nationalist, laid excessive emphasis on the political almost ignoring the social aspect of the Nationalism. Ambedkar’s argument was that the absence of any comprehensive critique of the caste system and Hinduism the political is bond to suggest that the local/indigenous tyrants are preferable on patriotic grounds (Guru, 1998).

Ambedkar also argued that Hindu culture due to its anti egalitarian tone and spirit could not bind culturally diverse people into a oneness which an important precondition of nationalism.

After defining the Ambedkar’s episode one can safely conclude that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar did his sincere efforts to make Indian society as egalitarian as possible through the much needed social and political actions or reforms. Some of his political and social reforms like making some special provisions and safeguards for Dalits. Fundamental rights for all the citizen and none citizen of India reservation policy and positive discrimination or protective discrimination in the constitutional provisions, abolition of untouchability, establishing of social and economic democracy under directive principals of state policy are really something much needed arrangements for the spirit of nationalism and welcomed by the scholars.

It is also important to note that at the time of Ambedkar, he was the only institution of social and political reforms for the depressed classes. He faced a multidimensional criticism and opposition of congress leaders like Nehru, Gandhi, among others. He was the only person to look after all the social and political organizations like, All Indian Scheduled Caste Federation, Labour party, Representative Party of India among others. There was no social, religious or political organization or outfit which can complement the works being done by B.R. Ambedkar. Finally one can conclude that Dalits do not secure to themselves in overnight, in fact they bond awake first to the socio-cultural consciousness which is the first glimpse of the political consciousness and if it did in this manner, it would be called be called consciousness from below and not from above.

Dalit Movement in Post Colonial India (after Ambedkar)

After the death of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar there has been a tremendous growth in the consciousness among Dalits about the ideas and life of B.R. Ambedkar – a process which for the sake of brevity can be termed as Ambedkarisation. Many villages, committees, schools, libraries named after Ambedkar have been setup, and his status have bee installed. April 14, Ambedkar’s birthday is celebrated with fervor and gaiety. Plays exposing discriminatory caste system/Hindu religion/culture

are staged; *prabhat pheries* and processions in the accompaniment of singing of songs and slogans in praise of Ambedkar are taken-out. The processionist exhorts Dalits to read Ambedkar literature (Sing, 1998).

However, some Dalits were converted to budhism after a universal call by Ambedkar for conversion to budhism and after Ambedkar some Dalits who were inspired by RPI also converted to budhism. But it was impossible task to be converted all scheduled caste into the Budhism so some other Dalit started other way out of social protest like they find some other alternative mode of idol worship and construction of temples. Setting up their own temples separated from Hindus, named after valmiki, Guru Ravidas, and Ambedkar (ibid).

Not only do the Dalits now want a party based on Dalit ideology. They also set social-cultural organisatins. i.e. Dalit sangharsh vahini, Dalit sena, Dalit sangharsh samiti, bharatiya mazdoor union (BMU) Ambedkar Kalyan Samittees, and Ambedkar Committees (Singh 1998) and now more recently they srated organized on religion basis like they do getting the temple committees registered i.e. Guru Ravidass Sabha, Guru Ravidass Mandir parbhandhan sabha etc. Ambedkar Students Associations and Ambedkar Teacher Associations have also been formed at the university and college level. All these organisations are giving new identity and dignity to the Dalits today.

Role of Kanshi Ram and Mayavati in Social Change in Modern India

Kanshi Ram was born on 15 March 1934 in the chamar Ramdassia from Khawaspur Village in district Ropar, Punjab. Brought up in Punjab, which was comparatively free from the social stigma of untouchability. He did not experience any of the exploitation that Dalits in the north India usually face in their childhood. In fact, he remained unaware of the oppression suffered by Dalits in the country, until two events took place in his life: he experienced caste discrimination and was influenced by Ambedkar's writings, particularly "Annihilation of Caste". This made him aware of his identity and instilled pride in – his background (Singh, 1996).

After becoming the member of some minority organizations and formation of some small organizations of working class, in 1978 BAMCEF became a big national federation, and by the mid 1970s. Kanshi Ram had established a broad network of contacts in Maharastra and the adjoining regions. He moved to Delhi and then on to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Parallel to his attempts to work among educated Dalit employees. He also tried to spread the massage of Ambedkar among the masses. In 1980, he organized an oral and pictorial account of Ambedkar's Life and views, together with contemporary material an oppression and atrocities called 'Ambedkar on wheel's; between April and June 1980, this roadshow was carried to 34 destinations in nine northern states (Mendelsohn and Vieziany 1998: 222).

The Dalit Shoshit Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) was also launched in 1982 which was an agitainoal and political wing of BAMCEF. The mobilizational methods adopted by DS-4 were aimed at awakening the oppessed sections of the society and make them realize their strength through Jagsans, people's parliaments, Nukkar sabhas, anti liquid agitations and prachar yatras. By overwhelming the success of DS-4 Kanshi Ram decided to for a political party which can enhance the process of social change in India. So, on Ambedkar's birthday (14 April) 1984 the BSP came into existence and how onwards Mayawati the secretary of the party take over the charge of social change in India.

Mayawati and BSP a mechanism of social change in Modern India

An able lieutenant of Kanshi Ram and the secretary of the party Mayawati has emerged as an important leader in her own right. She was born on 15 January 1956, in Delhi- impressed by her aggressive and forthright speeches at the BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Community Employees Federation) meetings, Kanshi Ram persuaded her to join politics for the social, economic and political betterment of Dalits in India and finally she decide to take over the social base created by Kanshi Ram and emerged as a Krishmatic leader in BSP. The BSP began as an outfit of the government employees under the banner of BAMCEF in 1978 as a brainchild of Kanshi Ram. It gradually developed into a political party when its activist wing, Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) established in 1982, finally gave way to the BSP (Kumar 1999). Although since from the beginning the BSP done well in both vidhan sabha and lok sabha elections and has been doing well till today. But in this paper I would look at BSP as a tool of social change in modern north India rather than looking at its electoral gains and losses. But the party under the leadership of Kanshi Ram and then Mayawati did a tremendous work to mobilize Dalits on socio-cultural grounds, and to make the social change among Dalits going on. In the absence of any seriously thought out ideological contents, that strategy of BSP to mobilize Dalit from the above has a very-very serious impact on the mobilization from the below. In other words mobilizing Dalits for political gains has also contributed towards the socio-cultural mobilization of Dalits, i.e. through mobilizing Dalit in terms of politics the party used the socio-cultural process of Ambedkarisation which includes consciousness among Dalits about the life and ideas of Ambedkar (Pai, 1997).

Sudha Pai further describe the role of BSP in carrying out (bringing out) socio-cultural mobilization among Dalits in north India specially in UP she argues that the BSP through two phases since its inception, shifting between three mobilizational strategies and correspondingly relationship with other parties: socio-cultural, agitational and electoral, portraying its difficulties in being both a party and socio-cultural movement (ibid).

from 1985 to 1995 the BSP gave equal importance to all the three strategies leading to steady growth as a movement and party seen in increase in its seats in the assembly over the 1989, 1991 and 1993 elections from 13 to 16. It was a militant phase of vertical mobilization of the poor and underprivileged, ideologisation of caste as a tool to break existing system, criticism of both Gandhi Ji, and mainstream parties as manuvadi, Dalit politicization by highlighting the failure of congress regimes, opposition to Hindutva, caste based atrocities, etc. Many agitations were launched such as the struggle for social transformation on August 15, 1988 for self respect, annihilation of caste, untouchability etc. During this phase two competing mobilisational strategies of caste and communalism dominated the political scene. While the BJP attempting to arrest Hindu Caste cleavages arising from the mandal reservation policy. The BSP moved closer to SP representing the backwards both in order to 'contain' communalism and establish a 'Bahujan Samaj' of the SCs, BCs and muslims. The victory of the later was perceived as that of the secular forces and lower order against entrenched upper caste rule. However, this divided the social base of parties along caste/communal lines emphasizing distinct identities creating violent confrontation both at the grass-roots and politics (Pai, 1994). So one can argue that during the above mentioned period of BSP-SP coalition BSP has successfully apply its agenda of socio-cultural transfer motion for Dalits and electoral gain for BSP.

It is also important to note that the BSP increased its share of votes in UP assembly elections from 9.4% in 1991 to 23.2% in 2002, and BSP formed coalition governments in UP in 1993,. 1995, 1997, and 2002. In April 2007, the BSP won a landslide victory in the state elections capturing power on its own for the first time and securing 30.6% of the vote. Mayawati a Dalit woman and former School teacher, has led the BSP since 1995 (Jeffrey, 2008).

Under the leadership and Chief Ministership of Mayawati the BSP was committed to bring about the social, economic, political and cultural transformation of Dalits. The BSP has persuaded this goal through two interlinked but distinct political strategies. First, it has aimed to transform the symbolic landscape of north India especially UP through the creation of parks, statues, and libraries dedicated to Dr. Bhim Rao Ram Ji Ambedkar and other Dalit heroes, and by renaming hospitals, educational institutions, and stadiums along similar lines. The acme of this iconographic program was the creation of a hugely expensive park in the UP state capital, Lucknow, in honour of Dalit hero E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (Jeffery, 2008).

To summarize, the recent socio-cultural and political developments in Uttar Pradesh one can safely argue that Kashi Ram and Mayawati played a tremendous role in bringing about the social transformation of Dalits in north India. Through their social and political organizations like BAMCEF, D-SSSS (DS-4) and lastly BSP these leaders created a Dalit culture in north India. Further by creating and establishing Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Samajik Parivajan Sathal, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Parivarjan Sangarhalya and renaming the cities, educational institutions and government policies for Dalits on the name of Dalit icons. i.e. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Ji Maharaj, Shri Narayana Guru, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Shrimati Rama Bai Ambedkar, Shri Kanshi Ram Ji, Gautam Budha, Saint Kabir, Saint Ravidass Ji etc. are the clear indicators of emerging separate or autonomous identity and socio-cultural transformation of Dalits in north India.

Role of Ad-Dharam Movement and Dera Sant sarwan Dass Ji in Socio-Cultural Change of Dalits in North India

Although there have been many movements in both colonial and post-colonial India, which include Dalit emancipation on their agendas i.e. Dalit Movement under the leadership of Ambedkar, Arya Samaj Movement, Singh Sabha etc. But Ad-dharam movement was purely a pro-Dalit movement in terms of its concentration only on the socio-cultural mobilization or transformation of the Dalits and its founder Babu Mangoo Ram himself was a Dalit.

Ad-dharam Movement of Punjab was based on the Bhakti Movement, especially on the poetry and hymns of saint poet Guru Ravidas, Kabir, Namdev, Trilochan etc. Ad-dharam movement was the only movement in north western India that aimed at securing a respectable place for the Dalits (SCs) through cultural transformation, spiritual regeneration, and social and political assertion, rather than seeking patronage from above. The movement focused more ethnification of Dalit (SC) identity than on following the path of Sanskritization to move up the caste hierarchy, as was the case with the Adi Hindu Movement (Ram 2004 as cited in).

The Ad Dharam Movement aimed at securing a distinct identity for the Dalits, independent of both Hindu and Sikh religions. Its central motif was that untouchables constitute a *quam* (community), a distinct religious grouping similar that of Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs, which had existed since the immemorial (Ram, 2004).

Mango Ram set a clear agenda for Ad dharma movement, namely to create a new religion for the lower castes. Lower caste were treated shabbily by the Hindu whom for political motives, considered them co-religionists while the Arya Samaj was making frantic efforts to bring shudras who had converted to Islam, Christianity and Sikhism back into the Hindu fold, Mango Ram thought it appropriate to intervene at this juncture to espouse the Dalit cause and carve out a separate Dalit identity (Ram, 2004 as cited in).

The leaders of Ad Dharam thus chose to restore dignity and freedom to the untouchables by detaching them completely from Hinduism and consolidating them into their own ancient religion- ad Dharam – of which they had become oblivious during the long domination by the “alien Hindus”.

In fact the task of reviving their ancient religion was not an easy one, for the untouchable had forgotten their gurus and other religious symbols during the long period of persecution at the hands of the SAVARNAS. They had been condemned as impure and declared unfit to have their own theology. Thus, to revive Ad Dharam was tantamount to developing a new religion for ex untouchables. Mango Ram's claim that the Dalit were the real inhabitants of this land made an enormous psychological impact on the untouchables, providing a theological podium to sustain and reinforce the new Dalit identity (Ram, 2004).

The leaders of Ad Dharam endeavoured to establish a religious identity for the lower castes. They also started some new cultural and religious values as they asked to salute each other in the name of Jai Guru Dev (victory to the divine guru) and to respond with Dhan Gurudev (blessed be the divine guru) Sant Guru Ravidass Ji, Kabir, Valmiki, Namdev etc. accepted the religious guru of ad dharmies.

To conclude we can say that the Ad Dharam movement contributed its sincere efforts to make a separate socio-cultural Dalit identity through the construction of new religion. This movement has been a turning point in the process of social transforming and changing of Dalits in modern north India. It was in the side line of this movement the dera Sant Sarwan Dass was also working at that time and the founder of ad Dharam Movement Babu Mangoo Ram himself as devotee of this dera requested the dera's saint to help the movement as much as possible. This dera even after the collapse of the ad Dharm Movement is working as giving the Dalit a separate identity.

The Dera Ballan and Dalit Social Change

The Ad Dharma Movement and Ravidass Deras (religious centers or compounds) has played a tremendous role in making the Dalit socially and culturally mobilized. Although there has been many Dalit deras in Punjab but Dera Sachkhand Ballan is among the most influential dera in north India. Dera Ballan also known as Dera Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Ji Maharajs Sachkhand Balla in village Ballan district Jalandhar, Punjab. Mangoor Ram the founder of Ad Dharam Movement was also closely related to the dera and than dera chief Sant Sarwan Dass Ji Maharaj (Bawa, 2004).

Sant Sarwan Dass one of the Founder Guru of Dera Sachkhand Ballan was an emissary of Guru Ravidass in the true spirit. Under his stewardship. The dissemination of the teachings of Ravidass became one of the most important mission of dera Sachkhand Ballan. He himself laid down the foundation stones of various Ravidass deras and sponsored the construction of rooms in the Shiri Guru Ravidass High School Jalandhar, Art and Craft training College Jalandhar and many more (Bawa, 2004, 7).

Dera Ballan has meticulously kept Sant Sarwan Dass's legacy of spreading the Bani of Guru Ravidass with zeal and has actually accelerated its efforts to virtually every corner of India and abroad, and has generated a sense of cohesive belongingness among the Dalits. The construction of Guru Ravidass Mandirs (temples) in seer Goverdhanpur (Varanasi), Hadiabad (Punjab), Sirshgarh (Haryana) Pune (Maharashtra), Haridwar (Uttaranchal), and Una (Himachal Pradesh) is a clear indication of the concerted efforts of Dera Ballan towards the popularization of social egalitarian philosophy of Ravidass (Heer, 2005).

The important feature of dera Ballan is that brought it to the forefront of the cause of the Dalits uplift was its deep interest in literary activities. The dera has a very rich library on its premises. The library contains book on the life and philosophy of Ravidass, Baba Sahib Ambedkar, The Bhakti Movement, the Ad Dharam Movement, Dalit literature, and the missions of Dera Ballan. All the writings and speeches of Baba Sahib Ambedkar are also available in the library (Ram, 2008).

Conclusion

One can conclude that in ancient India the Dalits were denied even from the very basic rights i.e. right to reside, right to worship, right to shelter in residential area, liberty and Equality of all kinds. They fought for basic amenities and rights, without which life was impossible on earth. In the medieval India the Dalit movement turned to be religious from the basic social nature. Now the Bhakti saints like Guru Ravidass, Guru Nanak Dev, Kabir, Banka, Namdev and others started criticizing the ridiculous or orthodox Hindu rituals like, Bali pratha, caste hierarchy, child marriage, murti pooja etc. and demanded equal status for lower caste or Dalits through their critical verses and hymns.

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