



Main Dalit Movements in Post Independent India (1950 - 2000)

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Abstract

One of the biggest issues facing India for millennia has been the abuse of human rights. Indian society's socioeconomic environment is fundamentally antagonistic to the defense of Dalits' human rights. Dalit human rights violations are encouraged by the caste and Varna systems of social stratification. Manu, the creator of Hindu law, established the rule that there should be no fifth Varna and that there should only be four Varnas for Hindus. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras are the four Varnas. The word "Dalit," which meaning "crushed" or "broken to pieces," may have Sanskrit origins. In the nineteenth century, Jyotirao Phule may have been the first to use it in reference to the tyranny that the Hindu castes who were once considered "untouchable" endured. In order to distinguish the erstwhile Untouchables, Mohatma Gandhi used the term "Harijan," which loosely translates to "Children of God." The Dalits are classified as members of the Scheduled castes under the Indian Constitution. In their anti-untouchability campaign, Gandhiji and others argued that, according to Manu's concept of stratification, scheduled tribes and untouchables belong to the fourth Varna, or Sudras. This idea is unacceptable, according to Dr. Ambedkar, because Manu speaks refer to untouchables as varn-baya, which indicates those who are not part of the Varna system. Hindus who belong to the four classes are known as Savarnas, while those who do not, such as untouchables, are known as Avarnas. According to Manu's smiriti, the Chandals' dwellings must take place outside of the village, they must be made "apapratras," their wealth will consist of dogs and donkeys, they will dress in the clothing of the deceased, they will eat in broken dishes, they will wear black iron as ornaments, they will wander around, and they will not sleep in towns and villages at night. It is often known that other castes reside in the main village, while the untouchables live in isolated neighborhoods. Therefore, it is indisputable that untouchables are not a part of Hindu society and should continue to be kept apart. Nowadays, a lot of Dalits use the phrase to avoid using the more disparaging connotations of their caste titles, such as

"Untouchable." The premise behind the modern usage of "Dalit" is that, despite being shattered by tyranny, the community as a whole manages to survive and even flourish by finding purpose in their daily fight. These days, Dalit is a political identity.

I. Introduction

Human rights violations are one of the main issues in this nation. The socioeconomic environment of Indian society is fundamentally antagonistic to the defense of Dalit human rights. The caste and Varna system of social stratification is what encourages Dalit human rights violations in society. There are only four Varnas for Hindus, and a fifth Varna is not allowed, according to the rule established by Manu, the creator of Hindu law. The four Varnas are Sudras, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, and Brahmins. According to Manu's concept of stratification, Gandhiji and others argued in their campaign against untouchability that scheduled tribes and untouchables belong to the fourth Varna, or Sudras (Baij Nath, 2015).

Since Manu refers to untouchables as varn-baya, or those beyond the Varna system, Dr. Ambedkar has argued that this idea is unacceptable. Hindus who belong to the four classes are known as Savarnas, while those who do not, such as untouchables, are known as Avarnas. According to Manu's smiriti, the Chandals' dwellings must take place outside of the village, they must be made "apapratras," their wealth will consist of dogs and donkeys, they will dress in the clothing of the deceased, they will eat in broken dishes and wear black iron as ornaments, they will wander around, and they will not sleep in towns and villages at night (K. Sravana Kumar, 2016). It is well known that in villages the untouchables live in separate localities, while other castes live in the main village. It cannot, thus be denied that untouchables are not part of Hindu society and they must remain separate and segregated.

Major Causes of the Dalit Movement

The ongoing animosity that has been stoked for millennia by the savage actions of India's higher castes is what led to the Dalit Movement.



Dalits were denied social, economic, and political standing as well as higher mental training as they were tasked with servicing the other three Varnas, or all non-Dalits. Due to exploitation and injustice, the division of labor resulted in the division of laborers. Dalit lives were degenerated into a pathological state by the caste system, where castes replaced occupations. Dalits were kept out of the general population for centuries and were only permitted to work in low-paying jobs like sweeping and dry toilet cleaning. 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.

Numerous crimes were carried out in the name of religion. In addition, the Devadasi technique involved pouring molten lead into a Dalit's ears as he was listening to a chant. Education was monopolized in order to maintain its influence on the populace. Untouchability is the most cruel practice, forcing the Dalits to live in abject conditions. As a result, the Dalits have taken to the streets to protest Brahmanism's cruel customs. In India, the Dalits' fundamental demand for equality marked the beginning of their struggle. 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 Dalits eventually start discussing the issues of the impoverished as well as the abuses and humiliations committed by the higher castes. Additionally, they received a boost from the British divide and conquer strategy, which relied heavily on the census process (the British system of caste classification). This gave rise to the possibility of using caste mobilization to assert claims to social superiority. Wider connections and combination were made possible by an improved communication

network; new educational opportunities for socioeconomic advancement were made possible by the new administrative system; the rule of law challenged some privileges enjoyed by a select few; and certain economic forces, such as industrialization, opened up equal opportunities for everyone, 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 conducted significant campaigns and conflicts, including Varkom and Guruvayur Satyagraha, and included the topic of ending untouchability into the national movement. Gandhiji tried to show the higher caste how serious the injustice caused by the untouchability policy was.

By the late 1920s, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had become a prominent figure in the Depressed Classes. In 1942, he established the All Indian Scheduled Caste Federation. Additionally, he collaborates with the colonial authority after realizing that he may get additional advantages for SCs. The Congress defeated the candidates of the All India S.C. Federation, which also ran in the election. Other strands have developed in other places, such as Bengal's Namashvedsas, Uttar Pradesh's Adi Hindi, and Punjab's Adi Dharm. 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 Dalit movement's tactics, beliefs, and methods differed from one leader to another, from one location to another, and from period to time. In order to move up the caste structure, certain Dalit leaders therefore underwent the "Sanskritization" process. They took up Brahman etiquette, such as wearing holy thread, applying sandalwood paste to the forehead, and becoming vegetarians. As a result, Dalit leaders such as Moon Vithoba Raoji Pande (Maharashtra), Muldas Vaishya (Gujarat), Pandi Sunder Lai Sagar (UP), and Swami Thykkad (Kerala) attempted to embrace the customs and cultural norms of the upper castes. Dalits asserted their claim to equality by imitating the high caste mannerisms.

Adi-Hindu movement

The Adi-Hindu movement began as a result of treating Dalits as being outside the fourfold Varna system and labeling them as "outcastes" or "Panchama." As a result, some Dalit leaders held the opinion that the Dalits were not Hindus but rather the original occupants of India. that the indigenous occupants of this territory were forced to become untouchable by the Aryans or Brahmins who invaded there. They thought that untouchability would vanish on its own if Hinduism was abandoned. In Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab, Dalits started referring to themselves as Adi-Andhras, Adi-Karnataka, Adi-Dravidas, and Adi-Dharmis. Dalits also took the conversion path in an effort to improve their moral and economic circumstances as well as to abolish untouchability.

Conversions

Many Dalits, particularly in Kerala, were converted to Christianity. Particularly in Punjab, some Dalits became Sikhism converts. They go by names like Kabir Panthis, Namdharis, and Mazhabis, among others. Dalits became Buddhists as well. In 1956, Dr. Ambedkar and his millions of devotees converted to Buddhism in Nagpur.

Identifying Sects

Some Dalit leaders established their own sects or faiths in opposition to Hinduism. The Satnami Sect was formed by Guru Ghasi Das (MP). Matua Sect was formed by Gurtichand Thakur (Bengal). SJPY (Sadha Jana Paripalan Yogam) was created by Ayyan Kali from Kerala, while Adi Dharam was founded by Mangu Ram from Punjab.

Ambedkar's activism

Additionally, efforts were undertaken to politically mobilize Dalits in order to combat socioeconomic issues. In 1936, Dr. Ambedkar established the Independent Labour Party. He attempted to end the exploitative Khoti system that was in place in the Kokan region of Maharashtra as well as the Vetti or Maharaki system, which provided caste Hindus in the local government with wage-free hereditary service. He made an effort to persuade the government to enlist Mahars in the military. When the first Mahar Regiment was established in 1941, he finally achieved achievement. Dr. Ambedkar called for Dalits to have sufficient representation in the legislature and government as democracy progressed. One seat in the central Legislative Assembly was allocated to the downtrodden classes under the Government of India Act, 1919. The British government, led by Ramsay MacDonald, declared the "Communal Award" in 1932. The award called for the Depressed Classes to have their own electorate. Mahatma Gandhi embarked on a historic fast in protest against Communal Award especially in regard of downtrodden sections. The dispute was addressed by Poona Pact, September 1932. It allowed seats from general electorates to be reserved for downtrodden classes. Articles 330 and 332 of the Indian Constitution now guarantee Scheduled Castes seats in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha based on their population.

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.

A number of Dalit poems and stories that depicted the suffering of the Dalits, with their origins in the laws and regulations of the Vedas and Smritis, later flourished after the Dalit Panthers were formed. All of these works made the case that the Dalit Movement opposes not just Brahmins but also anyone who engages in exploitation, whether they be Dalits or Brahmins. Dalit writers produced new, revolutionary autobiographies, stories, poems, and songs. All their sentiments were coming out in the shape of essays. Intellectuals and educated



Dalits start discussing the issues without holding back and attempt to convey to their uneducated brethren the need for social reform. 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, dynamism 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 begin, in the real sense, can the Dalit be able to attain power and win the movement against exploitation. Gandhis 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.

B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhist dalit Movement

Without a question, Babasaheb Ambedkar has played a pivotal role in the Dalit universe's epistemology. The reason why Dalits adore and pay homage to Ambedkar is easily understood. They view him as someone who dedicated his entire life to contemplating and fighting for their freedom; who gave up all the comforts and conveniences of life that were within his grasp to support them; who, in spite of overwhelming odds, became the tallest among the tall, thereby disproving the idea of caste-based superiority; and, lastly, as someone who held the torch to light the way for their future.

Ambedkar accepted the invitation from the new Congress-led government to become the country's first Law Minister after the British administration transferred power to India on August 15, 1947. The Assembly tasked him with writing India's new Constitution, and on August 29 he was named Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. Ambedkar's draft contained constitutional safeguards and guarantees for a variety of individual individuals' civil freedoms, such as the prohibition of all types of discrimination, the removal of untouchability, and freedom of religion. 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. After his proposal of the Hindu Code Bill, which aimed to clarify gender equality in the rules of inheritance and marriage, was stalled in parliament, Ambedkar resigned from the government in 1951. In 1952, Ambedkar ran on his own for the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, but a little-known candidate named Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar won the Bombay seat. In March 1952, he was appointed to the Rajya Sabha, the upper chamber of parliament, and he would serve there until his 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 Saddhatissa, 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 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 Rahulan Ambawadekar, an RPI Dalit leader. In April 1981, Ambawadekar founded the Dalit Panthers (U.P. Branch) inspired by the Maharashtrian Dalit Panthers.

Dalit Panthers

Namdev Dhasal established the Dalit Panther as a social organization in Mumbai in April 1972. The group peaked in the 1970s and 1980s. The Black Panther Party, an African-American revolutionary movement that existed in the US from 1966 to 1982, served as the model for the Dalit Panther. The organization's name was taken from the American "Black Panther" Movement. Because they believed that they should fight for their rights like panthers and not be subdued by the power and might of their oppressors, they dubbed themselves "Panthers." Through the US Black Panther Newspaper, which was published weekly all over the world from 1967 to 1980, the US Black Panther Party consistently recognized and backed the Dalit Panther Party. 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.

Ambedkar was really dragged in by the tragedy of casteism, which was a part of the Dalit experience, because his was the only clear framework that took it into consideration. Marxism, however, offered a theoretical basis for a revolutionary transformation in the other modern issues of deprivations. Both Dalits and non-Dalits yearned for a fundamental shift, but the former followed what seemed to be Ambedkarian approaches to socio-political change, while the latter followed what became known as the Marxian approach, which tended to view all social processes as reflections of material reality. Both led to incorrect 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 extreme element of the agenda was criticized by the reactionaries, who claimed that the radicals, the Naxalites, had altered the manifesto. It is undeniable that the Naxalite movement, which had sprung up similarly to the Dalit Panthers as a rejection of the political establishment, saw a possible ally in the Panthers and attempted to establish a relationship with them at the very level of developing their policies and programs. However, it would not have been any less radical even if the Panthers had decided to model their program after the ten-point platform of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the USA, which served as the primary source of inspiration for its founding. 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-bourgeoise '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 downtrodden 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 downtrodden 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 Modern Indian Politics

Although the Indian Constitution has appropriately provided for the social and economic advancement of the Dalits, which include the scheduled castes and tribes, to allow them to attain upward social mobility, these benefits are only available to Dalits who maintain their Hindu identity. In order to address and resolve historical injustices, Dalits who have converted to other religions are demanding that they too get the statutory advantages. Religious conversion is a significant politically sensitive subject associated with the emergence of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) in Indian politics. 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.

The government's affirmative-action policies, which include quotas for government employment and university admissions, are another political point of contention. In order to guarantee Dalits a proportionate political voice, B. R. Ambedkar and other Dalit activists pushed for the National and State Parliaments to reserve seats for

candidates from Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In parts of the Indian state of Bihar, fringe organizations like the hardline militia Ranvir Sena, which is mostly controlled by upper-caste landlords, harbor anti-Dalit sentiments. 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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