

Ambedkarism and Socio-Political Change in India (For June 2021)

Ravinder Kumar

*Assistant Professor of Political science,
Government College for Women, Ambala City.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social mobility may not be important and concerned to those who belong to the dominant caste in Indian society. However, it is much important and concerned to the lower ranked castes of the society. In the late 19th century, reform movements led by religious leaders and social reformers challenged the evils of *Varna* ideology, caste system and caste based discrimination. After the independence of India, Dalits have challenged the notion of impurity and pollution attached to their community. In the different parts of the country, Dalits have started to mobilize themselves as socially, educationally, religiously, culturally and politically¹. In the changed socio-political scenario in the country, the lowest castes or the Dalits themselves strive for achieving social mobility and justice and respectful social identity through both social mobility and social change. This very paper is about to define the concept of Dalit social mobility keeping into account the efforts made by Baba Saheb Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

Social Mobility

The Society in itself is an outcome of the process of social Mobilization. And thus the mobilization is a necessary dynamic process in any society. It describes the nature and amount of change in social position over time. More commonly, the term mobilization is used in connection to the common agenda, movement or activity of individuals, families, and social-political-economic-religious and ethnic groupings for some common aims. Thus it also important to argue that there can be many dimensions of mobility i.e. social, cultural, religious, ethnic, economic, educational, and political mobilization. In western context it is measured in terms of classes. In that context, it signifies either a change in social position: such as occupational change, where a person move up or down on the occupational scale, or a leap from low economic class to high one or vice versa.

As far as the social mobility in India is concerned one can argue that the caste based society in India have a certain amount of steady social mobility. This is far less gradual social mobility than that of in a democratic western society (kaur and gupta 2006). It is accompanied by social transformation break down of the old structures, and emergence of new way of life. Industrial economy, secularization, sanskritization, westernization, and diversification of occupation structure, emergence of class system, and globalization are some of the modern development process that have an impact on the people living across metropolitan and rural settings (Dubey 1975).

Rooted in the radical philosophy of the Satyashodhak movement Sorokin had demarcated two types of social mobility: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal social mobility means the transition of an individual or social object from one social group to another situated on the same level. Vertical mobility means the relation involved in a transition of an individual from one social stratum to another.² When we study mobility, we analyze the movement of individuals from positions possessing a certain rank to position either higher or lower in the social system. In one another classification of social mobility there might be inflow and outflow mobility. In case of inflow mobility we can examine the social (caste based) composition of given society and in outflow mobility one can examine the class based mobility (Kumar 2002).

¹ M. Glen and Sipra Bose Johnson (1978), 'Social Mobility among Untouchables', in G.R. Gupta (Ed.), *Cohesion and Conflict in Modern India*, (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House), .

² P. A. Sorokin (1954), *Social and Cultural Mobility*, (New York, The Free Press), pp. 133-34.

THEOLOGY OF DR. AMBEDKAR

Dr. Ambedkar has played very eminent role to mobilize the Dalits in India. He has appeared as the leader of the community in Maharashtra by 1920. He was the first highly educated and active leader from within the community.³ He gave the slogan – Educate, Unite and Agitate for the social mobility of Dalits in India. He has organized a movement to accelerate political, religious, social and educational mobility among Dalits at large scale. In 1924, he has formed ‘Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha’, an educational and cultural organization which aimed at improving the social conditions of the Dalit community.⁴ To mobilize the Dalits of India through the political process, Dr. Ambedkar has formed three political parties named Independent Labour Party (1936), The Scheduled Caste Federation (1942), and Republican Party of India (1956).⁵

Through the religious conversion, from Hinduism to Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar has led the religious mobility among Dalits especially Mahars of Maharashtra. He has declared that I born in Hinduism because it was not in my hand but I will never die as a Hindu. After this declaration he has adopted Buddhism in 1956 and, mobilized and inspired Dalits of India to do so.⁶ Dr. Ambedkar has also launched the movement of temple entry at Kalaram Mandir, Nasik and Parvati temple at Pune in 1920-30⁷ for the equal social status, dignity and self-respect of Dalits.

Dr. Ambedkar has greatly emphasized on education for Dalits with the view that only education could liberate them from their traditional bondage and subordination to the upper castes and classes. In his opinion, education would enlighten them and expose them to realize their long cherished goals of embracing equality, liberty, fraternity and justice.⁸ Since the time of Ambedkar, Dalits in the country have started to achieve education. Along the education and socio-economic achievement, a new form of social stratification has emerged among the Dalits. There is no doubt that Dalits have achieved upward mobility in several domains of their life but the degree of their status mobility is definitely low.⁹

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 strait 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

³ Lata, Murugkar, (1991), *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal*, (Bombay, Popular Prakashan), pp. 24-28.

⁴ G. C. Wankhede, (1999), *Social Mobility and Scheduled Castes: Receding Horizons*, (Jaipur, Rawat Publications).

⁵ Ghanshyam, Shah (2005), *Social Movement in India: A Review of Literature*, (New Delhi, Sage Publications), pp.123-24.

⁶ James Massey (2003), *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: A Study in Just Society*. (New Delhi, Manohar), pp. 24-30.

⁷ Keer, Dhananjay (1954), *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*, (Bombay, Popular Prakashan), p.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

⁹ Nandu, Ram (2009), *Beyond Ambedkar: Essays on Dalits in India*, (New Delhi, Har-Anand Publications), pp. 28-29.

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 SOCIO-POLITICAL MOBILITY AFTER AMBEDKAR IN MODERN INDIA

The post Ambedkar leadership was full of lesser mortals whose gradual co-option in the congress power strategy of the 1960s and 1970s disappointed Kanshi Ram in his early years as a worker of the now-defund republic party when his movement or reckoning came, Kanshi Ram went beyond the conventional predictions about the future of a usual Dalit leaders. He demonstrated his uniqueness by combining the qualities of a shrewd tactician and charms of a mass leader. He showed contempt for everyone and stayed himself another "sahib" of Dalits after Babasaheb.

Kanshi Ram is a legendary figure, looked at differently by different people, social scientist, through, though they find him "shallow", pin hopes on him for 'social justice' and cultural revolution.

He calls his party a 'Phenomenon' his supporters describe him as the greatest social scientist (Rajan, 1994).

Kanshi Ram was of the view that to win the rights of Dalits, one need not to be a great militant like the Dalit Panthers; recourse to peaceful agitation can be taken to attain the objective. Second, the instant mobilization of ERDL's (Explosive Research and Development Laboratory where Kanshi Ram worked) Scheduled Caste employees gave him a glimpse of an entirely new and mostly unexplored ground on which a different kind of political movement could be launched. This new constituency was far more wide, plural and national in its character than the narrow base of Mahar and Neo Bhudists of the Republican variety. Through as per the service rules, bureaucracy is considered non-political, Kanshi Ram saw it as the 'Brain Bank'; 'Talent Bank', and 'Financial Bank' (The Sunday Observer 2, August, 1990) of Dalit movement. Third, he also found that employees of Dait origin were not the only victims of upper caste bias. Other backward classes and minorities also suffered in the same manner. This is what he learnt from the history of non-brahmin movement of Maharashtra, initiated by Phule in the 19th century. Phule coined the term Bahujan Samaj and tried to unite all non -Brahmins (Omredt, 1994a).

Kanshi Ram believes that one should first consolidate one's non-political base to succeed in politics. He himself did not aspire to any political post but was engaged in the work of the Ambedkar Education society which, in his considered opinion, could have been the fountain – head of his non-political base in the ever-burgeoning Dalit bureaucracy. In 1978 he launches his first organisation which acquired dreaded existence for upper-caste besses of the bureaucracy. Its full name is All India Backward (SC, ST, and OBC) and Minority Communities Employees Federation. Its full name was too long to be popular, but the acronym BAMCEP stuck very soon with the help of this organisation. Kanshi Ram worked so hard to mobilize Dalit employees across the nation. Then he formed another organisation DS-4 which spelt Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (Committee of the exploited and Dalits for struggle). These two organisations were not full fledged political organisations but some foremost leaders of that time i.e. Charan Singh, Devi Lal, Karpoori Thakur found electoral potential in it which happened to be so later on when BSP was introduced.

The success of the 1983 rally enthusiast Kanshi Ram so much that he started preparing for a full-fledged political party. Thus come the third stage of his mobilisational programme and or the occasion of Ambedkar's birthday (14th April, 1984), he announced the formation of Bahujan Samaj Party in Delhi on 22, 23 and 24 June, The BSP's first conference was held at the maidan in front of Red Fort (Rajan, 1994).

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 been 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 (Singh, 1998).

However, some Dalits were converted to Buddhism after a universal call by Ambedkar for conversion to Buddhism and after Ambedkar some Dalits who were inspired by RPI also converted to Buddhism. But it was impossible task to be converted all scheduled caste into the Buddhism 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 organisations. i.e. Dalit Sangharsh Vahini, Dalit Sena, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Bharatiya Mazdoor Union (BMU) Ambedkar Kalyan Samitees, and Ambedkar Committees (Singh 1998) and now more recently they started organized on religion basis like they do getting the temple committees registered i.e. Guru Ravidass Sabha, Guru Ravidass Mandir Parbandhan 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 SOCIO-POLITICAL 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 Maharashtra 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 message of Ambedkar among the masses. In 1980, he organized an oral and pictorial account of Ambedkar's Life and views, together with contemporary material a 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 Vieziary 1998: 222).

The Dalit Shoshit Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) was also launched in 1982 which was an agitational and political wing of BAMCEF. The mobilizational methods adopted by DS-4 were aimed at awakening the oppressed 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 form 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 SOCIO-POLITICAL 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 decided 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 (Jeffrey, 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 Joytiba Phule, Shahu Ji Maharaj, Shri NArayana Guru, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Shirimati 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.

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