
Research Papers



Dalit's Social Transformation: Redefining the Social Justice

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Abstract

Dalits, as the ex-untouchables prefer to be called, are a very distinct social group. While belonging to a broad class of have-nots they suffer an additional disability of social oppression. Economically, most of them are still the poorest of poor. There is a need for the dalits movement to emerge as a movement for genuine emancipation and social transformation of weaker sections of the society. Social justice is a fundamental principle of democratic principles engaged in a politics of social transformation, to bring about a fundamental defeat of the brahminical social order. It is a change in the present economist definition of such transformation and strives for its redefinition in social terms.

The Dalits movement needs to incorporate all the dimensions of struggle against the national and international establishment, thereby providing a new vanguard of social transformation and in the process broadening and deepening its own socio-cultural terrain towards social justice and redefining the concept of social transformation. In this backdrop the paper will trace the dalits social transformation redefining the social justice in India. Further the paper will discuss a combination of the literature review of social movements and social transformation. Finally the manuscript will define the concept of social justice, dalits social transformation redefining in the context of India.

Key Words: Social Transformation, Social Justice, Dalits, Society, Movements

Defining Social Justice Concept in Democracy

In a democracy, political masters are selected by the people and in theory; they are the ones who provide us the sense of direction in

which our polity ought to evolve. And in a democracy that ought to be the case. But one has to reckon with the fact that all is not well with the way our political system functions. The Constitution of India and the founding fathers of our Republic set before us lofty ideals and goals. The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in our Constitution constitute the talisman which should guide our conduct. But we all know that there have been aberrations. Politics in a democracy has to be a purposeful instrument of social change. Politics in a poor country has to mediate between societal tensions, which are built into the body dynamic of a poor society trying to modernise itself. Unfortunately, many a time politics becomes the instrument of self-aggrandisement. And many a time, it ceases to be a purposeful instrument of social change. Politicians come and go and the way elections come, there is frequent change of political masters, many a time they don't have the occasion to think about the long-term

consequences of what they are doing. Modern science and technology have made it possible as never before in human history that chronic poverty does not have to be the inevitable lot of a majority of human kind. Poverty eradication is a feasible goal provided we make full use of modern science and technology and we evolve the social engineering technology of using that knowledge to achieve the basic purposes for which our polity was founded. Great importance is attached to ensuring that our civil servants remain faithful to the Directive Principles enshrined in our Constitution, that our civil servants operate on the frontiers of knowledge that Constitutional values, the quest for equality – social, economic, political, that the State is an instrument for wiping out tears from the eyes of those who are disenfranchised, who are at the bottom of social and economic ladders, and that there is a commitment to social equity as well as excellence.

An Overview of the Problems Faced by SCs and STs

NCRWC (2011) Since the 1980s there has been a steady decline in the allocation of government funds for SC and ST development and welfare projects. The paper states, "there has in general been an inherent lack of interest and seriousness on the part of the planning and implementing machinery to achieve the objectives of the Constitution...benefits secured by the SCs and STs do not appear commensurate with the funds spent so far" (page 93). Despite providing reservation quotas in jobs, the representation of SCs and STs in the higher levels of all public services remains poor. The paper notes that the amendments to departmental orders concerning recruitment and promotion of SCs and STs have adversely affected their interests.

Since 1970s the government has earmarked plan funds specifically for the socio-economic empowerment of SCs and STs. The Special component Plan (SCP) for SCs and the Tribal Sub-Plan for the STs were intended to ensure adequate allocation of resources for schemes to improve their all round development. According to the government guidelines, the proportion of funds allocated under each plan should be equal to the proportion of SC and ST population in each State. Without providing any statistical data the paper notes that in reality this proportionality is hardly maintained. The paper remarks that budgetary allocations on SC, ST welfare schemes has declined in the recent years. In many cases the unspent money lapses back to

the government because departments which have the responsibility of spending the funds are unable to promptly finalise the welfare schemes. The Tribal Sub-Plan was introduced in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) and the Special Component Plan was initiated during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85). While this is true of the Special Component Plan, the state-wise allocations for Tribal Sub-Plans have matched the percentage-wise population of STs. During 1996-97 the outlay for TSP was a little over 8% while STs comprised 7.5% of the total population. But allocation for SCP during the same year was a little over 11% though SCs constitute 16.48% of the population. (See National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes- Fourth Report; 1996-97 & 1997-98, pp. 86ff).

Mahatma Gandhi & Dr. Ambedkar:

If we look to the history of Dalit movement, it is as old as the birth of the concept of untouchability, which was the darkest spot in Hindu social structure. Though, Hindu reformists tried their best to fight against this social evil right from the days untouchability was born, the real concern over it came to surface during the freedom struggle, when Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar fought against it in their own way. While Gandhi wanted complete eradication of untouchability for emotional integration of Hindu society, Ambedkar was for abolition of Varnashram structure of the Hindu social order. The conceptual difference between the two messiahs of untouchables continues to affect the Dalit movement even after their death. While the disciples rejected Mahatma Gandhi for the sake of power and fulfillment of their personal ambitions, Ambedkar became a symbol of Dalit movement. A clue to understanding Ambedkar lies in his hatred of Gandhi. The activists of Dalit movement adopted the same philosophy against the upper castes and are still found boiling in the anger generated by their messiah Ambedkar. Taking advantage of the violent landscape, which started emerging since the closing decades of twentieth century, the followers of Ambedkar adopted the sole agenda to create social disorder and capture power. In both the situations, the process of social transformation in Hindu society, which took off in positive direction just after independence got disturbed. To understand the multi dimensional direction of the Dalit movement, we may briefly look into the difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar on this issue. During the first Round Table Conference, when Ambedkar favoured the

move of the British Government to provide separate electorate for the oppressed classes, Gandhi strongly opposed it on the plea that the move would disintegrate the Hindu society. He went for an indefinite hunger strike from September 20, 1932 against the decision of the then British Prime Minister J.Ramsay MacDonald granting communal award to the depressed classes in the constitution for governance of British India. In view of the mass upsurge generated in the country to save the life of Gandhi, Ambedkar was compelled to soften his stand. A compromise between the leaders of caste Hindu and the depressed classes was reached on September 24, 1932, popularly known as Poona Pact. The resolution announced in a public meeting on September 25 in Bombay confirmed -" henceforth, amongst Hindus no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and they will have the same rights in all the social institutions as the other Hindus have". This landmark resolution in the history of the Dalit movement in India subsequently formed the basis for giving due share to Dalits in the political empowerment of Indian people in a democratic Indian polity. Even though Ambedkar was a party to Poona Pact, he was never reconciled to it. His contempt against Gandhi which was continued even after his assassination on January 30, 1948. On the death of Gandhi he expressed, "My real enemy has gone; thank goodness the eclipse is over". He equated the assassination of Gandhi with that of Caesar and the remark of Cicero to the messenger - "Tell the Romans, your hour of liberty has come". He further remarked, "While one regrets the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, one cannot help finding in his heart the echo of the sentiments expressed by Cicero on the assassination of Caesar". Considering Gandhi as a "positive danger to this country", he quoted from Bible that "sometime good cometh out of evil, so also I think good will come out of the death of Mr. Gandhi" (Gandhi and Ambedkar - Saviours of Untouchables by Sheshrao Chavan. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan publication 2001, page 263-64).

Post Ambedkar Dalit Movement:

The post-Gandhian and post-Ambedkar Dalit activists re-invented the direction of their movement, which was by and large focussed towards developing the negative ideas in a dark room. They are yet to take the next step to focus their negatives in light for positive prints. In the absence of a scientific endeavour their movement lags in its march towards social reform, as it has

more or less become a platform for the political empowerment of some individuals for their personal ambitions and vested interests. This is not only against the concept of equalitarian Hindu sociology of Vedic India but also against the concept of democracy. The present clash for Dalit leadership has confirmed the theory of C. Rajagopalachari that many Dalit leaders are interested for continuance of the undesirable status of Dalits for the fulfillment of their personal ambitions. Disagreeing with Ambedkar on Dalits issue he said, "...This is material explanation for the violent dislike of Gandhiji exhibited by Dr. Ambedkar, who looks upon this great and inspired reformer as the enemy of the untouchables, meaning thereby of the educated and ambitious among them who find that the depressed status furnishes short cut to position". ("Ambedkar Refuted" page 33, Hind Kitab Publishers: Bombay 1946). It may be partially true that political empowerment is a key to social and economic empowerment as suggested by Ambedkar but this cannot be the sole criteria for the social equality of Dalits. The representatives (122 -76 SC and 46 ST in parliament against its strength of 543 and 1085 - 556 SC and 529 ST in state assemblies against their strength of 4370) of Dalits in parliament and state assemblies in sizeable strength have been sharing political power for last fifty years. But if they have failed to bring a desired social change and economic upliftment of Dalits, there is something wrong in the movement, which is yet to be identified. The students of the constituting history have therefore, a right to know from Dalit activists the reason behind the failure of their representatives sharing political power.

One may be amused to understand that how only 160 Dalit delegates under the umbrella of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights in WCAR would have fought for the cause of Dalits in India if the representatives of Dalits sharing political power could not assert and agitate for the cause of their community? An objective analysis of the prevailing social condition and sentiments in India may corroborate the theory of C.Rajagopalachari that Dalit movement has become a vehicle to promote the personal interest of some individuals or groups. The Dalits despite empowerment are not a political force – why? In the absence of an All India mind with a cohesive and unified perspective, Dalit movement has also failed to emerge as a strong political force. Dalits are divided into hundreds of castes and sub-castes. About 56 percent of Dalit population belongs to

about 20 dominant castes among them. These dominant castes are presently grabbing all the privileges provided to the Dalits constitutionally. Even Dr. Ambedkar failed to give an intellectual explanation to unify them together; as a result, his political influence during his life time also remained confined to only Mahar caste of his community in the Maharashtra region. Dalit activists, due to lack of actual ideological direction are not clear whether they are interested to ensure the material prosperity of Dalits or equal status in Hindu social order. Untouchability has almost disappeared, as touch of Dalit is no more considered to have any polluting affect on caste Hindus. However, so long the Dalits enjoy the benefits of reservation in Government jobs and admission in academic institutions; they may have to bear the stigma of being considered unequal in merit to the caste Hindus. The objective of Dalit movements should be therefore, to erase such stigma, which is possible only if Dalits get a chance for their proper education befitting to the standard required for competitions.

Vested interests in Command:

The on going Dalit movement is gradually losing its track. Its multi-dimensional character based on the philosophy of love and hate is unfortunately turned into political theocracy, which is contrary to the basic concept of the total transformation of Hindu social order. Inciting the Dalits against the caste Hindus for historical agony without any honest effort for their emotional integration with rest of the Hindu social order is neither in the interest of this disadvantaged section of population nor in the interest of the nation. The shrinking influence of the so called Brahminism in electoral politics, social transformation, spiritual movement, or even other public affairs are enough indications of gradual changes in Hindu sociology. Dalit movements with a view to create social disorder by promoting caste hatred against the upper castes of ancient Varnashram system will simply halt the process of the on going social transformation. With their political empowerment by occupying the post of President, Union Cabinet ministers, Chief Ministers, and bureaucrats, Dalits are gradually getting more opportunities for achieving social empowerment under democratic process. By gaining more confidence, Dalits are now found to be quite assertive of their rights. This however, does not mean that they have been acceptable in community dining or inter-caste marriage, which is not even prevalent within the various Dalit castes.

The objective of any social reform movement is to ensure a peaceful, decent and dignified life for every body without any social confrontation. But, unfortunately the Dalit activists are so obsessed and possessive in their approach towards the historical agony of their community that they have made the latter as prisoners of Dalitism, which hardly has any constructive plan for creation of a just social order. Their slogan for abolition of Varnashram (professional units) system and total abolition of caste is a utopian concept, which will never take root in the diverse and pluralistic Indian society. Casteism is the bane of Indian society but the Indian people accept caste as a hard reality. Even the Christians and Muslims boast themselves of their upper caste heritage. In South India even Christians are maintaining visible distance from the Dalit Christians as the latter continue to have separate church, separate burial ground and even separate places for social interactions. Similarly, even Muslims in India and Pakistan there is no inter-caste marriage among the Sheiks, Syed, Paithan and others because of their upper caste heritage before conversion.

The three Dalits groups and their separate agenda:

As far as the present Dalit movement is concerned, it is in the hands of three vested interest groups of Dalit politicians, Dalit writers and Christian missionaries. Dalit political leaders like Kanshi Ram and Ms Mayawati of Bahujan Samaj Party and Ram Vilas Paswan of Lok Jana Shakti are having their influence exclusively among the members of their own community. They can never come to power on their own due to their limited influence among the voters. For coming to power they are compelled to join some other parties dominated by caste Hindus. They are therefore, hardly in a position to bring any social change. The second group, which claims to be the champion for the cause of Dalits, is of Dalit writers. Their personal ambition and ego have kept them away from the common Dalits, who are illiterate and poor. They are more interested in their self-promotion than serving the cause of their community. Their possessiveness is often mistaken as love for Dalits. Since they do not get enough space in media to spit venom against the caste Hindus and are hardly in a position to play an effective role in electoral politics, they are always in search of the forces through which they could get national and international recognition. They have therefore; joined hand with forces (third group) determined to disintegrate the Hindu

society. The interest of the third group in Dalit movement is to de-Hinduise the Dalits and promote their proselytisation. The argument of this group that Christian society does not have any caste discrimination is not based on ground reality. The Dalit Christians are facing the problem of caste discrimination even in Christian society. Such discrimination is prevalent in Kerala even after the death of Dalit Christians, whose corpses do not find any place in the cemetery meant for upper caste convert Christians. T.V.Rajshankar, a Dalit writer, while speaking in a seminar (Church and Dalit) organised by Christian leaders in Madras on June 14, 1986 said that Dalit Christians form about 80 percent Christian population in India but contrary to what Jesus Christ preached, the Dalit Christians are also the victim of caste discrimination as they have separate burial ground, separate churches and separate dwelling places.

Ever since the promulgation of presidential order No 19 of 1950 debarring the Dalits of non-Hindu and non-Sikh community to be included in the list of Scheduled castes, the Christian missionaries have been facing difficulty in alluring the Hindu Dalits for their conversion. For this they have already launched a movement for constitutional privileges for Dalit Christians. If they succeed in alienating the Dalits from Hindu social order, the entire Dalit community will get the benefit of constitutional provisions and it will help them in their mission for proselytisation.

Dalit empowerment has emerged as an important aspect of the ongoing socio-political transformation in India. Empowerment of hitherto marginalized groups—those deprived in social, economic, political, administrative and cultural terms is featuring as a major issue in development discourse. The notion of empowerment was introduced by the World Bank in 1990s, which stands for 'the expansion of assets and capabilities of marginalized sections to participate in, negotiate with, influence control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives'. Arunoday Bajpai (2011) accordingly, Dalit Empowerment may be defined as a process of gaining control by Dalits as a community over self, ideology, material and knowledge resources, which determine power relationship in a society'. Thus, concept of empowerment is essentially a political process, which challenges the prevailing power structure of sub-ordination. As a political process, empowerment involves three crucial elements—Access to information, opportunity for

participation and inclusion in political process, and organising capacity to influence and gain power. In outcome-oriented paradigm, the process of empowerment involves four successive steps. These are Consciousness, Mobilisation, Organisation and Control. The consciousness refers to knowledge and awareness about group identity and interests. The distinction between a conscious group and a passive group is the same distinction what Karl Marx finds between a 'class for itself' and a 'class in itself'. The control means acquiring the power and capacity to be able to decide and determine those matters which affect one's life conditions.

Arunoday Bajpai (2011) Viewed in this perspective, the ideas, actions and life struggles of Ambedkar form solid bedrock, which continues to inspire and sustain ideologically the ongoing process of Dalit Empowerment in India. His sustained emphasis on the principles of equality, liberty and human dignity proved instrumental in initiating second wave of social transformation within Hindu society, which was concerned with enabling Dalit Community to share administrative and political powers in India. Ambedkar came to realize the repressive and persisting nature of caste system embedded in Indian Social Structure, which was sustained and rationalized for generations through nonegalitarian social and religious norms. Therefore, he came to the conclusion that the caste system cannot be reformed; hence it is to be annihilated. This was the point where he developed serious differences with Gandhi on the nature and reform of caste system. Because of this realization, he renounced Hindu religion and embraced Buddhism in later part of his life. Though he did not survive long to witness the fruits of his ideas and struggles, they continue to sustain and inspire the ongoing process of Dalit empowerment in independent India.

The parliamentary form of democracy is the best form of the government, but democracy cannot succeed without realization of social and economic equality. That is why; he was the chief exponent of social democracy in India. Like a true democrat, he had deep faith in the viability of peaceful methods. He gave priority to socio-economic transformation over political liberation. The process of social change involves four elements—the internal change (slave's rejection of slavery), social struggle, political dialogue and political organizing. Without access to political power the social change cannot reach to its logical conclusion. The inclusion of political elements in

the process of social change is the most singular contribution of Ambedkar to the process of Dalit empowerment in India. In order to keep the process of social change in the right track, he was convinced that the leadership of such change should be in the hands of Dalits only.

The above points of Ambedkar's ideological framework have direct bearing on the process of Dalit empowerment in India. However he was not merely an ideologue but he was a great organiser of social struggles and restless mobiliser of social consciousness with deep insight for the future. If we analyse his actions, efforts and innovative capabilities to guide the course of social transformation in the light of four steps of empowerment process, his immense contribution to the cause of Dalit empowerment would be evident. For generating awareness and consciousness of Dalit identity, he laid due emphasis on the education and self-respect of Dalits. He was critical of British government because it could not ensure the adequate opportunity for the education of Dalits. His interpretation of origin of Shudras and untouchability in his books, 'Who Are Shudras' and 'the untouchability' goes a long way in generating the feeling of self-respect among Dalits. His advocacy to convert to Buddhism was primarily meant to vindicate the self-respect of Dalits. He exhorted Dalits to leave their traditional and demeaning occupation, move away from villages as 'they were sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism'. He started newspapers like the 'Mooknayak', 'Bahiskrit Bharat' and 'Janata' to raise their awareness and propagate his views. Similarly for the mobilization of Dalits, he organised many social struggles like Mahad Tank Satyagrah, 1926, Temple Entry Movements, 1930, effort to reform the Mahar Watan System, 1928 and founded Social organisations like Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha and the All India Depressed Classes Association in 1930 with the same objective. For the political organization and political mainstreaming of Dalits, he pleaded for their representation in legislatures in the Round Table Conferences, 1930-32, convened by the British government, and entered an agreement with Gandhi to ensure their legislative representation within the system of joint electorates. For the political organisation of Dalits, he founded the Independent Labour Party in 1937 and replaced it with another political party, the All India Scheduled Caste Federation founded in

1942. He also laid the foundation of another political party, Republican Party of India, which was founded in 1957 after his death in 1956 by his followers, which advanced the agenda of Dalit empowerment in 1950s and 1960s. Even, the formation of Dalit Panther Party in 1970 and the Bahujan Samaj Party in 1984 owe their ideological genesis to Ambedkar. He played a leading role in the drafting of the Constitution of India and due to his pleadings many provisions including the reservation in services and legislatures have been incorporated in the Constitution for the empowerment of Dalit Community. Ambedkar was not the first person to initiate the process of Dalit empowerment in India, nor was he the last person to ensure its completion. However, his sterling contribution in this field was to advance and steer the course of Dalit empowerment and to impart to it a distinct political character, which is the core of the very notion of empowerment. Without this political core, the idea of Dalit empowerment will be without real substance and spirit. And, unlike other Dalit social movement before and after his times, he advanced his mission with a sound and viable ideological framework. In this respect he stands apart and much ahead of others. His life and mission was a perfect and unique blend of theory and action. His ideas are the leading light and sustain the ongoing process of Dalit empowerment even today. Without his ideological foundation, the edifice of contemporary Dalit empowerment in India will go bankrupt and lose its identity, direction and spirit. Sri Krishna S & Anil Kumar Samudrala (2007) a Dalit feels as keenly and thinks as clearly as others. Dalit in their sphere do work as clearly as others do. As such, Dalit has as much right to freedom to develop their personality fully as others enjoying the rights. The full and equal participation of Dalit political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at the local, regional, national and international level is a must not only for the well being of Dalit in particular but also for the well being of the entire humanity in general. Human rights ensure prosperity in society and social and economic rights take care of the weaker and under privileged sections of the society by providing them equality of opportunity in the matter of education, employment and mobility.

Conclusion:

In the backdrop of the dialectics of Dalit movements, it appears that the Dalits have now become the victims of the politics of Dalitism being played by various groups. Instead of

fighting the evils of caste discrimination in Hindu society, the Dalit movement has given birth to neo Dalitism, which hardly has any difference with the polluted Brahmanism. The movement, which does not have the ingredients to bring about reconciliation among conflicting social groups and fails to accelerate the process of social harmony and human dignity, is bound to lose real direction. Dalits should therefore be very careful about the politics of Dalitism being played by vested interests not only at the cost of the disadvantaged community but also at the cost of social harmony, which is more dangerous for the nation.

We understand that lack of resources ideological immaturity and absence of unity among Dalits allows the Brahmanical forces to spread the venom of casteism in this campus. Dalit assertion in every part of the country faces the Brahmanical onslaught. Even after more than five decades of modern democracy in India the 'upper' caste goons do not digest the fact that the Dalits are human beings. They are not ready to accept the fact, that the people who till yesterday were untouchables and their slaves, today are sharing corridors of power and the field of education equally with them. They see it as a challenge to their hoary caste superiority, 'rich' tradition and attack over the Brahmanical 'social' values. The only way, they opt, to stop the progress of Dalits is by perpetuating casteist atrocities. The casteist and Brahmanical forces have utilized the same instrument of oppression to subjugate and discriminate Dalits in this campus. Their mindset is still operating in VarnaDharma age of Manu, which is antithetical to the modern values of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Dalit movements throughout the country uphold the philosophical doctrine of Babasaheb Ambedkar and fight the Brahmanical forces by keeping our full faith in the cherished democratic constitutional setup. We fight for our rights, dignity and self-respect without falling prey to the violent-rowdy means of protest even at the heights of provocations. Our matured sensitivity gives us strength and courage to fight uncompromisingly against Brahmanical forces. But the casteist goons should also understand that our sincere democratic mode of protest should not be understood as our cowardice, or that we don't know how to kill the Satan. We are committed to the principles of democracy and peaceful co-existence which does not allow us to adopt violent means to show our anger. We warn the casteist goons to desist from their vicious agenda, the time has changed, every

mind of Dalit youth is not ready to supplement to the doctrine of democracy and peace. In future, every culprit of caste atrocity will have to face the anger and resentment which is burning in the hearts from more than 2000 years. He will be taught the lesson of humanity in his own language. We are discriminated not because they are powerful or in a majority, the simple reason is that we are not unified. We are not seeing the victim as our brother or sister but see him or her as a political instrument. We have failed to develop a moral and fraternal community amongst us which can fight tooth and nail against any act of atrocity against our own people. Also we have failed to understand that to fight against Brahmanism is the foremost duty and responsibility of every educated Dalit. We therefore, appeal to the progressive section of this campus especially to the scattered Dalits to understand the gravity of the situation. This is high time that we follow the slogan given by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: "Educate, Unite, Agitate", and raise our voice against the continuous attacks on Dalits.

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