

The Political and the Social Dalit Movement

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Introduction

The development of dalit ideology and literature in India The established literature of India is Hindu literature. But it is the dalit which has the revolutionary power to accept new science and technology and bring about a total transformation. Dalit is the name for total revolution it is revolution incarnate. B.R.Ambedkar phase which, may be traced back to B.R.Ambedkar led the satyagraha campaign against the ban on the use of water of alake. This is known as Mahad movement. Mahad Satyagraha was the beginning of the collective protest of the people self respect in dalit solution to the dalit fought empowerment of the dalits in political and social life is not changes in life all problems in all dalits. B.R.Ambedkar contribution of dalits manual writes B.R.Ambedkar must Brecon ideas not only as a great political thinker, Social philosophy religious leader, but also a great champion for the human rights of the Depressed Classes.

B.R.Ambedkar the Dalit Identity

B.R.Ambedkar formulated and conceptualised the meaning and political philosophy of both these domains with certain prerequisite modern ethical norms. The contemporary dalit movements have followed divergent routes to achieve social transformation without any dialogical relationship between them. This paper will focus on the reasons of an imaginary distance between the two recent transformations: the social upsurge of dalit castes which embrace Buddhism to bring social change and the assertion of BSP as a political party under the leadership of a dalit woman for a dynamic change in the politics of India. In social science, both these phenomena are often studied and analysed separately. This is an attempt to examine the limitations of these movements in forging a meaningful synthesis out of their friendly dialectics. Since both the social and political models have the potential of enriching the movements of the subaltern masses through their divergent motives, experiences and ideals, it is imperative to judge them on their ethical credentials.¹

The underprivileged sections, especially, the bahujans and the dalits have had a history of struggle in challenging given identities and furthermore constructing their own alternative identities and political concepts to fulfil the requirements of contemporary times. In this discourse dignity of the self became the outcry for targeting the nature of the existing social control. Dalit-bahujan thinkers conceive the nation as a good society where its members, considered as individuals or collectivises, respect one another; protect mutual rights and show concern and solidarity. Self-respecters, therefore, felt that as long as there is the existence of untouchability, all talks of freedom and self-rule is empty.²

In the social history of identity formulation of the deprived castes, B.R.Ambedkar's name is the most prominent as he was the thinker who successfully formulated an assertive and separate dalit identity. He demonstrated that the exploitative relationships of the untouchables to the other Hindus were a result of the battle between two divergent cultures. He argued that the Brahminic counter-culture destroyed the great Buddhist civilisation, which resulted in the enslavement of Buddhist population as untouchables. He had a firm belief that within Hinduism any kind of radical social transformation is almost impossible. Therefore he argued against the "reformists" and the bhakti cult for their lack of social protest and content of social reform. The representation of dalits in their discourse was highly passive and lacked any kind of radical challenge to the social system. He convinced the people that with the bards of Hindu culture, emancipation would be a difficult task. Furthermore his encounter with Gandhi over the question of separate electorate and harijan demonstrated that he was not interested only in some kind of separate nomenclature but he was deeply introspecting about how an identity of his people will be placed in the public domain. What would be the rights of his community in the nascent independent country? He was overly concerned about the dignified positioning of new dalit as a citizen in the realm of modern secular democratic order. In 1936 as a response to the burning questions of dalits' political and social identity, he declared two separate modes of struggles; he announced his conversion to Buddhism at Yeola and on August 15, he established his first political outfit, The Independent Labour Party. The reason behind formulating such a twofold agenda for dalits lies in his insight about India's social and political nature.³

¹ *Frontline*, June 2-15, 2007.

² Valerian Rodriguez, *Dalit-Bahujan Discourse in Modern India* in V R Mehta and Thomas Panthan (eds), *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Exploration*, PHISPC (Vol X, Part 7), Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006.

³ BAWS 1990:,PP,372-374.

Secularism Important for B.R.Ambedkar

B.R.Ambedkar was a modern secular thinker. Religion as a political identity was observed by B.R.Ambedkar as a dangerous formulation in a multi-religious country like India. He had also witnessed the communal tensions between the Hindu and Muslim political elites. If religion as a seer political instrument succeeds, it would further endanger all the minority communities. Understanding such a drastic impact of religion on democracy, a secular polity was essentialised by the makers of the Constitution. B.R.Ambedkar understood that under such a conflict-ridden situation, politically mobilising dalits over the issue of separate religion would have a dangerous impact on the secular polity of contemporary India. But he was also convinced that Hindu religion as a social mechanism is highly undemocratic, orthodox and antagonistic to the modern values of citizenship. He observed that the “impure” Hindu identity of dalits is responsible for their demoralised and undignified social status. Therefore a radical transformation of society is essential so that the social values and status of every individual would supplement the goals of modern Political ideals.¹

Conversion to Buddhism was a result of B.R.Ambedkar’s deliberation over the social and political context of India in which the dalits were one of the main groups. B.R.Ambedkar as the chairman of the drafting committee of the constituent assembly visualised that the future constitution of the country would be based on the western model of citizenship along with the secular rights to the minority communities. Even though the rights of his community were formally structured in the modern constitution, he was aware that the implication of constitutional norms was going to be very troublesome as the Hindu societal attitude went against the ethics of the constitution. He warned the constituent assembly that if the social and economic inequalities remained operational in society then one is doing nothing but “putting our democracy in peril”.

On January 26 we are going to enter a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long can we continue to live a life of contradictions? How shall we deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we do so only by putting our political democracy in peril.²

Morality Common Signifier

Like Machiavelli, B.R.Ambedkar established a relationship between religion and politics by making morality a common signifier. The religious order of society should supplement the great ideals of a secular political establishment. Any antagonism over the ideals between the two will result in a social oligarchy of minority groups over the majority. Religion as a social identity should propose a common and proud legacy of cultural past, social relationship with dignity and liberty to every individual to acquire profits out of his/her labour. For the dalits, such essential components of public life were absent in Hindu religion but were granted by the modern Constitution. His respect for western modernity was to its commitment to individual liberty, human rights and scientific progress of human civilisation. He also imagined that these moral principles were enshrined in the teachings of the Buddha. B.R.Ambedkar visualised Buddhism not as a ritualistic religion but as a social doctrine to establish morality in the society. By proposing Navayana Buddhism to dalits, Being a spiritual person, he aspired to bring social change through the most non-violent, human and collective mode of cultural resistance. He imagined the dalit as a modern citizen endowed with basic human rights, dignity and a glorified cultural past, with which s/he would be capable of entering the domain of politics. The post-B.R.Ambedkar dalit movements, in contrast, especially in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, have developed two alternative models for bringing about social transformation. These social and political alternatives, because of their separate existence from each other, failed in generalising the basic ethical notions of Ambedkar’s teaching, essential for any programme of social transformation.³

Dalit Movement in Maharashtra

Many social scientists have developed an elusive scholarship over the positive impact of Buddhist conversion movement on the dalits in Maharashtra. Socially, the dalits represent a distinct religious identity with new forms of rituals, symbols and festivals. They crafted a whole new set of public culture around the iconography of B.R.Ambedkar and the Buddha by building numerous Buddha Vihars. A dynamic and popular Buddhist literature also became the part of public consciousness, which represents revolutionary songs, plays and realistic autobiographies by dalit authors and poets. Most importantly, it is emphasised that the conversion movement has

¹ BAWs 1990,PP. 29-30.

² B .R. Ambedkar, *Prospects of Democracy in India*, in Hari Narke (ed), BAWs, Vol 17 (Part Three), Education Dept, government of Maharashtra,Mumbai, 2003, p 519.

³ Shah, Ghanshyam (ed),*Dalits and the State*, CBC, publication,New Delhi,2003,p,29.

a psychological dimension as it has freed the Maher from the sense of inferiority in public. These illustrations argue that in Maharashtra the conversion movement precipitates a silent social and Cultural Revolution among the dalits. The above-mentioned analysis has a practical validity but it does not reflect the whole truth. The impact of any movement should be measured on all the parameters: social, cultural, economic and political. In Maharashtra, the conversion movement has significantly changed the first three arenas but failed in the last, the political domain. The post B.R.Ambedkar political leadership, especially in Maharashtra, failed in asserting themselves as the true heirs of Ambedkar's socio-political legacy.¹

Dalit Political Ideology

The BSP under the leadership of Kanshi Ram has brought the most significant change in the psyche of dalit masses by providing an umbrella identity, futuristic vision, myths, social ideology and a political strategy to become one of the most significant players in the game of power politics in contemporary India. The BSP from its very initiation as a political party symbolised the political aspirations of the downtrodden oppressed masses in India. The name of Kanshi Ram's first political party, Dalit Shoshit Sangram Samiti had a broader philosophical appeal in the fight for the rights of the oppressed and thus reflected the unwavering influence of dalit social movement on him. B.R. Ambedkar also understood that the dalit as a community was not only economically exploited, culturally segregated and socially discriminated but also remained untouchable in the realm of political power. Therefore he advocated the capture of power as one of the main objectives for emancipating the lower castes from the elite domination. As early as in 1932 at the All India Depressed Classes Congress at Nagpur, he proclaimed his wish to establish dalits as a ruling class in India.²

It is very necessary that the political reins should come in the hands of untouchables. For that, all of us should unite and secure a political status. Untouchability in India will not be eradicated so long as the untouchables do not control the political strings. In the post-Ambedkar era, Kanshi Ram became the true torchbearer of B.R.Ambedkar struggle in the political arena of India. He materialised this vision by giving a practical road map of social revolution based on the idea of social engineering. The political bahujan was one of the most imaginative political categories, which Kanshi Ram coined to overturn the dominant generalisation that the deprived classes are always submissive bearers of political power. The bahujan identity also rejects the mainstream formulations based on class, religion and secularism because they favour and legitimise the control of upper castes over the rest. The political philosophies of social elites disregard the aspirations of dalits and lack any radical programme to bring about social transformation. Challenging the limitations of these national parties, the BSP argues that an inclusive and representative social engineering of castes and minorities is the most appropriate formula for power sharing.³

Democratic Political Alliance

This alternative conceptualisation of a political party based on a majority-minority dichotomy mirrors the classical Marxist category but with new cultural attire suitable to the Indian context. Social identity not only replaces the class category in this mode but also democratises the whole structure by sanctioning the autonomy to every cultural, social and religious group before forming the alliance. The bahujan identity neither believes in the total submission of all deprived communitarian identities to become one nor does it philosophise a complete suppression of the minority ruling elites to achieve its political ideals. Bahujan identity is a democratic political alliance between the politically deprived caste groups of contemporary India under the leadership of the most exploited castes of Indian history, the dalits. This coalition of all deprived minority communities (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes, and minorities) in practical sense represents the majority of the population in India. The BSP mobilises its voters using this newly carved meta-narrative by making one grand promise that power is the master key which enables its wielders to open every lock, whether social, political, economic or cultural. The dalits being the formulators and leaders of the bahujan category are also the most stringent advocates of the BSP's political strategies. They have discovered a pan-national legacy of bahujan leaders as their ideologues and constructed a distinct political discourse based on B.R.Ambedkar's thoughts. Being dalits, they endeavour to overthrow the social, political, cultural and economic dominations perpetuated by the Hindu social order. Such a revolutionary appeal is the basic component of this vanguard party to bring real social change in India and therefore, dalitness becomes the core value of bahujan political philosophy.⁴

The BSP's magnificent victory in the recent Uttar Pradesh elections has shown that they are second to no political outfit in providing political leadership to all those people who want a great and inclusive democracy, corruption-free society and state system based on strict observance of law and constitutional norms. This victory

¹ Kuber, W N, *Ambedkar, a Critical Study*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi.2001,p,98.

² Kanshi Ram' in Ghanshyam Shah (ed), *Dalit Identity and Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.2002,p,73.

³Smith, B L (ed) *Social and Religious Conflict in South Asia*, University of Chicago Press,1978,p,453.

⁴ Gopal, *Dalit Cultural Movement and Dalit Politics in Maharashtra*, Vikas Publication, Mumbai.1998,p,39.

has a capacity to generate a revolutionary spirit in the whole democratic system for a required change. Political power in India is controlled and instructs metalized by the upper caste ruling elites for the benefits of a small and exclusive group of people and has persistently denied the bahujans from its valid share. Mayawati has shown the way that the dalits as the leaders of the people can discover new political arithmetic between the social groups and can mobilise them towards a concrete political victory. This is indeed a real social revolution under the proletariat dalit leadership in a most democratic manner, without spilling a drop of blood.¹

Social Movement

But there are some cautious warnings too along with such warm analysis. The political power seizure by BSP has introduced the party in public with a new political ideology different from the consistent idea of “social engineering” between the deprived sections of the country. In its recent avatar, the BSP is riding the chariot of power with the help of a community, which is notoriously condemned in history by the ideologues and thinkers of bahujans for its shrewdness, greed of power and criminal valorisation of their social status. Keeping such a partner in power can compel the BSP to dilute the vital issues of social justice, law and order and secularism. Secondly, there is a threat that due to its fixation on power, the BSP will forget the ethical idea of empowering the bahujans. In the thirst of capturing sarvajan, there is a possibility of compromise in delivering social justice to the bahujan masses. Such openness to the non-bahujans can also undermine the moral guidelines of the movements and offer an opportunity to the manuwadis to gradually consolidate their domination under the garb of sarvajan.²

Social and Political Agenda of Dalits

A separate analysis of these movements demonstrates that both of them at their respective spaces are unconsciously prioritising two distinct alternatives for bringing social change. There is lack of respect vis-à-vis each other's strategies and many times these movements are critical and antagonistic to each other. On one hand the Buddhist movement in Maharashtra cunningly valourises its cultural and psychological impact on the mahars but fails to provide any kind of political alternative to the vast deprived non-Buddhist communities. It is unsuccessful in aggregating the interest of the deprived sections. On the other hand, in Uttar Pradesh, the BSP succeeded in providing a dalit leadership to a multi-caste, multi-religious political alliance, but lacks in providing an empowered social milieu for the dalits. The political socialisation of dalits has a limited impact on their present social, cultural and economic status. A vast majority of dalits in Uttar Pradesh are prone to the ills of untouchability, poverty and illiteracy and a symbolic dalit political leadership is facing limitations in fighting these evils through the corridors of power. Both the movements further provide sound references to B.R.Ambedkar's political and social writings to legitimise their claim as right and perfect.³

B.R.Ambedkar had employed Buddhism in the society, by giving an insight to the larger political context and its moral purpose in the modern world. He was convinced that Buddhism possessed a moral doctrine with two major objectives to perform. Firstly, in the political domain, it will be helpful for the dalits in creating a non-communal political ideology and identity against other existing perspectives of violent political identities.⁴

B.R.Ambedkar Dynamics Ideology

B.R.Ambedkar was well aware about these contradictions between the virtues of modernity and the explicit autonomy of conservative values persisting in society. Therefore he proposed two dynamic strategies to counter this challenge. A religious conversion movement will challenge the hegemony of the social elites, by establishing a secular fraternity. Secondly in the pursuit to control political power, the dalits will forge an alliance with the other marginalised sections and if they succeed, this will establish the order of social justice. Only a fraternal social system is conducive to bear the fruits of social justice. Democracy is quite different from republic as well as from parliamentary government. The roots of democracy lie not in form of government, parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is more than a form of government. A democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of associated life between the people who form the society.⁵

¹ Education Dept, government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003, pp, 395-478.

² Aloysius, G *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p,49.

³ Vasant Moon and Hari Narke (ed), Voles 3, (Part Three), Education Dept, government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, pp, 236-435.

⁴ Davis, Brian, *Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford University Press, London, 2001, p,87.

⁵ Rawls John, *Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1991, p,95.

Conclusions

The B.R.Ambedkar dalit movements by not giving the needed importance to the socio-political and cultural notions of Buddhism have developed a strategy that is limited to the issues of political democracy. They aggregate the issue of representation of the identity as the main agenda and neglect the struggle of alienation of caste system. Thus, the agenda of social democracy is sidelined under the larger consensus on political democracy. Modern democracy in India therefore reflects the following three important characteristics concerning the nature of dalit politics. First, it has a blurred, narrow and a power-centric perspective having limited effects on socio, cultural and economic status of the community. Secondly, being the representative of particular caste/castes in politics it operates in the circle of hierarchal relationships without actually breaking the permanent pure-impure dichotomy. Finally, it upholds a strict and non-compromising attitude over the issues of leadership and over the question of participation in the broader struggles of social change. The characteristics presented here are the reflections of a fundamentally caste-ordained political psychology of dalit politics, which has failed to articulate another dimension of B.R.Ambedkar's vision based on the philosophy of Buddhist conversion movement. This religious movement lacks dynamism to become a political movement of the whole deprived classes, but it carries the potential ingredients to challenge the social control of brahmanical elites. This is an appropriate time for the intellectuals of the dalit-bahujan masses to deliberate on these issues in order to develop a better synthesis out of this imaginary dialectics.