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**CHAPTER-3**  
**DALIT ASSERTION: FORMS**  
**AND MANIFESTATION**

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## CHAPTER-3

### **DALIT ASSERTION: FORMS AND MANIFESTATION**

The term 'Dalit Assertion' comprises refers to the special behaviour (assertion) by a particular group of individuals(Dalits). The very subjectivity involved due to relative deprivations and marginalization makes it difficult to define the word 'Dalit. However, in general parlance, this word connotes the bunching of marginalized caste groups, who are placed into a scheduled list, first established by the Government of India Act 1935 and later adopted by the Indian constitution. This bunching or clubbing of different castes does not refer to a 'class behaviour' as it involves heterogeneity and cultural, economic, political, and social differentiation. As Leach said, "if a whole caste group plays the role of a political factor by competing with other such factions for some common economic and political goals, it thereby acts in defiance of caste tradition"<sup>1</sup>. Also, the community character like endogamy, hereditary membership, occupation, ritual status, and a specific style of life, has emerged in the writings of Beteille<sup>2</sup> maintained the distinctiveness of caste despite a greater similarity in marginality and exclusion. The demand for equality by this marginalized section of the Indian society and subsequent change in the caste and power relation has been branded by the term 'Assertion'. This word has been defined as a confident and forceful statement of the fact and belief (oxford dictionary), as a statement which you strongly believe is true (Cambridge University dictionary),and insistent and positive affirmation maintaining or defending (as a right or attribute) ( Merriam Webster).

The term 'Assertion', derived from the word 'assert' means to behave in a manner that expresses confidence, importance, power, and respect from others. The term assertion, contains the consciousness or the awakening of self and community, the demand of equality in political, social, and economic spheres and led to mobilization and mobility of them and the formation of identity. When we use the term 'Dalit Assertion' is not merely a word it is the conscious effort among the oppressed classes to challenge the unequal hierarchy, awareness for their rights, self-love, self-affirmation, and an attempt towards a dignified life. Dalit Assertion is not only the mobilization but also the consequence of

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<sup>1</sup> Leach, E.R.(1960). *Aspect of caste in South India, Ceylon and North-Western Pakistan*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Beteille, Andre. (1971). *Caste, Class and Power*. Berkley: Universityof California Press.

many movements which came out from the struggle for equality for their identity, pride, and dignity.

The word Dalit was not only to be understood as 'the oppressed' but also as 'the proud, the defiant' by Eleanor Zelliot. He suggested the idea that the untouchables of India had chosen a new name that of 'Dalit' when explaining the title of his book 'From Untouchables to Dalit', reflects their sense of the faulty caste system of India. It is signified to look at how the marginalized section is coming forward and asserting their due rights.<sup>3</sup>

### **Why Assertion: The Basic Human Need**

In the society, when the privileges like prestige, authority, wealth, and valuables enjoyed only by some section of the society on the basis of birth, race, faith, and community of prestige, authority caused the dispute among those who feel less favored. Dalits are the marginalized section and less favored section of the Indian society, facing inequality and violence due to the structural classification of the society. Inequality hinders society's smooth progression. It destroys the capacity of the individual and creates social frustration and conflict, which Johan Galtung called systemic violence. According to Johan Galtung, structural violence is a system of differential, unequal access to the means for closing the gap between the actual and the potential, where those at the bottom' of some hierarchically structured relational system.<sup>4</sup>

The situation of structural hierarchies with violence and oppression characterized by hostile interaction between communities, where, due to lack of growth, hate, political and economic injustice, and other types of victimization (perceived or actual) run along on caste or identity-based lines to a great extent. The asymmetrical power relations affect the growth of society and are in direct conflict with the theory of basic human needs. John Burton, the exponent of human needs theory, contemplates the existence of certain universal needs that must be satisfied if people have to resolve protracted social conflicts.<sup>5</sup> The theory of human needs claims that some ontological and genetic needs will be sought. The non-negotiable basic human needs can be categorized into basic material

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<sup>3</sup> Zelliot, Elenor. (1992). *From Untouchable to Dalit*. New Delhi: Manohar Publication, p.267.

<sup>4</sup> Galtung, Johan. (1969). Peace, Violence and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, Vol. 6, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> Burton, John. (1993). *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, New Zealand :Macmillan Press Ltd.,

needs includes food, shelter, health care, employment-freedom from want, the second is cultural need includes right to worship, language and the third one is social needs, which desires to have respect, lives with dignity, and freedom from fear in the society.<sup>6</sup> There is a human need for identity, to get recognition, attain justice & rights to feel secure for the personal development and dignified life. People are becoming more and more aware of their status and are asserting their cultural, social, and economic needs. Dalit is no exception to it, the Dalit community made its efforts for the liberation of its masses from the atrocities faced due to the caste system and untouchability. They made their demand for justice and equality in the society to gain self-respect in the society.

Dalit movements are the movements of their consciousness of their own identity. These movements are reformatory in nature in the caste system and for the abolishment of untouchability.

### **Buddhism: The rise of sect**

The caste system and discriminatory practice of untouchability got entrenched in the conduct of the Indian society with time and space. From time immemorial there were several voices raised against these discriminatory practices. Gautam Buddha was the first one who revolted and condemned the *Varna-Vyavastha* and supremacy Brahmanism their rituals and scriptures. Buddha emphasizes equality among the people and higher values on morality.<sup>7</sup> Buddha's ideal is to establish the classless ideal society; Buddha held that "all men are born equal".<sup>8</sup> All system was wrong. According to Buddha, there may be different species of plants and animals but as such no different species can be found among the human being. The *Varna-vyavstha* division is solely superficial. The teachings of Buddha were lightened with the flame of equality among the outcastes. Gautam Buddha brings into being a new religion the Buddhism, which is now the world's fourth-largest religion. Buddhist tradition welcomes 'Chandala' and 'sudra' in its fold. Buddha emphasis on deeds, by the deeds alone one, can be Brahmin and by the deeds alone one is an outcast. The thoughts and teaching of Buddha brought a new consciousness among the outcastes or untouchables. It established the new tradition based on equality and deeds, denouncing the birth-based caste system. Like the Buddhists, the Jains too fiercely

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<sup>6</sup> *Transcending Conflict*, WISCOMP, New Delhi, 2003, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Ram, Jagjiwan. (1981). *Bharat mein Jaatiwd aur Harijan samasya*, Rajpal and Sons, Delhi, pp.12.

<sup>8</sup> A.K. Warder, (1980). *Indian Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. p. 164& 169.

condemn the Varna-Vyavastha. Mahavira advocates for equality among the people and broke down the barriers of caste, creed, and gender.<sup>9</sup>

Several other schools were also coming into existence, the materialistic school of philosophy, Lokayata or Carvaka also opposed the Vedic religion and Brahmanic philosophy. During the Saint-tradition, another school 'Sahajayan' appeared on the sight, which also opposed the Brahmana dharma. Sahajayani deplores the Brahmins as hypocrites and also critical towards the pilgrimage & idol worship. They said

*Jabbe mana atthamana jai tanututtaibandhana*

*Tabbe samaras sahajebajjaiduddanabahmana.*

“When the mind is free, the body has not bondage, only then can there be harmony and spontaneity. At this time, there is no Sudra, no Brahmana”.<sup>10</sup>

Sant traditions, have another offshoot known as the 'Nath' sect and Gorakhnath was very much prominent among the Nathas. They believe in the equality of the people and negate the caste system, according to them all the four varnas are located in the nature of the individual. Nath tradition emerged as a sect, not as a social movement, but did much for human equality. The Nath tradition left an ideology of 'Nirgunavada', which later followed and continued by the Kabir-Panth. It has been seen that the Nirgunavadais are mostly followed by the people, who earn their livelihood by their own occupation. Besides Kabir, in the saint tradition, there were Ravidass, Dadu, Sundardas, Chaitanya, Guru Nanak, etc. they vehemently opposed the jati-vyavastha and raised the slogan of equality. They tried to influence the people by singing, teaching, and writings but were not able to change the social structure of the society.

### **Bhakti movement: Preaching and Teaching of Equality**

It was an attempt to bring Hindu religion from the clutch of dogmatism and ritualism and to make it more societal and egalitarian. Leading nationalist and reformist M.G. Ranade considered it very significant as it was “like the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century, there was a religious social and literacy revival and reformation in India.

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<sup>9</sup> G.L.Sharma. (2003). *Caste, Class and Social Inequality in India Volume II*. Jaipur (India): Mangal deep Publications,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pp-88-89.

This religious revival is not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy; it was heterodox in its spirit of protest. This religious revival was the work also of the people, of the masses, and not of the classes. And its heads were saint and prophets, poets and philosophers who sprang chiefly from the lower order of the society-tailors, carpenters, potters, gardeners, shopkeepers, barbers, and even Mahars- more often than Brahmans”<sup>11</sup>. The attempt to refute orthodoxy although started in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D especially with the preaching of the Vaishnavite and Shaivite poets of the Tamil region (Alvar and Naynars). However, as a movement, the Bhakti cult seems to be more prominent during the 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century. This movement after Buddhism left a great appeal for the establishment of an egalitarian society. <sup>12</sup> Bhakti saints belong to different regions and caste. Generally, they do not have any familiarity with each other and nor did they had any institutional arrangement or platform, still, their arguments have several discernible commonalities and also preachers belong to different castes and more often from the depressed class. In the Karnataka region (Bijapur), a Brahmin priest, Basavana through his preaching (*Vachana*), decry the ritualism and hierarchal social order (i.e. caste system). In the Maharashtra region, Jnandev- A Deshash Brahmin, Namdev-a Shipmi (tailor), Tukaram-Kunbi, Eknath- Brahmin, and Chokhamela- Mahar were the prominent figures of the Bhakti movement. One of the noticeable points is that both higher caste (like Bhramins) and Lower Caste (Mahar, Shimpri) saints were part of these movements. Namdev and Tukaram’s philosophy of egalitarianism negated caste and caste-based discrimination. Eknath considered Chokhamela(a Mahar) wider in spiritual matters than the Bhramins and allowed untouchables in his Bhajan session.<sup>13</sup>Through his poem, Chokhamela challenged the very basis of the caste system and the Bhramanic order's dominance was also seen as an anti-caste struggle. At the same time in the 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century, Kabir was the famous bhakti movement figure in north India who preached monotheism, condemn hypocrisy, and orthodoxy. According to Adi H Doctor “The bhakti saints and poets of the 17th century such as Kabir in North India and Tukaram in Maharashtra had also criticized Brahmanism, but their protest was of a very different order”<sup>14</sup>. In the 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> century Guru Ravidass himself belongs to the leather working ‘Chamar’ community, which have

<sup>11</sup> Ranande, M.G. (1961). *Rise of the Marathi Power and other Essays*. Bombay: University of Bombay, p.62 as quoted in Eleanor Zelliot

<sup>12</sup> Zelliot.Op.cit

<sup>13</sup> Zelliot.Op.cit.

<sup>14</sup> Doctor, Adi H. (1991). Low Caste Protest Movements in 19th and 20th Century Maharashtra: A Study of Jotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. *The Indian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 4, No. 2 Sage Publications, New Delhi/Newbury Park/London, p.202

had a lasting impact on the bhakti movement. Ravidass through his poems challenges caste discrimination and stressed the casteless society. In the famous poem 'Begumpura' he raised his concern towards the suffering of the lower caste people in the Brahminical society. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Guru Nanak Dev also rejected the caste system, through his teachings have made efforts to abolish discrimination in society.

### **Satnami movement: Gaining self-confidence**

Aims to develop a non-hierarchical social order and negated caste-based discrimination. It was believed that it was founded by Birbhan in the Narnaul area of Punjab in 1672. A similar version was founded by Jagjivandas of the Barabanki district in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, this sect culminated in a movement by the reformer of Chhatisgarh-Ghasi Das. The basic tenets of the Satnamis were the worship of the "True name of the one God", the cause and creator of all things. In this sense, Satnamis denied the plurality of god but not its existence. Among his followers were the low caste Hindus such as Chamar and he succeeded in establishing some community of thought between himself and Islam.<sup>15</sup> Their preaching is quite close to nirvana as they oppose idolatry and enjoined to cast all idols from their home. Guru Ghasidas preached the Satnami way of life which refers to a distancing from alcohol and other intoxicants, meat, etc, and the belief in the one god along with the adoption of some typical Bhramanical Practices (like cow worship), broke the bounds of the occupation-based rigid caste system. This boasts a sense of confidence among the lower castes especially among the Chamars of Central India and also broke the bounds of occupation bounds based on an occupation-based rigid caste system.<sup>16</sup>

### **Jyoti Rao Phule: Reinventing the Texts**

In the mid of 19<sup>th</sup>-century contribution of **Jyoti Rao Phule** (1826-90), as a social reformer and as a writer (Gulamgiri & caste), is quite important. He was well aware of the rich Bhakti tradition of Maharashtra, however, his style of criticism and protest was of a different order. Phule made a direct attack on the Bhramanism as in his work 'Slavery' he writes "*if the ancestor of the progressive and learned men had understood the meaning of patriotism, they would not have written essays in their books in which their own*

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<sup>15</sup> Hasting, James. (1913). *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethic Vol XI p 210.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.forwardpress.in/2019/12/200-years-on-the-legacy-of-guru-ghasidas-satnam-revolution/>

*countrymen, the Shudras, were regarded lower than an animal*"<sup>17</sup>. The theory of the Aryan race, the prevailing explanation of caste and Indian culture, provided the basis of his theory in his time.<sup>18</sup> Phule was influenced by the writings of the Jacobians especially that of Thomas Paine, and was of the view that all men enjoyed certain natural and inalienable rights which every just society recognize<sup>19</sup>.

Phule criticized the Hindu social order for taking away the natural rights of the Shudras and ati-shudras. Also, he accused Bhramanism of seeking an advantage for themselves of writing 'false books' in the name of god and violating the basic rights of fellow beings. Though he himself belongs to the Mali caste ( a dominant OBC) he argued for the unison of the Shudra ( Non-Bhramin other castes) and ati-sudras. According to Phule Shudras are oppressed and exploited masses whereas the Dalit (ati-sudras) are more oppressed and downgraded due to heroism in fighting with the Bhramin domination. He radically reinterpreted the puranic mythology or built the alternative mythology, which is anti-caste, anti-Vedic, and anti-Aryan. He viewed Vishnu's various avatars as India's different stages of conquest and the Rakshasas as the people's heroes. Gail Omvedt describes Phule's theory as an incipient historical materialism interwoven with economic exploitation and cultural dominance.<sup>20</sup>

Phule founded the Satya ShodakSamaj (the truth-seeking society) in 1873 in Maharashtra, the movement was against casteism, gender, and caste-based discrimination, the practice of untouchability, express disapproval of socioeconomic inequalities, injustice, and discrimination. According to Phule's argument, knowledge, education & science were the weapons elitist masses, they used Western science and Eastern morals to preserve Brahmanic traditions. For Phule, 'Vidya' or knowledge was in sharp contrast to the Brahmanic or ritualistic shastra and a tool for freedom and human liberty as well as economic development. Phule also set up a school for the children of untouchables castes.

Phule's writings are revolutionary at his time as he directly challenges the established practices of the religion and myth/contrives in favour of a particular (Bhramin) section of the society. Also, he established a direct link between the caste system and religion and

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<sup>17</sup> Phule, Jotirao.(2002). *Slavery* in Keer and Malshs (ed) *The Collected work of Mahatma Phule* (Marathi) Bombay: Maharashtra state society for literature and culture

<sup>18</sup> Omvedt, Gail. (2011). *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar & Beyond*. Orient Blackswan. P.25

<sup>19</sup> Doctor, Adi H.Op.cit, p.207

<sup>20</sup> Omvedt (2011), Op.cit.



criticized both not only in caste terms but also from the standpoint of economy, gender and culture. Deshpande is of the view that his method in his book *Slavery* is dialogical. He vehemently questions the double standards for the Brahmins and Shudra and Ati-Shudra whereas both belong to the same religion. He further says “ Phule’s thinking on religion can’t be separated from his thinking of caste. His method in the analysis of caste was not to separate jati from varna. As the Brahmanical system derived its authority from Vedas, and especially from the Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda which asserted varna superiority, it was necessary to develop a counter-discourse to in varna terms”<sup>21</sup>

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### **Arya Samaj: Get back to Veda’s**

Arya Samaj with the teaching of Swami Dayanand at its core is one of the major reform movements, especially for Hinduism. Reform of the caste system and its rigid hierarchical structure is one of the major offshoots of the movement. 'Arya Samaj arose as a revivalist socio-religious reform movement seeking to revive the Vedic faith and their return to the Vedas was not as understood by the conventional scholarship of Indian Orthodoxy or by Western critical scholarship, but as Dayanand, himself interpreted'.<sup>22</sup> Dayanand concluded that the key to the social reform in Hindu India lays in the return to the precepts enshrined in the Vedas and in what he considered perfectly in line with a well-established western oriental perception<sup>23</sup>. Dayanand criticized idolatry, untouchability, and innumerable rigidities of caste distinction. He is of the view that the ‘Varna Ashram system’ as provided in ‘Vedas’ is based on the ‘Karma’ and not on birth. The medieval degeneration of religion led to orthodoxy and makes this system hereditary. Also, in the Varna system, all were interlinked and functioned in close cooperation<sup>24</sup>. The Vedic hymn prays from

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<sup>21</sup> Deshpande. G.P. (ed).(2002) *.Selected writings of Jotirao Phule*. New Delhi: Left world Publication, p 209

<sup>22</sup> Dua, Veena .(1970).Social organization of Arya Samaj: A study of two local Arya centre of Jullndhar, *Sociologiacl bulletin*, p 33 Source:<http://ijsw.tiss.edu/collect/sbj/archives/HASH3aed.dir/doc.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Brill’s. (2013). *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*. Handbook of oriental studies, Vol-V (edt) Knut: Jacobsen Boston , p 390

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.aryasamaj.com/enews/2011/feb/2.htm>

God for the betterment of all humanity and not of a particular Varna. Swami was first to assert the rights of the lower caste, the right to education, the right to recite Vedic mantras, the right to inter-dining, the right to marriage, and the right to draw water from the common well.<sup>25</sup> Arya Samaj undertook the problem of religious conversion of Hindus. Arya Samaj started the 'Suddhi Movement' to bring the converted Hindus back into Hinduism. It attempted to bring the untouchables the status of the upper castes Hindus. So, unlike the Jyoti Rao Phule who denounce religion as a Bhramanical contrive, Dayanand emphasized the understanding of true religion and for this, there is only one source – Vedas. Therefore rather than renouncing the social constructs, he had provided an alternate interpretation that was humanistic and logical in the approach.

### **Adi Movement: Movement of Aboriginal Identity**

Adi-movement, with its several regional variants, was a rational and radical attempt to re-define the caste relations in India with a pointed attack on the evil and discriminatory practices in Indian society. The movement was an attempt for a social and cultural consciousness among the deprived section towards their identity and an endeavour to re-define it. Adi-movement has its genesis in the Adi-Hindu movement, which was promulgated and promoted by the Swami Achutanandalongwith some of the associates of the Arya Samaj Dalits. The core argument of the Adi-Hindu movement was :

- a. Dalits are original inhabitants of India, and
- b. For Adi-Hindus, Bhakti is the original religion

During the first quarter of the 20th century, 'adherence to Bhakti religion and veneration of Kabir, Ravidas and other lower caste saints became much more widespread among the urban untouchables migrants in Uttar Pradesh, which led to the emergence of new sectism with Kabirpanthis, Shivnarayanai or Ravidasi/Raidas added to their name as a surname<sup>26</sup>. Temple dedicated to bhakti saints<sup>26</sup> were dedicated were also refurbished or newly constructed in the early twentieth century<sup>27</sup>. It is significant that in the resurgence of heterodox devotionalism among the poorer untouchables, bhakti was conceived

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<sup>25</sup> ibid

<sup>26</sup> Briggs. G.W.(1920).*The Chamar*, London:Low Price Publication , p 19

<sup>27</sup> Singh, Om Prakash . (1900-1950). *Evolution of Dalit identity*, History of Adi Hindu movement in, *United province Proceedings of Indian History congress*, Vol 70 (2009-10) , p 576

explicitly and primarily as an egalitarian ideology that opposes caste hierarchy<sup>28</sup>. This egalitarian bhakti tradition was believed to have a spiritual genealogy stretching back to the pre-Aryan period before the advent of Vedic Hinduism<sup>29</sup>. During the same phase, the publication of ‘The people of India’ by Herbert Rishley (1908) provided support to the Adi-Hindu conception, which was later on reiterated by Dr. Ambedkar in his writings. The idea of the pre-Aryan origin of the bhakti devotionalism, alongwith the exclusive claim of untouchables over egalitarian, heterodox bhakti lint fuel to an emerging belief that the untouchables were the original Indians or Adi-Hindus, and in turn, developed into a social movement in the early 1920s –Adi-Hindu movement<sup>30</sup>.

Bhakti movement believes in the innate equality of mankind while the Adi-Hindu movement challenges the ground of discrimination by establishing Dalit as an original inhabitant of the land. In various parts of India, various Dalit castes posed this problem separately by stating that they had discovered a pure history and a pure identity within or outside the Hindu religion.<sup>31</sup>Adi-Hinduism through radical racial explanation of caste relations attempted to deconstruct the ‘Higher or lower status’ and tried to establish that, by using religion as a tool, upper-caste occupy higher positions in the society. Also, they have added a new word in the Dalit movement lexicon- i.e. indigenous(Adi)-the original inhabitants, which provides a ground to claim their lost positioning and rights. Christopher Jaffrelot is of the opinion that “ far from establishing a separate identity that would pull the Dalit out of the caste system, the Adi movement used their so-called original identity as a means of promoting their status within the system<sup>32</sup>.

There was an Adi movement in both northern and southern India. It is Adi-Andhra in Andhra, AdiDravida in Tamil Nadu, Adi Karnataka in Karnataka, in Uttar Pradesh as Adi Hindu Movement. In Punjab as the AdiDharm movement, formed a distinct religious identity, free from the prejudices of Hinduism, also described as the “*religious revolt of the untouchables*” in the Indian Census report of 1930. It rejected Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam and tried to develop the distinct identity of the Dalits.

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<sup>28</sup> Fuller, C.J. (1992). *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*, Princeton , p 155

<sup>29</sup> Jijnasu, Chandrika Prasad. (1968). *Adi Hindu Andolanka prabantak Sri 108 Swami Acchutanand Harihar*, Lucknow, 2<sup>nd</sup>edt, p 106.

<sup>30</sup> Singh, Om Prakash, Op.cit., p 576-77

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 577

<sup>32</sup> Jaffrelaot. C . (2003). *India’s Silent Revolution*. India: Columbia Press University, p 204.

## **Gandhi and Untouchables: A move towards respectable recognition**

In the initial years' Congress was not much inclined towards the social reforms. However, under the leadership and guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, the vision of the party changes its trajectories. With the emergence of Gandhiji in congress, the new era of lower caste consciousness and movements focuses on the elevation of the social status of lower and backward castes. In 1922, the working committee of Congress (Bardoli) passed the resolution for the depressed classes for the improvement of their social, mental, and moral condition.<sup>33</sup> Gandhiji wanted to refurbish the old Hindu society structure by eliminating the discriminatory social practice of untouchability.

The contribution of Gandhi to caste reform is very integral to his definition of society. There was the practice of untouchability in Indian society and caste-based discrimination. In the 1930s the demand for a special electorate suddenly aggravated the caste issues. During this period, when he was in Yedarva jail (due to disobedience of salt tax), a new organization, Harijan Sewak Sangh was founded to combat untouchability and a new weekly journal 'Harijan' was started<sup>34</sup>. However, Gandhiji's solutions to the question of untouchability were also religious in nature. As a substitute for the backward or suppressed class, he embraced a neologism, Harijan (Child of God).<sup>35</sup> The socio-economic reforms issues were added to the Congress party agenda due to the initiative of Gandhiji.

Gandhiji believed that the practice of untouchability in Hinduism or Hindu scripture was a socio-religious evil and had no penalty. He pointed out "Manusmriti and other similar treatises, put before us, seem to be different from what they are in original form.... There is no sanction in Shastras for untouchability"<sup>36</sup>. Gandhiji was not against the fundamental principles of the religion. He was even of the view that work for the service for the Harijan "is purely religious and must be carried out on a regular spirit"<sup>37</sup>. Gandhiji believes in the innate goodness of human beings and of the belief with continuous 'aagraha' for the 'satya' (equality of behavior in this context) will definitely lead the

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<sup>33</sup> The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol.54,p.18.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.mkgandhi.org/biography/campaign.htm>

<sup>35</sup> Choudhary, Adrija. (September 5, 2018). Why dalits want to hold on to Dalit, not Harijan, not SC, *Indian Express*, retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/dalit-scheduled-caste-information-and-broadcasting-media-5341220/>.

<sup>36</sup> The collected work of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 41 pp177-178

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, Vol 55, pp124-125

‘change of heart’ especially among the caste Hindus. Gandhiji said that As extended to the masses, the ‘anti-untouchability movement is of mere heart change and shifting their (caste Hindus) mindset towards Harijan, the vast majority of Hindu castes do not have to disrupt their everyday activity in order to serve the Harijan’<sup>38</sup>. Besides, he notes that its (eradication) is bound to be part of every future constitution and there is no difference of opinion on it. The untouchables have the same rights as any other in the constitution.<sup>39</sup>

At the organizational level, for the disseminating his ideas and appeal to the masses, he started a journal ‘Harijan’( after the discontinuation of young India), the first issue of which carries the appeal of Gandhiji under the column ‘To the readers’ which says “ Will you become a fellow worker in the movement of liberating over 40 million human beings from an intolerable yoke of purifying Hinduism<sup>40</sup>”. He has undertaken ‘Penance fast’ in 1932 and 1933 at least three times, which was joined by many others, especially to appeal to the conscience of caste Hindus. Besides, he has undertaken a Harijan tour with a purpose to understand the plight of thedepressed class’ and to establish a campaign against untouchability. For this, he established the ‘Harijan Purse Fund” with the purpose of welfare of the ‘depressed class’. Also, he supported ‘Temple entry satyagrahato make Hindu religious place open to all.

Overall, Gandhiji and HarijanSewakSangh seem to work on a three-pronged argument: firstly, untouchability is not a part of Hinduism in its original sense, and therefore being religious one can be free of this evil. Secondly, he tries to abolish the evil practice of untouchability in a reformative manner and this reform began with the individual. Thirdly, due to his innate belief in inhibited goodness in human nature,he believes that this evil practice will be abolished through the ‘change of heart’ at the individual level and the total of all such change will create a spillover effect on the general attitude of the society. Gandhiji tries to culminate morality both at the individual and societal level to end this malpractice

### **Justice Party Movement: Denial of Supremacy**

In November 1916, the organization,“The South Indian Liberal Federation” was formed in Madras by a group of non-brahmin citizens namely Dr. T.M.Nair, Sir PittiTheagaraja

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, vol 51 ,pp 434-435.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid,vol 46, pp362-363.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, vol 53, p 264.

Chettiar, and Dr. C.Natesa Mudaliar. It was the first step in south India initiated to unite the non-brahmin youth. It was seen as the start of the Dravidian movement established to represent the Non-brahmin interest in Madras.<sup>41</sup> The organization was formed to advance, safeguard promote the interests of the non- Brahmin community. The movement challenges the supremacy & domination of the brahmins in the educational system, the political sphere, and in government services. The SILF published the daily newspaper in English language, named 'Justice', which became so popular that it became the name of the organization. The watchwords of the party are 'Equal opportunities for all and injustice to none'. The justice party raised the issues and consciousness through the daily newspapers 'Tamil daily', 'Dravidian', 'Telugu Daily, and 'Andhra Prakasisni'.<sup>42</sup>The justice part was not satisfied with the working of the Home Rule Movement and considered it as a conspiracy of Brahmins against the non-Brahmins.<sup>43</sup>

### **Self Respect Movement: Establishing New Society**

The Self Respect Movement was the social revolutionary movement, aimed at dismantling the current discriminatory Hindu social order and establishing a new society without caste, religion, and god, founded on rationality.<sup>44</sup>It opposed the domination of Brahmins as the superior class and encouraged the backward castes to live with self-respect, raised their voice against the social structure of casteism, which considered them lower in the hierarchy. The movement was founded by S.Ramanathan in 1925, invited the E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker also famous as Periyar to join the anti-brahmin movement. EVR headed the movement in Tamil Nadu, also regarded as the 'Father of Modern Tamil Nadu'. Naicker broke his ties with Congress on issues of representation of non-Brahmins and social justice. The journal named 'KudiArasu' was launched by the EVR, in which he stated "Self Respect Movement was inaugurated not for talking ill of particular community or sect, but to destroy the social evils as a whole".<sup>45</sup> The self-respect movement along with its journal 'KudiArasu' wants to reform the society for that has had several operational programmes. EVR stated "Man is disgraced by caste and the caste is disgraced by the religion. How can we destroy one, keeping the other alive?".<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> Chatterjee, A.C. (1936). *A short history of India*. London: Longman Publication, p.475

<sup>42</sup> G.O.Ms. No.512, Rural Development & Panchayat Raj.

<sup>43</sup> G.O.no. 695, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.

<sup>44</sup> Thandavan. R.,2001, *The Dravidian Movement*, Chennai, p.9.

<sup>45</sup> KudiArasu, 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1931, p.4

<sup>46</sup> Hansen, Bent Smidt. (1974). *In respect of Periyar Ramasami in Janardhanam*, Madras. P.18

movement was against the caste system as well as the religious practices it advocates self-respect marriages which are without the presence of a priest and favours the inter-caste marriages. The movement against the practices of using caste names, caste costumes, and caste marks. In 1926, it established the self-respect leagues all over Tamil Nadu, which organizes the conferences at the Taluks as well as at the district levels.<sup>47</sup> The movement dedicated to generating a sense of pride among the non-Brahmins based on their Dravidian past and denied the superiority of Brahmins. It perpetrated that non-Brahmins were the aboriginals having the Dravidian origin whereas Brahmins were Aryan invaders from the north. The self-respect movement was much more popular than the justice party.<sup>48</sup> The self-respect movement makes to generate feelings of self-respect, consciousness, and self-confidence among the backward classes or the non-Brahmins. It spawns the confidence in them to fight for social justice. It was due to the movement the separate dining places for Brahmins were got slowly given up, due to their continuous practices the name board of hotels was get replaced from “Brahmin Hotel” to “Vegetarian Hotel”.<sup>49</sup> The movement has played an important role in the political, social, and religious life of South India's people.

### **Dr. Ambedkar and Socio-Political Arrangements**

No discussion on the Dalit movement and assertion seems to be complete without understanding the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. His efforts have had a huge influence on the country's future social and political dialogue. Ambedkar always believes that “the political revolution in India was preceded by social and religious reforms led by the saints”<sup>50</sup> he rejected the varna interpretation of the caste as an economic division, rather considered it as ‘harmful institutions’. He called upon the Hindus, in accordance with the concept of democracy, to annihilate the caste, which is a greater obstacle to social unity, and to create a new social order based on the principles of independence, equality, and fraternity<sup>51</sup>. Ambedkar examined different principles and hypotheses of the origin and validity of the caste system in his seminal work 'Annihilation of Caste' and debunked all of them due to logical incoherence and empirical inappropriateness.

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<sup>47</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1928, p.1.

<sup>48</sup> Irschick, Eugene F. (1969). *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press .p.330.

<sup>49</sup> Anita, Diehl's. (1979). *Periyar E. V. Ramasami: A Study of the Influence of a Personality in Contemporary South India*, New Delhi :B. J. Publications, 54. Janpath, p.52.

<sup>50</sup> Speech and writings of Dr . B.R.Ambedkar, Ministry of social Justice Vol 1, p XIV

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid* , p XV

It is believed that the structure of castes and related notions of ‘purity’ and ‘pollutant’ embedded in the socio-cultural aspect of religion. He also said that “*not only did the Hindu have little effect on the humanitarian cause of civilizing the savages, but higher caste Hindus intentionally prevented the lower castes within the pale of Hinduism from rising to the higher caste cultural level*”<sup>52</sup>. He also lamented the Hindu religion for the lack of the feeling of community and brotherhood. Further, he says that “*the effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed the public spirit and destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible*”<sup>53</sup>. Unlike Gandhiji, he was critical to the Chaturvarna system i.e. division of society into four classes. he considered the labeling of ‘Bhramin’, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra as unnecessary and was of the opinion that men can be honoured without labeling. Also, he considered the varna order as “impractical, harmful and a miserable future”<sup>54</sup> Ambedkar pointed out the numerous contradictions embedded in the dominant construct of religion with an array of citations from the past and in tune with the ‘rational’ societal construct especially taking reference from the European society. “He attempted to forge India’s moral and social foundations to a new strove for a political order of constitutional democracy that is sensitive to the disadvantaged, inherited from the past or engendered by providing social relations”<sup>55</sup>

He encapsulated the feature of caste in the following words: “ this critical evaluation of the various characteristics of caste leave no doubt that prohibition rather than the absence of intermarriage-endogamy to be concise is only one that can be called the essence of the caste when rightly understood. But some may deny this on the abstract anthropological ground, for exist endogamous groups without giving rise to the problem of caste, societies, culturally different making their abode in localities more or less removed and having little to do with eath other are physical reality”<sup>56</sup>

Ambedkar adopted a multi-dimensional strategy to counter the problem of untouchability and henceforth exclusion and marginalization. He believed that a substantial chunk of the

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<sup>52</sup> Annihilation of Caste, *ibid*, p 53

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* p 54

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p 59

<sup>55</sup> Rodrigues, Valerain. (2002). *The essential writings of DrB.R.Ambedkar*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p 1.

<sup>56</sup> Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, The critical evlution of various charaterstics of caste, p 46 as cited in C.D.Sing “ Dr Ambedkar perceives caste system as inherently pernicious, *Indian Journal of political Science*, April-June 2011, vol 72, no 2 pp 523-527



Indian population was denied their legitimate rights by the oppressive and dominant social customs and traditions. He described the state of slavery of untouchability and the denial of human rights before the Reform committee(franchise) and Southborough committee on January 27, 1919.

He argued for the generation of class-consciousness among the untouchables and favours for the steady and systematic upliftment of the downtrodden through the educationalandsocial reforms. The satyagraha launched by Ambedkar has aimed at the self-respect of the untouchables .the right movement initiated by Ambedkar to inspire the depressed classes to fight for their right gradually gained momentum and successfully brought about an improvement in their economic and social conditions, political representation, educational and cultural achievements. He called for the union of different marginalized castes under one platform to project their united strength and to hold the balance of power in the new democratic setup. he declared that “political power is the key to all social progress and the schedule castes can achieve their salvation if they capture their power by organizing themselves into a third party and holding, balancing the power between the rival political parties.”<sup>57</sup>

In the view of Ambedkar, the economic marginalization of the Dalits had its place in the laws of Manusmriti, according to which the Dalits were subject to the law of inheritance. The same text considered the acquisition of knowledge by the Dalits as a crime. The Brahaminical construct was not only responsible for the downtrodden status, economic misery, and backwardness of the untouchables but also it had prevented the non-Hindus from economic competition. the element of social boycott and punishment in a long run resultant in the suppression of the community and a low, dirty, and menial occupational status for the Dalits. Ambedkar favour for industrialization to break these shackles. He was of the opinion that it would destroy the land premium and minimize the demand on it, and that decreasing population pressure on land and increasing the use of capital and capital goods would forcefully establish an economic imperative to increase the holding<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. (1976). *Bhahiskrit Bharati Agrulekh* (Marathi) edited by R.Ganveel . Bhusaval: RatnamitraPrakashan, pp137-138

<sup>58</sup> Mungekar, B.L ( 2004). *Dr Ambedkar on India's Agrarian Problem*. Debendra Kumar dass(ed) .*Great Indian Economists: their creative vision for socio-economic Development: B.R.Ambedkar*, Vol.3 New Delhi Deep and Deep Publication, p 275.

In 1942, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar established a political organization for the Dalits in the Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF) which limited to the untouchables in the hope of getting all the untouchables together in a new movement to gain political rights and representation for the Dalit people. As a rival organization to Congress, the AISCF used to continuously challenge the argument of Congress to represent Dalit interests, Bombay remained its main center in the initial period, but it spread all over India in a very short period. The primary goal of the AISCF was to unite and fight against the domination and untouchability of the upper caste.

The RPI was the first political party founded in India in October 1957 by the post-Ambedkar leadership. By changing the name, the Republican Party of India came into existence from AISCF. The party's mission was to unite the oppressed, to combat the atrocities committed against the Dalits, and to eradicate their disabilities. The philosophy of the Republican Party of India reveals that it took up several problems that related to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in keeping with its efforts to create a broad-based framework. Initially, the Republican Party of India did some positive work as it attempted to serve and address Dalit issues. It plays an important role in the formation of organizations for workers, organizations for students, organizations for women, etc. Unfortunately, as each leader posed as a junior Ambedkar, over time, the tempo and the revolutionary zeal of the party leaders were lost in mutual conflicts. They failed to bring forward the momentum of the Dalits (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) movement in this rivalry, which contributed to the party's decline. The party did not understand the root cause of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes problems. The party split into many groups after that. There is no ideological basis for the split in the RPI, but it occurred due to a clash of personalities and personal political ambitions.

### **Kanshi Ram and Bahujan Movement**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar through his activism and institutional reforms emphasized education and organization-based mobility and Jyotiba Phule aimed for radical re-reading of Indian history. In the Post-independence period, however, there have been material changes in the condition of the people and most importantly being the emergence of a

larger body of educated youth, who had benefitted from the Phule-Ambedkarite legacy in so far as it had been enshrined in the Indian constitution in the form of reservations in the elected offices, government jobs, and educational institutions<sup>59</sup>. This new emerging middle class of the marginalized achieved a better position in socio-economic settings of the country but having a stigma of ‘reserved category’ in the dominant caste construct. Considering the need of these employees and for providing a collective platform for the dignified life the Bamcef came into being into stages<sup>60</sup>. Kashi Ram one of the key arch in the foundation of Bamcef, emerged as the biggest and most creative leader in the post-Ambedkaritedalit movement<sup>61</sup>. Born in 1934 in a mediocre Ravidasi family of Punjab, Kanshi Ram impelled to the path of social activism in 1971. Although at that time mainstream Dalit politics was represented by the Republican Party of India and frustrated Dalit youth in the form of Dalit Panthers<sup>62</sup>. Instead of investing his resources in the reconstruction of these institutions, on December 6, 1973, Kanshi Ram discovered the potential in an unlikely class of government employees belonging to Dalits, other backward classes (OBCs), and religious minorities and founded the All India Backward and Minority Employee Federation (BAMCEF).

He claimed that only 15% of the upper castes, along with religious minorities, ruled over 85% of backward and lower castes. Therefore, the 85 % fraction could come together and take advantage of democratic politics-the bulk of which will run the nation forever.<sup>63</sup>. Unlike the Marxist scholars, he never tried to create an alternate system of governance, rather he showed his belief in the representative model of democracy and urged Dalits and Minorities to become in power by consolidating the number into ‘united power’

*“jiski jitni sankhya bhari, uski utni bhagidari”* (The more the number, the more the share in power).

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<sup>59</sup> Lochan, Rajiv. (2014) . Paying back to society: The Bamcef-An Idea and its network in N.Jayaram, *“Interrogating Ideas, institutions and Process: Essay in memory of Satish Saberwal*, Orient Blackswan.

<sup>60</sup> ibid

<sup>61</sup> Teltumbe, Anand. (2006). An Enigma called Kashi Ram. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Nov 4-10, Vol 41, No 43/44 pp 4531-32

<sup>62</sup> ibid

<sup>63</sup> Singh, Shyam .(2010). Dalit movement and emergence of BahujanSamaj Party in Uttar Pradesh: Politics and Priorities; Working paper Sereis 242, *The institute for Social and Economic Change*, Bangalore , p.6

He mooted the idea of ‘bahujan’ which comprises 85% of the society<sup>64</sup>. He never aimed for an egalitarian society but a system of rational distribution of resources. He said that ‘We are the majority 85 % of the population; on the basis of our numbers we came to power. He coined a slogan affirming the Dalits right <sup>65</sup>to undistributed excess lands “ *Jo zamin sarkari hai, who zamin hamari hai*” (the land lying excess with the government, belong to us)

Before the BAMCEF he launched the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and other backward classes and minority communities employer Association in 1971, which precedes BAMCEF. The purpose was of the launch of such an association was to defend the interest of “Bahujan Officials’ who are gradually forming a Dalit middle class.

Kashi Ram transformed the BAMCEF into a secret organization, due to harassment from different agencies and founded a parallel political party for which BAMCEF provided a skilled cadre.<sup>66</sup> In 1981, Kashi Ram felt the need for some more action and formed the Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (popularly known as DS-4) which would parallel to the BAMCEF with Khaparde as its president<sup>67</sup>. DS-\$ was far more aggressive in its stances, under the slogan ‘*Brahmin, Thakur, Bania ChorBaki sab hai DS-4*’. However, the aggressive stand of this newly created organization has not paid much, and to channelize the numerical strength of non-upper caste groups, he set up the BhaujanSmaj Party in the formal arena of politics in the year 1984, with a slogan ‘*vote humara, raj tumhara, nahi chalega*<sup>68</sup>. Although Punjab is the birthplace of Kanshi Ram and had a considerable influence on the Ambedkarite and Adi-movement, BSP does not gain ground in the state. On the contrary in a larger state like Uttar Pradesh, in which, the hereditary within Dalit cluster is manifested, the party gradually occupied a significant position, however, due to different reasons.

In the year 1989, BSP entered into the fray of representation and that was competitive electoral politics was the time Dalit movement in UP transformed itself as a political movement with less focus oneconomic equality and social reforms. The rise of politics of

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<sup>64</sup> ibid

<sup>65</sup> Roy, Bhaskar. (2002). Paradoxes of Dalit Politics in Uttar Pradesh. *India International Centre Quaterly*, Monsoon , vol 29, no 2 pp 107-116

<sup>66</sup> Jafferlot, Christopher. (2010) . Caste and Politics. *India International Centre Quaterly*, Autumn 2010, vol 37, No 2, Autumn , pp 94-106

<sup>67</sup> Lochan, Rajiv (2014). Op.cit.

<sup>68</sup> Teltumbe, Anand. (2006). An Enigma called Kashi Ram. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Nov 4-10, Vol 41, No 43/44 pp 4531-32

Hindutva by BJP and violent communal tension and announcement of the Mandal commission reports recommendation, all set for the polarization of communities along caste and religious line. “These opportunities provided a clear avenue for the BSP to use its political leverage”<sup>69</sup>. However, it was heavily dependent on the lower castes and not on other sections of society. this restricted the expansion of the electoral base of the BSP<sup>70</sup>. The electoral success gradually became a top priority to the BSP and this is because as Kanshi Ram said “*We wish that no political party could get the proper majority, then only we will be politically important for others*”<sup>71</sup>. Sudha Pai in her analysis found “*Therefore, the political priorities of the BSP during its early years were surrounded by the need to acquire a dominant place in UP politics. The party believes that state power is the ‘key’ or ‘agent’ to introduce social change*”<sup>72</sup>.

### **The decline of BSP and Dalit Politics in contemporary times**

Dalit politics & consciousness movement has gone through many phases. Dalit politics witness the rise with the success of BSP in 1984. After the Kanshi Ram, Dalit leadership get strengthen by his successor Mayawati. She was the first female leader from the Scheduled caste category to become the Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh. She serves the state not only once but four times as the chief minister. The success of BSP and its popularity observed to get declined in 2014. The national party BSP marks its majority in Uttar Pradesh state assembly election in 2007, got the steep decline in 2014 Lok Sabha elections when it failed to secure a single seat in the lower house of the parliament. In 2017, Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections, BSP only secured 19 seats and 10 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. It was perceived that Mayawati shifted its base from the Dalit politics to ‘Sarvjan’ based politics, the party only favored the ‘Jatav’( the sub-caste among the scheduled caste in Uttar Pradesh, to which Mayawati herself belongs) and the certain upper caste people, who helped her to win in 2007 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections.

### **New Wave of Dalit Mobilization: Negation of Existing Stereotype**

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<sup>69</sup> ibid

<sup>70</sup> Lerch, Jens. (2003). Hamlet, Village and region, Caste and class differences between low caste mobilization in east and west uttarprades in Roger Jeffery &jenslerche *Social and Political Change in Uttar Pradesh*, New Delhi, Manohar publication.

<sup>71</sup> Akela, A.R. (2006). *Kanshi Ram Saheb ke Saatchatakar*, Aligarh: Ananda SahityaSadana

<sup>72</sup> Pai, Sudha. (2002). *Dalit Assertion and Unfinished Democratic Revolution BSP in Uttar Pradesh*, New Delhi: Sage.

The downfall of the BSP created an opportunity for many new faces of Dalit leaders to emerge. The new wave of Dalit mobilization does not rely on the conventional way of electoral politics but a different style. The new wave focuses heavily on the dignity of Dalits, self-respect, and socio-economic gains. Several new Dalit leaders emerged at that time, with new ideas and movements forming their organization like Azad Samaj Party (ASP) by Chandra Shekhar Aazad, Jignesh Mevani in Gujarat from the Una AtyacharLadat Samiti, and in Maharashtra, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi founded by Prakash Ambedkar.<sup>73</sup> There is no pan India uniform movement or the political party seen after the BSP, most of the Dalit movements have the character of regional requirements and heterogeneous in nature.

#### **i. Bhim Army and the rise of Chander Shekhar**

The rise of the Bhim Army by a youth named Chander Shekhar, a social activist & lawyer from Gharkoli village in western Uttar Pradesh in 2015 was a whirlwind movement. Among the Dalit youth, it was very popular and concentrated on the issue they faced or go through such as unemployment & social inequality. Later he setup the 'Azad Samaj Party' for political ambitions. The Bhim Army was formed with the goal of *"direct confrontation-based action to preserve or restore the dignity of the Dalits"*. The Bhim Army has received tremendous support from the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh since its foundation. The BSP is much focused on electoral politics, Bhim Army much involved in the issues of insecurities and protection against atrocities faced by the Dalits. In April 2017, the incidence of violent clashes was reported between the Bhim Army and the other upper caste at the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Chandrashekhar and Bhim Army provide support to the various demonstrations related to Dalits and minorities, such as the expression of injustice at the death of Rohith Vemula, Una incidence, Bhima Koregaon one, and also provide support to CAA and NRC protest.<sup>74</sup>

The Dalit symbols, icons, and cultural memories of the Dalits are get rearranged in the Bhim Army symbolization. The images of Ambedkar and Buddha were at the top of the symbolic hierarchy of community icons during the time of Kanshi Ram & Mayawati and the saints like Ravidass, Kabirdass, and others were placed lower down in the symbolic

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<sup>73</sup> Gharhi, Arti. (24 April 2018), 'The Changing face of Dalit Politics', *HW News*, also at <https://hwnews.in/news/opinion/changing-face-dalit-politics/38448>

<sup>74</sup> Pai, Sudha. (20 March, 2020), Future of Dalit Politics Swings Between Decline and Regeneration, *The Wire* retrived from <https://thewire.in/politics/dalit-politics-chandra-shekhar-aazad>.

representation. Chandrashekhar disrupts the hierarchy, Ambedkar still holds the top spot, but Buddha is replaced by the Ravidass, the Ravidass projected as a guru to whom the queen was his disciple.<sup>75</sup> The Ravidass as a deity worshiped by the several scheduled caste community belongs leather related work, such as the Chamar community, Mochis, Jatavs, Ramdassia Sikhs. By putting the Ravidass as they symbolize affiliation with Bhim Army, he is expanding his influence among the Dalits of Northern India, especially in the states of Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi. Slogans like '*Chamar da Puttar*', '*Mai Ravidassi Chamar*', are the symbols of the identity-based assertion.<sup>76</sup>

## ii. **The suicide of Rohith Vemula: Assertion of Bahujan Identity in Campuses**

The suicide of Ph.D. research scholar Rohith Vemula at Hyderabad Central University boosted the protest movement among students and Dalits across the nation in January 2016. Following Vemula's suicide, members of his family, friends, and some social groups claimed that he committed suicide because he was the victim of caste discrimination. His death did not take place like any other student's demise, the incident became the mass movement of Dalit-Bahujan students.

His death took the caste system debate to the center stage at the campuses and colleges of Indian Universities, previously confined only to the political domain. The Dalit-Bahujan solidarity was seen in the student organizations at the protest sites and in campaigns, in oppose to Brahminical hierarchy.

At the protest sites and campaigns, the banners were seen with the pictures of Ambedkar, Phule with the pictures of Karl Marx. Most of the places of agitation had the demonstration with the red flags (symbol of Marxist solidarity) along with the blue flags (symbol of Dalit solidarity) together. The new identity of the Dalit class along with its sub-identity of the proletariat class in capitalist society was established by that scenario. Marx and Ambedkar which are in contrast to each other in thoughts were taken together in the contemporary society after that incident.

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<sup>75</sup> Narayan, Badri. (19March, 2020), Chandrashekhar Azad leans on new symbolism to change Dalit-Bahujan equation, *Buisness Standard*, retrieved from [https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/chandrashekhar-azad-leans-on-new-symbolism-to-change-dalit-bahujan-equation-120031900615\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/chandrashekhar-azad-leans-on-new-symbolism-to-change-dalit-bahujan-equation-120031900615_1.html).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

In the academic world, the incident has raised several debates on the caste system at multimedia platforms, several seminars & conferences were held on that issue, intellectuals raised the consciousness through their writings, it became a matter of discussion and seems to be a new political Dalit wave of assertion and consciousness.

In the symbolization, the statue of Rohith Vemula was installed in his memory at the protest site. The statue was put there as a symbol to assert their identity among the fellow Dalits of the country. That incident of death mobilized the Dalit students and Bahujan politics and compelled them to fight for their rights by asserting their identity.

### **iii. Bhima Koregaon: Milestone in the making of Dalit Narrative**

In the trajectory of the Dalit struggles, Bhima Koregaon has its important place. It has been seen as the act of Dalit valor against the upper caste Peshwas. The Dalits are providing the contemporary meaning to the battle fought 200 years ago. It was the battle fought at Koregaon, near the banks of Bhima river, the last battle of the Anglo-Maratha war fought between the Peshwa Baji Rao II (Maratha Confederacy) and the East India Company. The battle was won by the East India Company had 500 Mahar soldiers out of 800 total soldiers. The battle has been seen as a symbol of Dalit pride as they conquered the Brahmin (the Peshwa).<sup>77</sup> The Vijay Stambh has been built in memory of the victory. In 1927, B.R. Ambedkar visited the memorial obelisk, after that number of Dalits regularly paying their visit to the site. The victory has been seen as the victory of the untouchable over the oppressor class 'the Brahman' and an important event of Dalit assertion which gets celebrated with huge pomp and show.

### **iv. Alternative Media: Their Media**

Many social reformists, thinkers work for the emancipation of the Dalits. Several politico-legal provisions have also been enacted for the betterment of their position. Media which is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy plays a vital role in interest articulation and aggregation. In the social reform movements and inarticulate, the interest of the people for specific concerns role of media is undeniable. Dalits who are marginalized from the mainstream of society, are also neglected in the mainstream media. The news

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<sup>77</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/battle-over-a-200-year-old-battle-was-bhima-koregaon-really-a-brahmin-dalit-tussle/articleshow/62349485.cms?from=mdr>



related to the concern of SC/ST found very less or no space in the mainstream media. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar opines that Dalits need to have their publication to become empowered and awakened. Ambedkar himself 100 years ago, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1920 laid the foundation of 'Mooknayak' newspaper, which was very vocalized on the issues of Dalits. As per Dr. Ambedkar, the newspaper is the best source of remedy for injustice in society in the present as well as in the future. In the earlier times, newspapers, journals, magazines & radio were among the prominent sources of communication, which are mostly owned by the upper castes. Ambedkar soon realized that Dalits will never get supported by the mainstream media.<sup>78</sup> In support of the Dalit media, BSP founder Kanshi Ram shared his views that the mainstream media is biased and dominated by the upper caste/class people who do not highlight the problems and plight of the Dalits. Dalit has to print its magazines and newspapers to make them hear them. "The Oppressed Indian" published by the BAMCEF, "Bahujan Times" was the Dalit newspaper started from New Delhi, both were edited by the Kanshi Ram and considered as the evolutionary step to form the alternative print media.<sup>79</sup>

As per the report by Oxfam India, entitled "Who tells Our Stories Matters: Representation of marginalized caste group in Indian Newsrooms" ascetically claims that the marginalized groups do not have any representation in the leadership positions of media houses, these are people who decide how much space have to give for the particular news. No efforts have seen to make equal representation in the newsrooms.<sup>80</sup> As per the report out of 121 newsroom leadership positions 106 are occupied by upper-caste journalists. In the shows of flagship debate, over 70% of the news channel panelists belong to the upper caste. Approx 5% of the articles of English language and 10% of the articles of Hindi language were written by Dalits and Adivasis. The majority of the writings in English & Hindi newspapers about caste were written by upper caste people.<sup>81</sup>

The mainstream media is still the same as it was at the time of Dr. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram. The mass media channels of the marginalized section are also regarded as the

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<sup>78</sup> Ambedkar's journalism and its significance today: *Forward Press*; retrieved from <https://www.forwardpress.in/2017/07/ambedkars-journalism-and-its-significance-today/>

<sup>79</sup> Kumar, Vivek. (1999). Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Dalit Identities in U.P; *Dalits: Assertion for Identity* (ed.) Ambrose Pinto, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.oxfamindia.org/press-release/who-tells-our-stories-matters-representation-marginalised-caste-groups-indian-newsrooms>

<sup>81</sup> Report by Oxfam India. (2 Aug, 2019). 'Who tells Our Stories Matters: Representation of marginalized caste group in Indian Newsrooms'. retrieved from [https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Oxfam%20NewsLaundry%20Report\\_For%20Media%20use.pdf](https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Oxfam%20NewsLaundry%20Report_For%20Media%20use.pdf).

Alternative Media. These media sources sympathize with the real problems of the neglected masses and show the real picture, which is unheard & unseen by the mainstream media. The mainstream media considers the media of capitalism, entertainment, and consumerism. It is alleged that the mainstream media has failed to pick the real issues of marginalized sections and only serve the interest of the capitalist class, a corporate class that can benefit them.<sup>82</sup>

Multiple alternative media have arisen in the digitalized world of the internet to put their views on which the mainstream media is silent. Alternative media is the innovative form of media that came, it can be in the form of print media, digital format, audio-video, etc. It differs from current established mainstream media in their content, layout, in targeted audience as well. Various efforts have been taken by Dalit reformers to start their media.

Alternative media is challenging the dominant discourse of the mainstream media. In the digitalized world of the internet alternative media serving on the platforms of social media with content sharing. Many of the Dalit activists are having their voice on social media platforms like Youtube, Facebook, Twitter. It also works for interest articulation and interest aggregation among the Dalit classes. It provides the stage for the oppressed section to promote its rights, without any financial constraint.<sup>83</sup>

There are around 150 print and online platforms on the issue of caste, in Hindi, English, and various regional languages. **Dalit Dastak** is the monthly magazine and the youtube channel covering the issues of marginalized sections. In 2012, the magazine was launched in Delhi in the presence of eminent Bahujan thinkers and senior journalists. It was founded by Ashok Das, a post-graduate in IIMC, JNU, Delhi. The youtube channels have recorded the subscription of 8 Lac people. The magazine has the picture of Dr. Ambedkar on its front page, inscribed in the name of the magazine. As per the magazine, there were so many magazines published in the past for the Bahujan concerns and some of them are publishing in present as well. But there are very little efforts has seen in keeping them continue, 'Dalit Dastak' magazine is an endeavour to provide information & news concerning the Bahujan society on monthly basis. The magazine profoundly writes on the issues concern with Bahujans such as political issues of Dalits,

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<sup>82</sup> Croteau, David and Hoynes, William. (2006). *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*, Pine Forge Press. p.33.

<sup>83</sup> Atton, Chris. (2002). *Alternative Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

representation of Dalits in parliament & political parties, on the issue of reservation, Role of Dalits and Adivasi in Cinema, Subaltern leaders, Buddhist Religion, Constitutional Provisions, Campus based politics, Caste-based census, Dalit journalism, Achievements of Bahujans and recently the issue of Corona epidemic and the Bahujan, these are the issues which get largely missed by the mainstream media.<sup>84</sup> The youtube channel of channel is the forerunner in the Dalit issues, a much popular channel that has in-depth ground reporting videos, data stories, commentaries, and comprehensive interviews with eminent personalities of Dalit concern.

Forward Press website is one of the forerunner websites on the Dalit Bahujan issue, aims to bring the different and in-depth perspective of the Indian SC, ST, OBC, and northern India's converted minorities. It began as the bilingual magazine from Delhi in 2009, now with the era of digital media get transformed into a website. Forward Press also publishes the book under the imprint of the forwarding Press publication. The dictum of forwarding Press is 'to become medium of education & the voice of "silenced majority"'. It analyses its issues from the Bahujan lens of Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. The website has separate columns of News & Politics, Campus Compass which is related to the news related to University campuses, reservation issues, and any other issue related to SC/ST and OBC in varieties. The people can get the issue of national & international interest with the special reference to Dalit /Bahujan and minority concerns. It wrote about the sufferings of blacks and Dalits. It is the website, where one can get voluminous information about the Bahujan culture, their Arts & Crafts, books written on Bahujan culture & Literature, heroes of Bahujan, their festivals & films and their tradition & culture. The website also provides information about issues of employment, vacancies, educational opportunities, and employment. The books published by the forward press are now also available on 'Kindle'.<sup>85</sup>

Dalit Camera is another important youtube keeping the repository of Dalit discussions, songs, talks, and opinion pieces of Dalits, having more than 72 thousand subscribers. It gets started in 2011 by the voluntary effort of Ravichandran Bathran. It covers the news from the DABM perspective, stands for Dalit, Adivasis, Bahujan, and Minorities. As per the information from its website, "*Dalit Camera get started as a counter view to the*

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<sup>84</sup> <https://www.dalitdastak.com/magazine-archive/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.forwardpress.in/>

*cartelized hegemony of the English news channels.*”<sup>86</sup> In 2013, Dalit Camera also has the winner of Dr. Ambedkar International Award issued by FFEI, USA. Dalit Camera, captures the Dalits' histories, narratives, public gatherings, songs, talks lectures, and discussions related to Dalits. It is voluntary run by the students on their expenses, and actively working in Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Calcutta.<sup>87</sup>

Velivada, the website for independent Dalit journalism, is also quite active on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The website came into existence after the Rohith Vemula incident, the website got registered on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017, at the birth anniversary of BSP founder Kanshi Ram. The website is dedicated to those who fought & believe in equal rights. The ‘Velivada’ a Telugu word meaning “*Dalit Ghetto*” as per the website it is existed in ‘where Dalits pitch their battle tents’, ‘where the struggle is there to remember’ & where the Asuras fight for their equal rights<sup>88</sup>. Velivada YouTube channel is a very active multimedia channel for Dalit issues, it has more than 40 thousand subscribers.

Ambedkar Caravan is one of the important websites started by a Dalit guy, who is an engineering graduate, from the inspiration of teaching of Guru Ravidass Maharaj & Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The website has the aim of “*Cultivate Buddhist Culture & Heritage and to expose achievements and contribution of Talents of the unexposed to the world*”. The website has provided the pdf for the books written by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which contain original photographs of him, movies on him, and quotes of Dr. Ambedkar. The website also provides information about the Dalit history, Dalit heroes include (Guru Ravidass, Mahatma Phule, Savitri Bai Phule, E.V.R. Periyar, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Jogendernath Mandal, Shahu Maharaj, Iyothedass, Bhagya Reddy Varma.) It also provides the link and pdf file for the other important books & videos related to the Dalit concerns. Ambedkar Caravan’s Facebook page has more than 2 lakhs followers.

The other means of media such as Twitter, Instagram, Dalit voices are have marked their presence. ‘The Dalit Voice’ Twitter account active from March 2018, has more than 32 thousand followers, it is a non-profit organization, which campaigns against the atrocities, poverty & discrimination that the 260 millions of Dalit are suffering from.<sup>89</sup> The group of Dalit feminists also active on Instagram, the ‘Dalit Feminist’ account has around

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www.dalitcamera.com/>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> <https://velivada.com/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://twitter.com/ambedkariteind?lang=en>

30thousand followers with 529 posts. It has regular updates on scholarships/ Jobs/ study-related issues of the Dalit community. It regularly posts the art made by Dalit artists, Dalit poetry, songs, talks, audiobooks. The page also provides the space to share their own experiences of atrocities & discrimination with the Dalit community.<sup>90</sup> ‘Dalit Women Fight’ is theTwitter account, joined Twitter on September 2031, has more than 42 thousand followers, with the caption ‘a community-led digital project to amplify the voices of Dalit women for Justice’. It actively makes tweets on the Dalit women issues and atrocities faced by them.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/dalitfeminist/?hl=en>

<sup>91</sup> <https://twitter.com/dalitwomenfight?lang=en>