

Claiming Rights from Marginalized: A Scheduled Caste Perspective of Human Rights

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Abstract: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar dreamed of a society based on the modern liberal ideals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' throughout his life. Human rights are the approved result of the system, which is a social framework. The human rights problem that drew Ambedkar's attention in India might be better understood as Ambedkarism, a social solution for the caste-ridden, sick Indian social system perpetuated by customs sanctioned by dominant culture. To turn his dream into reality, Dr. Ambedkar worked hard to keep the 'SC/ST sections in the 'minority' category. While arguing in favor of his argument, he put forward the socio-economic condition of Dalits before the Southborough Committee in 1919. Dr. Ambedkar led a full-fledged movement for the rights of the Depressed Castes. He demands to access the natural resources (water) publicly by Dalits and right of entry into temples for all castes. He adopted constitutional methods to protect Dalit rights. Ambedkar led a movement against Dalit discrimination by creating public opinion through his writings in several magazines such as Mook Nayak, Vishkrit Bharat and Samanta Janta, which he started for the protection of Dalit rights. After a long struggle, he was successful in securing constitutional rights and safeguards for Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar had included all the principles for peaceful social revolution in the Constitution of India after independence. However, Ambedkar repeatedly emphasized that "political power is a means for Dalits to achieve all-round social upliftment, improvement and progress. Also looks at the approach of successive governments regarding the rights and development of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.

Keywords: Dr. Ambedkar, Schedule Caste, Dalits, Human Rights, SC/ST.

INTRODUCTION

Human rights are secure guarantees that are critically needed for survival of humanity. Particularly, democracy cannot survive without enforcement of human rights which are expected to provide fair society. Besides universal nature of human rights, schedule castes, culturally known as Dalits evolved a distinctive notion of human rights. This process was initiated by intellectuals from below in general and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in particular. This paper attempts to unveil a Dalit perspective of human rights which is still an unfinished project in contemporary India. This perspective, as this paper argues, is critical for empowerment of Dalits and other marginalized sections in India.

This paper has been organized into three sections. First section narrates the historical trajectory of Dalit perspective of human rights; second section explores the discourse and demands of Dalit movement

and its leaders for human rights for Dalits to facilitate their empowerment in India.

History of Human Rights from Dalit Perspective

During the last decade of the 19th century many Indian Bahujan leaders born among the lower castes like Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890), Narayana Guru (1854-1928), and E.V. Ramaswami Naikar (1879-1973) launched massive struggles for the dignity of Dalits and other marginalized sections throughout India. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the most towering figure among these Dalits leaders. He led satyagrahas to assert human rights. He advocated three traits: educate, organize and agitate to obtain rights to escape from oppression and march towards empowerment. Indeed, the first principle will provide rational thought, the second principle will give physical strength and third principle will lead to fight for human rights be it man or women. He thus, created a mission to fight for their human rights for the development of the poor.

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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's theory of rights is based on the assumption that every 'individual has certain inalienable rights (Ambedkar, 1947). At the same time, those are 'natural' and 'inherent'. According to him, the state apparatus and civil society are built on a comprehensive social philosophy and it exists for the sake of preventing injustice and tyranny through a system of rights. From humanistic points of view, he is opposed to any form of discrimination and exploitation on the basis of caste, sex, race, creed, place of birth etc. To him, right to life, liberty and property are the natural and inherent rights of individuals. These natural rights have to be recognized by the fundamental law of the land i.e., Constitution and protected and upheld by the Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar provided an admirable Bill of Rights in the Constitution of India, which remains the sheet anchor of liberty, equality and fraternity among all citizens of India irrespective of race, religion, caste, creed, sex etc.

Dr. Ambedkar was an ardent believer in Democracy. He took a rationalistic and comprehensive view of Democracy. This is abundantly clear from the definition of Democracy he gave in a speech at Poona on December 22, 1952. He defined Democracy as "a form and method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed." His vision based on liberty, equality and fraternity should not be an alternative to a caste society it should be full of channels for conveying a change. Dr. Ambedkar also put emphasis on educational rights for the deprived sections of the society irrespective of their caste, creed, sex which creates awareness for their fundamental rights and promotes social equality as education is the right weapon which cuts social evils and enlighten the scheduled caste to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom.

Conditions of Scheduled Caste: Post Ambedkar Era

Conditions of scheduled caste during post Dr. Ambedkar era had witnessed many ups and downs which could be seen in three broad phases. The rise and fall of Republican Party of India, emergence of Dalit Panther and assertions of dalits for political power in the form of Bahujan movement. RPI was founded by followers of Dr. Ambedkar on 3 October 1957 which was earlier announced by Dr. Ambedkar on 13 October 1956, but unfortunately, he was not live to formally establish the party. According to Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, a month after announcing the formation of the RPI Ambedkar, as president, dissolved the scheduled caste federation in its final meeting in Delhi on 13 November 1956 (Jigyasu, 1960). Contemporary scholars and observers have pointed to the contradiction that such a move entailed for the aims and objectives of the Dalit movement. It was perceived as "a party along class rather the caste lines" (Oliver & Viczainy, 1998). Ambedkar's biographer Dhananjay Kheer has argued that the Dalit leader was convinced that the SCF had created barriers "between

them and others classes" which he wanted to erase by establishing a new party (Kheer, 1962). Rammanohar Lohia has similarly claimed that Dr. Ambedkar was convinced of the need to move away from caste to class based mobilization by incorporating lower castes, workers, peasants and Dalits into a single party (Lohia, 1964). RPI was formed with the shifting agenda of the assertion from caste ridden to class perspective with the dissolution of SCF (Scheduled Caste Federation) in its final meeting in Delhi on 13 November 1956, which entirely relies on 'caste' and created barriers in the society. Decline of RPI followed by emergence of Dalit Panther movement in June, 1972 in Maharashtra. Where Dalit youths came forward and took up the task of bringing all the Dalits on to one single platform on mobilizes them for the struggle against caste discrimination for their civil rights and justice.

The leaders of the Republican Party of India, like B.P. Maurya, B.K. Gaikwad, and others, were given the application of their demands in 1964 to the then Prime Minister. The demands are the following-

1. The portrait of Dr. Ambedkar in the Central Hall of Parliament as a father of the Indian Constitution.
2. Barren and unemployed land should be given to landless laborers.
3. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes who have adopted Buddhism should increase their privileges.
4. The atrocities on Dalits should be stopped.
5. To be complete justice should be done under the Untouchability Crime Act.
6. Under the reservation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, jobs are provided until 1970.
7. The Republican Party of India started its weekly magazine "Enlightened India" to the campaign (Naimisharanya, 2013).

Dalit Panther Movement

A vibrant movement by Dalits and for Dalits took place in British India. Independent India also witnesses if not the same but similar movement by Dalits. The main demands of this movement were human, civic and legal rights to Dalit communities. The hopes of Dalits and other marginalized sections for positive changes were high after independence, but their hopes gradually faded on account of slow pace of reform process at one level and continued presence of atrocities at another level. It was this context that resulted in more aggressive form of resistance of Dalits came into existence and articulated more militant views than that of liberal views and strategies adopted by Dr. Ambedkar and as tools for emancipation of Dalits. Emergence of Dalit Panther Movement is part of this process.

The region of Maharashtra has been an epicenter of Dalit movement on account of presence of Phule-Ambedkar ideology. Emergence of the Dalit Panther Movement in the early 1970s is a part of the

process however with a difference. Apparently, the name with its insurrectionist symbolism was borrowed from the Black Panthers of the United States. Ideologically, the Dalit Panthers emphasized class-based Dalit political activism. Rise of Dalit Panthers movement coincided with wide spread famine, pervasive student activism and a non-party opposition politics in India. The movement was more driven by ideological and personality differences. The core ideological split was publicly evident by 1974, and was personified in its two pre-eminent leaders of the movement, Namdeo Dhasal and Raja Dhale. For Dhale's faction, the agenda of the movement was to deepen and widen Buddhist consciousness as the defining moment in Dalit history was the mass conversion to Buddhism under the leadership of Ambedkar. Namdeo Dhasal, on the other hand, represented a more orthodox leftist position and reduced caste to class. This faction accorded both Ambedkar and conversion movement less of defining role. Later on Indira Gandhi was successful in extracting support of the Dhasal faction on the plank of poverty amelioration programmes. On balance, the Dalit Panthers had failed to organize properly, both ideologically and as a political party. Lack of strategy and factionalism doomed this radical movement to insignificance. Nevertheless, this movement was successful in the sense that it had brought the issues of Dalits more shapely to the public domain than before (Das, 2004).

ROLE OF DALIT LITERATURE IN THE DALIT PANTHER MOVEMENT

Undoubtedly, Dalit literature has been played a major role for the origin of the Dalit Panther Movement. There have been many revolutions in the world took place because of literature and philosophy. Important revolutions such as the France Revolution, the Revolution of Russia and the Revolution of England are some examples. Literature produced by philosophers played major role for great revolutions happened in European and American continents (Kumar, 2015). Similarly, Dalits were inspired to revolutionary writings and ideas of Jyotirao Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, and E.V. Ramaswamy in India. The Dalit Panther Movement and Dalit literature are both inter-related. Ambedkar's book *the Buddha and his Dharma* in fact deeply influenced the Dalit Panther Movement and political and socio-cultural orientation.

In his numerous writings and speeches, Ambedkar has taught Dalits to fight against caste based social order as a means to escape from its evil effects. Similar concern and tone can be found in Dalit writers and poets. Leftist and Buddhist ideologies attract Dalit literature and Dalit Panthers and the authors and activist were militant in their rhetoric (Hardtmann, 2012). The literary genre initiated by Ambedkar created a paradigm for writings on oppressed and by oppressed. The life-world of Dalits and their grievances were translated into literary works and inspired the movement of Dalit

Panthers. The main focal themes of Dalit writers were to display the atrocities of Dalits, rising poverty and atrocities committed by upper castes on Dalits.

Undoubtedly, Ambedkar and his commitment for upliftment of Dalits were the backbone and provide inspiration for emergence of literature cantered on Dalits. He gave a great benchmark to the literature of the Dalits and the intellectual proceedings of the Dalits. The language of the Dalit writers arose from the miserable conditions created by poverty, ignorance and oppression. Even today, the framework of Manu dominates the orthodox sections of Hindus, which does not recognize the natural and civic rights of Dalits. In response to the Manuvadi mindset, Dalit writers voiced their views through various literary forms and movements.

Following are the demands of Panthers Youth

1. Illegally snatched land should be distributed in a rightful way to authoritative person.
2. People listed in caste atrocities should be charged and arrested in act MISA.
3. Scholarship of Dalit students should increase and employment for Dalit should also rise.
4. Dr. Ambedkar writing should also translate in other languages.
5. Home loans facility for Dalit should also increase.
6. Dalit should have to register as a share holder in co-operative societies.

Manifesto of Dalit Panther Movement

1. More than 80 percent of India's population lives in the villages. Of those, landless peasants are 35 percent, and 33 percent of all landless agricultural labourers belong to a scheduled caste. (Those Dalit poor peasants who do own pieces of land, own a negligible amount). The question of landlessness of the Dalit peasants must be resolved.
2. Landless peasants must immediately get excess land through the application of the Land Ceiling Act. Waste and jungle land must likewise be distributed.
3. Feudal survivals are still to be found in the villages. Due to this, Dalits are cruelly oppressed and exploited. Landlords and rich peasants get social prestige along with wealth. Due to this, the atrocities on Dalits have grown endemic. This system has clamped itself on the Dalits chest, affecting every part of his life, from day to day living to the deeper economic questions. This system must be destroyed.
4. The wages of landless labourers must be increased.
5. Dalits must be allowed to draw water from public wells.
6. Dalits must live, not outside the village in a separate settlement, but in the village itself.
7. All means of production must belong to the Dalits.
8. Exploitation by private capital must cease.
9. Social, cultural and economic exploitation must remove and socialism must be built in India. Misleading nationalization must give away to a true introduction of socialism.

10. All Dalits must be assured of daily wages.
11. Unemployed Dalits must be given unemployment benefits.
12. All Dalits must be given free education, medical facilities, housing, and good quality cheap grains.
13. When giving employment in educational institutions, the requirements to declare one's caste and religion must be immediately removed.
14. The government must stop giving grants to religious institutions immediately and the wealth of religious places must be used for the benefit of Dalits.
15. Religious and casteist literature must be banned.
16. The division in the army along caste lines must be ended.
17. Black marketeers, hoarders, money-lenders and all those exploiting the people economically must be destroyed.
18. The prices of essential commodities must be refunded.

Even though it was a short history, but the history Dalit Panther Movement represents a fascinating dimension of subaltern groups protest against oppression and hegemony. This movement was able to generate high degree of awareness among Dalits on their rights. Interestingly the Dalit Panther Movement not only confined to Maharashtra, but also spreads to other part of India.

DS4 and Bahujan Movement

Uttar Pradesh witnessed a vibrant movement of Dalits and by Dalits during the period of 1920 to 1950 (Kumar, 2006). This movement gradually merged with broader Ambedkarite movement. This ideological nature of Ambedkarite movement was transformed into mass based political movement by noted Dalit activist and thinker Kanshi Ram. He along with his co-activists established the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities Employees Welfare Association in 1971, which was duly registered under the Poona Charity Commissioner. The primary objective of this organization was to find out problems of government employees and provide equitable solutions to the problems of injustice and harassment of Dalit employees. This brought new change in Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh and finally it had created an "All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation" (BAMCEF), on 6th December 1978, the death anniversary of Ambedkar. This organization was formally launched with a rally at the Boat Club lawns in New Delhi (Pai, 2002).

DALIT SHOSHIT SAMAJ SANGHARSH SAMITI (DS-4)

Kanshi Ram was launched an organization to strengthen grassroots struggle to challenge the upper castes. Since the Indian democratic system does not allow the government employees to participate in political activities. Finally, they formed an organization made by bureaucrats was limited in its actions. Kanshi

Ram planned the formation of an organization that would be able to mobilize a larger section of the Dalits into political activities. The DS4 came into being to prepare mass base for political activities, which would help formation of a political party. This organization was formed to include and mobilize other sections of the society besides employees. Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti i.e., DS-4 was established on 6 December 1981. The main aim of this organization was to highlight the grievances of the oppressed Dalits and to educate them about their rights. It was not a political outfit; in fact it served as a link between Kanshi Ram's trade union organization BAMCEF and his yet to be formed political party, the BSP.

In North India, since the formation of the DS-4 the momentum for political mobilization picked up. Since the DS-4 was a quasi-rather than full-fledged political party [partly because government servants were forbidden to take part in political mobilization process], the DS-4 made little concrete progress. Unlike BAMCEF, which was more oriented towards urban Scheduled Caste elites, the target of the DS-4 was rural Dalits. The DS-4, because of its aggressive posture in agitational campaigns made quick inroads in North Indian villages. Between 15 March and 17 April 1983, the DS-4 organized a 3000 km cycle procession covering seven states in order to educate the oppressed and the exploited people that they need to build up their own organization and an independent movement (Kumar, 2006).

The Bahujan Samaj Party has become the symbol of self-respect for Dalits, Backwards and Minorities in the country. The ground work done by Kanshi Ram through BAMCEF, DS-4 and Media- 'The Oppressed Indian', 'Bahujan Times', 'Bahujan Sangathak' etc, gave him substantial mass base to launch a full-fledged political party. Hence, Bahujan Samaj Party was launched on 14th April 1984 on Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar's 83rd birth anniversary. The BSP is the political expression of the changing socio-political context of Uttar Pradesh. In contrast to the other Dalit organizations, its formation appears "deliberate and not reactive". Emerging almost twenty years after Kanshi Ram's resignation from the government job. It has consistently refused a reactive imitational stance and a reformatory agitation as well. It is in fact, a political organization with an aim to capture power and use it to elevate the problems of the Bahujan Samaj. The theme of the 'Bahujan Samaj' also allowed the BSP to communicate its social justice agenda to its target constituency. Kanshi Ram would often employ a discourse of "85 percent versus 15 percent," (Jafferlot, 2003) The bahujan movement created a vibrant discourse on Dalit perspective of human rights. It proposes that congenial conditions must be created for empowerment of Dalits within the framework of human rights with particular focus on Indian conditions.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Ambedkar is India's foremost human rights activist during the 20th century. He is an emancipator, scholar, extraordinary social reformer and a true champion of human rights. Dr. Ambedkar was a major leader in the field of human rights. His ideas gradually emerged as discourse which articulates Dalit perspective of human rights critically needed for empowerment of Dalits and other marginalized sections in India.

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