

Emergence of Lower Caste Associations and Their Role in the Eradication of Untouchability in United Provinces

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the factors which were responsible for the emergence of Dalit Associations and their role in the eradication of untouchability in United Provinces. This article attempts to document the history of lower caste associations in United Provinces. The main objective of this article is to provide a historical trajectory of evolution of Dalit movement and contribution of lower caste associations to it in United Provinces. The main argument put forwarded is that lower caste associations played an important role in mobilization and Associations of multiple Dalit castes which prepared ground work for emergence of Dalit movement in United Provinces. Caste associations thus created congenial atmosphere for mobilization of Dalits for achieving socio-political rights of Dalits.

Introduction

Uttar Pradesh is a state located in northern India. It was created on 1 April 1937 as the *United Provinces*, and was renamed *Uttar Pradesh* in 1950. Lucknow is the capital and Kanpur is the commercial capital and the largest city of Uttar Pradesh. On 9 November 2000, a new state, Uttarakhand, was carved from the mountainous Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh shares an international boundary with Nepal and is bordered by the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar. The state can be divided into two distinct hypsographical (altitude) regions. The larger Gangetic Plain region is in the north; it includes the *Ganges-Yamuna Doab*, the *Ghaghra* plains, the Ganges plains and the *Tarai*. It has fertile alluvial soil and a flat topography (with a slope of 2 m/km) broken by numerous ponds, lakes and rivers. The smaller Vindhya Hills and plateau region is in the

south. It is characterized by hard rock strata and a varied topography of hills, plains, valleys and plateaus.¹

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state in India, with a population of 199,581,477 million people as of 1 March 2011.² If it were a separate country Uttar Pradesh would be the world's fifth-most-populous nation, trailing only China, India, the United States of America and Indonesia. As of the 2001 Indian census about 80 percent of Uttar Pradesh population is Hindu, while Muslims make up around 18.5 percent of the population. The remainder consists of Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jains.³ Uttar Pradesh is between latitude 24°-31°N and longitude 77°-84°E. Area wise, it is the fourth largest state of India.

Lower Caste covered here are those who are listed in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes

Lists (Modification) Order 1956, for Uttar Pradesh. This order lists 66 castes in the Schedule for the State, of which 64 are Scheduled Castes throughout the State and two? Kori and Gond? are for a part of the State. Of the total Scheduled Caste population in the State about 92 per cent is contributed by only name castes.⁴ In UP, Chamar, Passi, Dhobi, Khatik, Dusadh, Basor, Dhanuk, Balmiki, Kori, Dom Gond, Kol, Dharikar, Kharwar, Musahar, Beldar, Kanijar, Nat, Bhuaiar, Ghasi, Habuda, Hari, Kalabaz, Kapadia, Karbal, Khairaha, Agariya, Badhik, Vadi, Bansphor, Barwar, Bedia, Bhandu, Bauriya, Korwa, Laibegi, Mazhai, Parika, Paradiya, Patri, Saharia, Sansiya, Bahelia, Balai, Bawaria and others are the Lower castes included in the Dalit community by the Dalit political forces. These are Chamar (56%), Passi (14%), Dhobi (6%), Kori (5%), Shilpkar (3%), Balmiki (4%), Khatik (2%), Dhanuk and Korwa (1%). The rest of the 57 castes account for a bare 8 per cent of the Scheduled Caste population.⁵

. Caste as a category has played an important role in the analysis of Indian politics. It has remained for long a very crucial source of collective identity and an important dimension of political mobilization, particularly so in the domain of electoral politics. In the post-colonial period, caste has not only assumed an active role but also become article for intense debates

As has been stated, the early socio-religious reform movements played a major role in inspiring the nationalist, struggle by awakening the people and reforming the society. However, it is equally true that the nationalist struggle in turn contributed to the emergence of social reform movements. Almost all of these movements emerged in the 20th century to work for the upliftment of the lower and backward castes.

A major cause for the rise of caste movements was the grievances nurtured by the educated among the low and backward castes. To improve their lot, the Bhakti and NeoVedantic movements worked by way of embracing the activities of Hindu reform associations. Schools for lower castes were started

by K. Ranga Rao in the 1890's. The Depressed Classes Mission Society of India was started as an independent set-up by the Prarthana Samaj to provide facilities for education to persons from lower caste. The Depressed Classes Mission Society of Madras began functioning in 1909. Caste movements also emerged to uplift the status of the deprived castes by helping them to assert a superior status by following the customs and manners of the traditionally superior groups. These movements, termed Sanskritisation movements, began among the Nadars and Pallars of Tamil Nadu (who claimed a kshatriya status), the Ezhavas and Nairs of Kerala and the Chamars of Jaunpur (who followed the ways of the Siva-Narayana sect).

Radical movements arose from the desire to challenge the domination of Brahmins and question the very basis of the traditional caste set-up.

The British rule, on one hand, encouraged movements for the upliftment of castes, both directly and indirectly, and on the other, strengthened caste feudalism by forming alliances with landlords and feudal classes and through non-interference in religion. Its divide and rule policy and the 1890 census which classified castes generated a great deal of confusion and caste uprisings. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 and the Special Marriage Amendment Act of 1872 helped in breaking caste rigidity.⁶

Like Phule, Thass tried to inverse the cultural heritage of India. He developed the concept of Aryan migration and subjection of Tamil Buddhists. He proposed that the word India is originally derived from the concept of a person who conquers five senses. For Thass it was none other than Lord Buddha. He argued that the world India derived from the identity of Buddha. He proposed a radical reinterpretation of Indian history and culture. For him Vedas are originally Buddhist Texts and all Gods are great human beings who served people. Brahman gradually absorbed the great Vedic literature as their own on account of their victory over the original inhabitants of India who happened to be Buddhists. Thass not only founded his own

Buddhist movement; he also identified Dalits with Buddhists by arguing that the Tamil Paraiyas were not only Buddhists, but descendents of the Buddha's own clan, the Sakyas. He offers radical reinterpretation of India culture by claiming that all the religious festivals observed by Hindus are originally Buddhist festivals. He proposes that Pongal is celebrated of the nirvana of Buddha, Mahasivaratri his renunciation; Deepavali the discovery of oil by Buddhist Monks. He thus proposed that the Brahmanic India was constructed on the foundation laid by Buddhist who is original inhabitants India.⁷ The ideas of Thass spread to entire South India and inspired the generation of educated Dalits.

By second half of nineteenth century Dalits of India were brought under the influence of self respect and emancipator ideas. Political mobilization is perceived as an effective means to achieve this objective. Political mobilization of Indians in fact has strong roots in caste associations and their politics. Caste based politics in fact were a paradigm of Indian politics in second half of 19th century. Not only lower castes but also upper castes established caste associations to foster communal unity within castes. Some of the examples as follows: Brahmin Sabha, Kshatriya Sabha, Jat sabha, Kayasth Sabha (1888), Jain Sabha (1888), Rajput Hitkarini Sabha, Punjabi Khatri Sabha (1888-89), Yadav Maha Sabha came in to existence.⁸ Following the mainstream Hindus, Dalit too started framing Caste Associations in different parts of Indian and in United Provinces. These associations institutionalized structure to initiate the process of reforming socio-economic and cultural conditions. Social reform initiatives such as women education, abolition of child marriage and dowry were initiated. Besides this advocacy of healthy life style and abstain from non-vegetarian diet and drinking of liquor was articulated. These associations also undertook political fight by sending petitions to government related to their problems. In the domain of culture, awareness was created to celebrate saints belong to Dalit background. Many groups started celebrating the anniversary of Ravidas and people of this group joyfully

participated in it. Some of the associations established by Dalits as follows: Ravidas Mahasabha, Passi Mahasabha, Dhobi Mahasabha, Jaiswar Mahasabha, Kori Mahasabha, kureel Mahasabha, Chamar Mahasabha, Dom Sudhar Shabha, Shilpkar Sabha, Balmiki Mahasabha etc Association established in different parts of Uttar Pradesh.⁹

Even though Arya Samaj worked for betterment of Dalits, but it was done within the framework of hegemony of upper castes. Consequently Dalit activists of Arya Samaj move away from Samaj and mobilized Dalits with more radical ideology.¹⁰ Swami Achhutanand Harihar left Arya Samaj and emerged as prominent leader north India who revolted against varna system. He went to Agra in 1912 and opened a school in Jatav locality. It was the time when Jatav demanded for Jatav Mahasabha, with the support of Achhutanand, *Jatav Mahasabha* came in to reality in 1917. He becomes successful for framing "*Akhil Bhartiya Achhut Mahasabha*, with the help of leaders such as Ratan Devidas Jatiya and Jagat Ram Jatiya. In 1918, he founded the *Adi Hindu Mahasabha at Delhi*. From the base of this *Adi Hindu Mahasabha*, He fought for the social political rights of Dalits and spread the *Adi Hindu movement in all parts of north India*.

In 1925 Swami Achhutanand came to Kanpur and started social reform from this place and published a monthly periodical "*Adi Hindu*" as well as opened the branches of *Adi Hindu Mahasabha* in different part of India. *Adi Hindu Mahasabha* conference held at Bombay in 1928, where he met Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and both decided to struggle for the Dalit emancipation.¹¹

Most of the ideas of the *Adi Hindu movement* were also widely shared by other Dalits groups across United Provinces. Caste associations such as *Adi Dharmis of Dehradun*, the *Kumaun Silpkar Sabha at Almora*, the *Jatav Mahasaha of Agra*, the *Dom Sudhar Sabha of Garhwal* and the *Chamar Mahasabha of Kanpur* were indeed influenced by the ideology of *Adi Hindu movement*. Further, evidence from CID weekly reports of these years (1926-30)

indicates a good deal of activities conducted by Adi Hindu Mahasabha.¹²

In the history of Dalit movements of Uttar Pradesh, the town Agra marks a valuable place. Here several dynamic activities for mobilization of Dalits and socio-cultural reforms took place. The leaders of Jatav Kshatriya movement consistently claimed kshatriya status to their castes and their effort reflect the Sanskritization process among Dalits.¹³ First Jatav conference was held in Agra on 28 October 1917, with the help of Pandit Sunder Lal Sagar, Khemkaran Bohare, Prabhudayal Vyash, Chhedilal kaushik, Baba Ramprasad, Babu Nandkishore and others. Most of them worked with Arya Samaj and wanted reform process within Hindu framework. Dr. Monakchand Jataveer formed the "Akhil Bhartiya Jatav Mahasabha. It was short lived due to internal conflicts but able to generate political dynamism among Dalits of Agra.¹⁴ Dr. Manakchand, a noted leader from Jatav caste proposed to adopt name which reflects identity. He proposed to adopt title Jatav Veer to reflect kshatriya identity to Jatav caste members. It was perceived as necessary condition for mobilization and fights for basic rights. In 1920, Dr. Manakchand Jatav Veer frames the "Bharatvarshiya Jatav Veer Yuva Parishad social reform and political mobilization of Jatav caste. This political activism indeed paid good dividends in the form of emergence of political leaders to represent the demands of Dalit castes. For instance, Dr. Manakchand won the election joined the first British assembly. At the same time, Karan Sing Kain appointed as first parliamentary secretary.

The sanskritisation tendencies among Jatavas reached higher proposition gradually. So much so that the Bharatvarshiya Jatav Yuva Parishad sent a petition to Lord Jatlant a minister of Indian issues in England, stating that in the government official records the name of Jatav was mentioned as Chamar. It was claimed by Jatavas that the work Chamar is humiliating to them. In response to this petition, Lord Jatlend ordered United Province government to solve this issue. Consequently on 8 November 1939, additional deputy secretary,

general department, Lucknow with letter no 78 (3) 3- 1938, declared that Chamar of Agra will officially written as Jatav. Further, after independence in SC/ST declaration they were mentioned as Jatav at the place of Chamars. Now they are mostly putting sing title after their names.¹⁵ This the political process of Dalit mobilization in India. They realized the fact that unity based upon the caste is precondition for gaining administrative and political concessions and rights. Thus, it was the caste which provided a basic unit of political mobilization of Dalits in modern India.

Socio-cultural reform, political and economic development gradually emerged as priority to various Dalit castes. It is interesting development to note that Dalits attempted to initiate reformist measures for emancipation on their own. To, eradicate untouchability and other form of discrimination, Kisan Phuguji Vansode established "Sanmarg Bodhak Nirashrit Samaj" in 1903 to pursue reform measures in Dalit society. On 18 October 1906, Sir Naryan Chandwar established "Bhartiya Dalit Varg Mission Society" to promote reforms in Dalit society. Main objective of this group was social mobilization of Dalits for political rights.¹⁶

Attempts for social reform and political mobilization of Dalit could be seen in several parts of India. The Madras Samaj Sudhar Sangh raised the voice against Brahmanical domination in 1892. It tried to assert the rights of Dalits and mobilized for civil and political rights. Two stream of Dalit mobilizations emerged in South India. First was liberal and second democratic liberal. Democratic liberalism emerged in the form of "Justice Party" in 1917, which supported British government and confronted with Indian National Congress. Its social basis was provided by educated elite groups came from Tamil, Reddy and Kamma from Telugu, Nayeris from Malayalam castes. At the same time, Dalits also played a crucial role in this party.

Gradually several political associations emerged to represent the demands of Dalits in different parts of India. In 20th century Punjab, Adi Dharma evolved as

Socio-religious movement to demand social respect and political rights to Dalits. The *Adi Dravid Mahajan Sabha* was established by M.C. Raja in 1924 at Madras. There were many revolutionary movements in Indian subcontinent such as as *Adi Andhra* movement of Andhra Pradesh, *Adi Hindu* movement of Uttar Pradesh, *Nama-Shudra* movement of Bengal, *Adi-Karnataka* movement of Karnataka etc. These movements tried to mobilize various Dalit castes to make it as a strong class to launch a strong fight for political rights.

A particular mention to the effort of Jag Jeevan Ram is necessary to capture the attempts of Dalits for political mobilization. He was instrumental in establishment of *All India Ravidas Sabha* in 1929 with the objective of education and unification of untouchables belongs to different caste. He organized different Dalit Castes under *Akhil Bhartiya Dalit Varg Sangh*, in 1930, which emerged as strong political party in election of 1937. The efforts of Ram show the emergence Dalits from castes to class as strong pressure groups in Indian politics.¹⁷

Non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra reflected in the form of political mobilization under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. On March 1924 Dr. Ambedkar called the meeting his Mahar and with continuous conversation he formed *Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha* in July 1924. This Sabha worked for education, cultural expansion, establishment of hostels and libraries represent the problems of Dalit to government. Dr. Ambedkar lightens the new areas for development of Dalits.¹⁸ Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 was the challenge for Dr. Ambedkar to authorizing right to use of water from public tank. Dalit group assembly on March 19-20, 1927 at district Kolaba, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar attended it and said in his speech that "If we adopt the theory of self help so we can grow more with availing self respect".¹⁹ It shows the aspiration of Dalit leaders for representation of Dalit by themselves in political process of India.

From 1920 to 1927, Dr. Ambedkar published *Mooknayak* and *Bahiskrit Bharat* weekly papers with

help of their little resources. This shows the interest of Dr. Ambedkar towards Dalit mobilization and annihilation of caste.²⁰ Dr. Ambedkar accelerated the activities to resist inequalities in domains of society and polity in India. He advocated for rights for Dalits to lead dignified life. The efforts of Ambedkar were aided by some associations. For instance before 5 days of Mahad movement, an association namely *Samata Sainik Dal* on 13 March 1927 was established with the help of retired Subedar Sawadkar from Bumbai. The main objective of this origination was to protest against social and political exploitation of Dalits. Later it was named as "*Akhil Bharatiya Samta-Sainik Dal*". It was the magic of this organization by which British government take interest in it.²¹

A conference was held on December 25, 1927 for "*Samta Yuga*" declaration. Dr. Ambedkar declared that untouchability eradication and inter caste eating interactions are not the solution for the problem of Dalits, there is a need in the transformation of Hindu religion. The date 25 September 1927 was celebrated as Red day in Indian history on this occasion Manusmriti was burnt by Dr. Ambedkar and asked for new text which based on the human values, respect as well as social justice.²² The movements of Dr. Ambedkar became mass movement and voice of the Dalits because he adopted independent working style. He did not join previous association working for Dalits and established his own association. He denied to accompany the others movement because they depend upon mercy and donation. He believed that we should ask for social equality their rights and appealed for self respect and honor in humanitarian form. In this reference he acetylated the Dalit movement with new achievement. He talked about right, based upon justice and human values.

After 1920 attempts are being made to organize Dalits at national level by the way of forming political parties. In 1935 Dalit leaders realized the need of political parties for their empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour party in 1936. This organization was related with peasants,

labour's and Dalit castes but it was closed in 1942 due to several reasons.²³ Gail, omvedt analyses the Non-Brahmin and Dalit movement in historical materialistic views. According her independent labour party take it frames from British "Labour Party" so people avoided this party due colonial construction. But it is important action of Dr. Ambedkar to produce a Labour Party for labours and peasants.²⁴

Dalit leader of Bihar were strongly influenced by Indian National Congress. When Jag Jeevan Ram joined the movement, Ambedkar struggled more for social political rights. In the fourth decade of 20th century there was a wave of religious conversion. Jagjeevan Ram established *Dalit Sudhar Sabha* and *Ravidas Sabha* in 1930. In response to Poona Pact of 1932, Jag Jeevan Ram built the *Asprashyata Virodhi Sangh* to fight against caste based discrimination in Indian society. He was not satisfied with M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, he realized the need of another organization to organize the Dalit leader. This led to establishment of *Akhil Bharatiya Dalit Varg Sangh*. This organization get donation from Dalit intellectuals for promotion of political mobilisation of Dalits to achieve their rights.²⁵ In this process political Dalit movement was broadly dominated by Ambedkar who led mainly Dalits of Maharashtra and north Indian Dalits organized by Jagjeevan Ram.²⁶

Dr. Ambedkar tired heard to cure the problems of Dalits at national level by the way of making them as a political force. He established *Schedule Caste Federation* in 1942 at Nagpur. In 1944 a big conference was held at Kanpur in which Dr. B.R. Ambedkar involved. And the people engaged to "*Adi Hindu movement*" participated in that meeting. Tilak chandra Kureel appointed as the president of branches in Utter Pradesh. Several leaders actively involved in this association. Those as follows: Chandhori Shyam Lal Baretha, Harilal Jaiswar, nand Lal Viyagi, Babu Lal Vaishya, Kalayan Chand Balmike (All from Allahabad), Gaya Prasad Prashant (from Lucknow), Bhagat Naipal Dal, Ram Avtar Pasi (Jaunpur), Dr. Dharma Prakash, B.P. Maurya, Sangh

Priya Gautam, Babu Mangal Singh (All from bareilly), Dr. Manik Chandra (Agra), Kannauji Lal (Farukhabad) etc. These leaders worked for socio-cultural reform and political representation for civil rights. Due the effort of these leaders several Dalit castes established caste associations. Some of them as follows: Chamar Maha Sabha (Kanpur), Dhanuk Maha Sabha, Dusadh Maha Sabha, Tantuyai Maha Sabha, Pasi Maha Sabha (Lucknow, Allahabad and in other parts of U.P.), Akhil Bhartiya Khatik Maha Sabha (Kanpur Allahabad, Varanasi, Lucknow and in other areas of U.P.), Dhobi Kalyan Samiti (Lucknow and in other big cities), Jaiswar Maha Sabha, Valmiki Maha Sabha, Ravi Das Maha Sabha etc. These caste associations tried to act as guide to caste members in political mobilization and social reform.²⁷

The Scheduled Caste Federation which was an umbrella association for Dalit castes in United Province. In 1946 federation asserted the movement with following issues:

1. Residential Buildings and colonies for Dalit on government expenditure.
2. Asked for representation according to Poona pact in new constitution for Dalits.
3. Abolition of criminal tribe act of 1871. In this act around 3000 people get imprisonment.²⁸

In the transfer of power, 1942-47 have taken as important period where a new chapter was going to start in Dalits future. Against the identify of Adi Hindu Jatav started their assertion with in this caste system.

CONCLUSION

This article tired to show the complexity of Dalti politics in colonial India. Most of the mainstream studies on Modern India project the activities of Indian National Congress, Muslim League and Communist Party of India as center of political organization. At the same time most of the studies on Dalit history concentrate on famous leaders such

as Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar. But this chapter argues that colonial modernity infused dynamism in the socio-economic structure of Dalit castes by the way of providing employment in urban sphere. Having liberated from traditional exploitation of upper caste at one level and exposed to western ideas at another level Dalits organized and mobilized politically for civil rights. The political mobility of Dalits took place at three stages. Firstly Dalits were organized by reformist associations established by upper caste reforms such as Brahman Samaj and Arya Samaj. Secondly, various Dalit castes established caste associations to articulate their demands with government at one level and social equality at another level. Finally Dalit leaders converted the grass root level awareness to national level by establishing national level political associations. This chapter attempts to prove that Dalits are extremely consciousness of political rights and established several social reform and political associations for achieving better life. Next chapter tries to document the paradigm of socio-political activism of Dalits in different parts of India by focusing on various associations established by Dalits.

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