



Dalit movements in post-independent India: A case study of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) (studying emergence, ideology and strategies of mobilization)

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Abstract

During the post Ambedkar period, the 'Dalit Movement' that has emerged in the northern part of India, with an exception to Dalit Panther, has been reformist in nature. Although it has mobilized the people on the caste lines, it has made no attempt to annihilate caste. The idea of the transformation of society has disappeared from the vision and they have been caught up in the popular power fray of Indian politics. It seems that they have recourse towards the liberal path of "affirmative" rather than "transformation" or "breaking the structures of dominance".

In this paper, we will be looking into 'BSP as Dalit Movement in post-Independence', this paper attempts to examine to what extent the Bahujan Samaj Party endorses the idea of a Dalit movement. In that course this paper also analyzes the emergence, ideology, mobilization strategies and the alliance politics of Bahujan Samaj Party and how the party has gone through its various phases and what is the situation now. We will look for some critical measures that will lead to the downfall of the BSP.

Keywords: Dalit movement, dalit panther, bahujan, affirmative, transformative, reformative, ideology, mobilization

Introduction

The terms "Dalit" and "Movements" are combined to form the word "Dalit Movement," which refers to all members of various castes and sub-castes who were historically targeted for personal discrimination on the basis of their perceived untouchability and labeled as "untouchables" "downtrodden", "outside classes", "depressed classes" or members of Scheduled Castes. "The organizational or institutional efforts made by Dalit leaders for the liberation of the downtrodden masses could be termed as Dalit movement. It is a movement of protest against untouchability, casteism and superstitions. It aims at the upliftment of the Dalits to the level of non-Dalits". It implies the adoption of a new social structure centered on social justice, equality, and the social, economic, cultural, and political advancement of Dalits. It is an effort to restore one's dignity and human standing in the community.

The significant part of the Dalit Movement and more specifically the case of BSP is that the nature of Dalit Movement was changed in the 1980s. It was mainly political. Political power is the core of Dalit Movement. The changing nature of this movement was anti caste and anti-Hindu religion. So this movement was known as Socio-political movement. This movement was started under the leadership of Kanshi Ram, later on Mayawati became the leader of this movement.

Here in this paper the larger quest is to look into the concerns that how far Dalit Movements in India are successful, more specifically the BSP. To deal this matter we will look what does Dalit Movement mean, how it is happening post-independence, how this movements keeps changing its nature as per time and to dwell more into this changing nature we will study BSP as case study that how it has emerged and how BSP has tried to come up with their organizational and ideological strategies that in any case have resulted into the more development of BSP.

Dalit movements after independence

Dr. Ambedkar's creation of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF) in 1942 was a changing point in the history of Dalit Consciousness and mobilization in the nation, notwithstanding its lackluster results and defeat in the 1946 and 1951 elections. These results convinced Ambedkar that a separate political organization with a more comprehensive election campaign was required. After Ambedkar which is usually thought to be post-independence, two major movements had emerged which shaped the consciousness of Dalit in Uttar Pradesh and they were the Dalit Panthers and Republican Party of India (RPI).

Republican Party of India (RPI) came into existence in the backdrop of failure of AISCF and UPSCF and the major intention of this party was to become the broad based party. Its ideology can be understood from the manifesto that it proposed in the election of 1962. This basically aims at the upliftment of those downtrodden people through various policy and symbolic initiatives.

As far as Dalit Panther was concerned, it was radical but was limited to western part of the nation, especially Maharashtra. Its impact was not as profound in UP as it was in other parts, partly also due to the increased role of congress during that period. Congress at that point pitted Dalit against middle class and rich peasantry which was challenging its authority as the major exploiter of Dalit.

After the failure of RPI and Dalit Panther some other Dalit Social Movements were emerging parallelly which is more of a voice against the oppressor by the oppressed. Some of these organizations are BAMCEF and DSSSS.

Kanshi Ram a Dalit from Punjab, a class A government employee and principal architect of Bahujan Samaj Party, sensed this rising discontent of middle class OBC government employees and started to mobilize the middle class Dalit government employees under an organization called BAMCEF (backward and minorities employee

federation of India). The major intention of this organization was to protect Dalit employees from exploitation at their workplace; however Kanshi Ram also intended to raise consciousness and responsibility among Dalit middle class regarding the debt that they owe to their Dalit society.

So far as the DSSSS is concerned DS4 as mentioned earlier functioned as a quasi-party in the form of morchas which organized several events and carried forward Ambedkar's vision throughout the nation. For instance, Kanshi Ram organized a cycle yatra of 3,000 km., passing by 35 important centers in 40 days and mobilizing the people, educating them about their oppression and exploitation. Under DS4 several campaigns were organized such as people parliament making people aware about the functioning of parliament, and the need of their people in the houses who could champion their cause. Beside that there used to be jagrans in which prominent Dalit leaders addressed the Dalit masses.

Later on when these ways of mobilization became popular Kanshi Ram was able to build a strong base in rural areas which resulted into the formation of its political party named as Bahujan Samaj Party which we will discuss in more detail.

Bahujan samaj party

Bahujan Samaj Party origins may be traced to the Backward and Minority Central Government Employees association (BAMCEF), a government employee's association that was founded in Punjab in 1978 and then expanded to Uttar Pradesh by Kanshi Ram. The establishment of Dalit Shoshit Sangharsh Samaj Samiti, often known as the DS4, in 1981 was the most significant move made during the BSP's foundation. In actuality, the DS4 took up political concerns and acted as the BSP's organizational foundation. It accomplished this in two key ways. First, via intellectual campaigns; second, by planning national gatherings, rallies (especially bicycle rallies), and social action initiatives. Although its first goals were to "educate, organize, and agitate" the oppressed groups, its second goal was to bring back equality and self-respect for the castes that were oppressed in society. Just prior to the BSP's creation, in 1983 and 1984, the DS4 was quite active in its operations. On April 14, 1984, Kanshi Ram launched the BSP after laying the foundation and the stage. When he convinced Mayawati to join the party in Uttar Pradesh, he gained a valuable ally. The BSP saw great benefit from Mayawati's entry into the state of Uttar Pradesh, since it allowed the party to appoint a reliable leader. Traditionally, Dalits in northern India had supported the Congress party, but it was quickly discovered that the BSP was gaining ground on the Congress voter base. Even though it lost every seat in the state it ran for in the General elections held in December 1984 and the assembly elections held in March 1985, it managed to garner millions of votes. After a few months, it was able to repeat its performance in Punjab the same year. It had a negative impact on Punjab's Akali Dal. Overall, the BSP demonstrated in the elections its rising appeal among the social categories that had previously supported the Congress. With this election, Kanshi Ram rose to national prominence and the Bahujan Samaj Party became a significant political force. In the subsequent General elections of 1989, the party performed admirably, winning three seats with 2.4% of all-India votes from the 235 Lok

Sabha seats it ran. In terms of votes cast, the BSP's outstanding performance allowed them to move up to the sixth position among all Indian parties. In 1997, it succeeded in having the Election Commission recognize it as a National Party as it carried on winning elections. The biggest gainer occurred in Uttar Pradesh. From 13 in 1989 to 66 in 1993, its representation in the state assembly continued to grow. It obtained 66 seats in the 1996 elections; however, its highest result came in the 2002 elections, when it won 97 seats. Considering that the BSP did poorly in the last elections, this performance was impressive.

Nature of bahujan samaj party

1. Bahujan Samaj Party organization is itself the out product of two major changes that took place in Uttar Pradesh.
 - a. Democratization of politics and society. Its development took place during the time when the hegemony of Congress Party came to an end, Congress system was de-institutionalised and the economic condition of Dalit started to improve as they benefited from the redistributive programs of Congress party (2nd phase of Green Revolution) and moreover the literacy rate also started to improve from 4% to 8%.
 - b. Due to affirmative action- policies of the state. The leaders, who established the Bahujan Samaj party, largely reaped the benefit of the reservation policies of the state. Kanshi Ram and Mayawati are the primary examples of it. During the legislative election of 1989 where 13 candidates of BSP won - 5 were intermediate passes, 6 BA and 1 LLB. In 1993 out of 66, 14 were intermediate, 16 BA, 7 MA, 15 LLB, 1 Ph.D.
2. It is a trade unionist party. Its emergence took place from BAMCEF which was a version of a trade union of Dalit middle class. Till today it works as a shadow organization of BSP. Bahujan Samaj party heavily draws man, money and mind from this organization. BAMCEF till today plays a very crucial role in managing the entire election campaign and strategy for BSP. Its membership till 1990 extended to two lakhs among whom fifteen thousand were scientists, three thousands MBBS graduates and seventy thousand graduates.
3. It is a statist party. The Bahujan Samaj party does not believe in revolution from below; rather its sole purpose lies in the capture of state power and making social engineering from above. It doesn't intend to transform the society or make any change in the political economic structures of it. Rather it believes that all the evil lies in misrecognition which needs to be resurrected through cultural assertion and acquiring power. It strongly believes in providing the sense of identity, self-respect and dignity as its primary task. Like other state or national parties it remains busy in making caste equations for electoral benefits as a result it had remained caught up in the popular power fray of Indian politics. Though it claims its ideology, close to Ambedkar it does not talk about annihilating cast, because it feeds on it.

Ideology of Bahujan Samaj Party

As far as ideology of Bahujan Samaj party is concerned it withholds the vision of alternative ideology of social justice. It holds that the Dalits have not benefited from the Nehruvian vision of social justice that the congress promised and was incorporated in the constitution. All the benefits have been appropriated by the upper caste that remained positioned at the upper echelons of politics, administration and society. Therefore, the party believes that social justice is only possible when Dalit Bahujan state is established i.e. when political power is captured. So the alternative idea of social justice of BSP which it developed in three phases with the personal experience of Kanshi Ram means "retributive" in character i.e. Capturing of state power and social engineering from above which means implementing welfare and development programmes using power and resources of state rather than social transformation or restructuring the political economy which generates distributive injustice.

Bahujan Samaj Party also condemns the congress and Mahatma Gandhi as "manuwadi" for perpetuating brahmanical dominance. Brahmanism according to Kanshi Ram is conservative and status-quoist. It exists because of dominance over five things: Politics; Custom and tradition; Religion and culture; Economic policy; Officialdom.

Whenever these things are taken away its dominance will come to an end. It also criticizes Dalit leaders who work for these parties as 'chamchas' for betraying their community and not paying any heed for development of their brethren. Moreover drawing on the line of Phule, Kanshi Ram also traces independent history of Dalits where Dalits were the rulers and real inhabitants of this land. This party believes in Dalit Bahujan unity. It believes that Dalit Bahujan constitute 85% of population and upper caste constitute only 15% so once Dalit Bahujan dominance is established no one can overthrow them. It is illustrated from its slogan- "Brahmin, Baniya, Thakur chhor baki sab hai ds4". "Vote hamara raj tumhara nahi chalega nahi chalega".

Bahujan Samaj Party strongly emphasizes on providing the sense of identity, self-respect and dignity as the primary task and economic betterment as secondary i.e. when the party will come to power. Thus it does not have any clear cut idea regarding social and economic changes. It holds that the prevailing economic condition of Dalit is largely due to the Manuwadi caste system and when it comes to power things will change. However the question remains that when Dalit based party has itself to make alliances with other castes specially Brahmin to remain in power then how such transformation will take place? BSP tried to empower Dalits through two strategies; it aimed to transform the symbolic landscape of UP for instance creating parks, renaming hospitals and institutions in the name of Dalit heroes. Since reservation in India has become a tool of mobilization and garnishing vote banks, BSP is also not bereft of it. Amidst the sphere of political uncertainty in the state, BSP had demanded extension of reservation from 23 to 26% for SC/ST and 60% for OBCs. This step of BSP is justified largely on the ground to resolve the growing discontent of Dalit against its party. Another reason for BSP raising this demand is to accommodate the anger of Dalit employee association who have questioned the credentials of it about its commitment towards Dalit (Kumar 2013:126). Which in return again signifies affirmation politics which opens the door for misrecognition? Despite this party claims to uphold

Ambedkarism as its ideology it does not respond to annihilate caste rather it engages in celebration of it, which again in return questions the entire vision of identity politics, whether there is any element of liberalization in it or just an ideology petty forgery.

Redistribution Politics of Bahujan Samaj Party

When the BSP government for the first time came into power it implemented a large number of redistributive policies but the prominent among them was Ambedkar village programme. AVP was initiated for the first time in 1993 by Mulayam Singh government when SP and BSP formed the coalition. However due to rising contradiction within the Bahujan community i.e. between Dalits and Yadavas on the one hand and between Mayawati and Mulayam on the other, the governments fell down and the programme was stopped. And most importantly, BSP entered into a post Bahujan phase where now the entire attention of BSP shifted toward Dalit, where Dalit no longer withheld plurality rather than exclusive singularity. It was re-initiated during 1995 when Bahan Kumari Mayawati became the Chief Minister of UP. In the era of redistribution, her entire attention was on implementation of AVP. Under this scheme special village with more than 50% Dalit population were selected which was latter on reduced to 20-30% and several redistributive schemes were implemented, for example Construction of roads, irrigation, pond, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana, etc. however if one goes for close scrutiny of these programmes, result were astonishing. According to Sudha Pai, who took up the case study of AVP in five villages of Meerut district which is in western part of Uttar Pradesh, it came to the forefront that all the benefits of the programmes were appropriated by Jatavas. Jatavas in these regions were dominant among SCs and were prosperous during the time of Britishers due to their policies. They successfully formed the ties with upper caste or middle caste and excluded the other caste and sub caste within SCs. Thus, the most backward caste in these areas remained bereft of any advantages which arises deep sense of antagonism within Dalits i.e. Jatavas v/s MBCs and MBCs v/s OBCs who reaped all the benefits of reservation. These re-distributional policies led to the emergence of a new kind of dominance where Jats, Gujjars, Rajputs were making alliances with Jatavas and Pasis and exploiting Valmikis and MBCs. This has led to violence in several regions, one of the prominent violence that gained wider public attention was the Shergani incident of Meerut where police brutality went to great extent against Dalits who were protesting against upper caste and OBCs conspiracy to demolish Ambedkar statue, but yet Mayawati remained silent on this issue defending Mulayam government. It was only when she felt the threat of losing her votes in Hastinapur by poll election she reacted against the government. Many of the MBCs allege that political preference of Mayawati remains attached with Jatavas. Since they dominate the party and form the largest bloc vote for BSP (86% votes) of Jatavas goes to BSP (Pai 2002:140). Thus in this condition a section of Dalit and MBCs has become "political orphan", leading one to argue that though BSP may claim to be a single party for Dalit its idea of Dalit which once meant exploited class has become restricted to Jatavas only. As far as the case of Bahujan especially Yadavas are concerned it remained no more attached with BSP since it found its shelter in Mulayam

Singh SP. Kurmis who were once part of BSP due to antagonism with Yadavas, left BSP as Mayawati became the CM of UP.

As far as re-distributional policies of BSP are concerned it distributed 52,379 acres of land to 81,500 Dalit. The BSP government claims to have given possession of land to one lakh fifty eight thousand Dalits while twenty thousand Dalits were given fifteen thousand acres of land. Beside that schools were made for boys and girls along with hostels under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, free scholarships of 20-40 rupees were given to students of class 10th and 12th, widow pension schemes and many other schemes were initiated. But these all seem to be tangible economic benefits as the real issue of restructuring of the political economy was never taken into consideration. Moreover, the Bahujan Samaj party has also enthusiastically supported Dalit capitalism and other corporate houses in her state during its government from 2007-13.

Strategies of Mobilization

The BSP's approach to mobilization in Uttar Pradesh has been extremely distinctive. The Bahujan Samaj Party isolated itself from "manuwadi" parties from 1985 to 1989. Using caste ideology as a means of overthrowing the current system, it was a belligerent phase of vertical mobilization of the poor and underprivileged. Congress and Gandhi were criticized, and the failures of the Congress and the Hindutva rule were emphasized. According to Pai this was a method to create alternative space for itself which it did in 1993 when it was able to assert itself against Hindutva forces by forging an alliance with Samajwadi party and to broaden its social base. Later on it switched to horizontal mobilization which continues till today in the era of post Bahujan phase when she willingly distributes tickets to Brahmins, Rajputs and other high caste Hindus. She organizes "Brahmin Maha Rally" and accepts swords from Brahmin and portrays herself as Parshuram (savior from tyrant Rajputs kings). As far as Mayawati politics of space is concerned Bahujan Samaj Party justifies it on the grounds of claiming public space to assert its identities.

However, this would again mean reification of identity, valorising monologism supposing that misrecognized people should create identity of their own without getting recognised from others, which again in return causes misrecognition because social subordination isn't uprooted and it remains intact. So in order to overcome that one should aim for politics aimed to establish a mis-organized party as a full member of society i.e. capable of participating with others. Since misrecognition is not caused due to free floating cultural representation but through institutionalized patterns, until and unless that pattern isn't disturbed misrecognition will perpetuate. Bahujan Samaj party does not seem to overthrow that institutional pattern, rather it appears to be not possible to become a part of that institution as a result one form of dominance is replaced by another in Uttar Pradesh. It does not hesitate in making alliance with those parties who once it remained sharply critical and called it as "manuwadi" parties for instance Congress, BJP. Though scholars like Vivek Kumar and others justify it on the ground of strategic coalition. However it resembles the opportunism and lust for the power that the party poses. Though in recent years it had refrained from making a coalition government but had not illustrated unwillingness in making caste alliances in the

state and supporting "manuwadi" parties in center. Even Mayawati the supremo of BSP seems to be following the same path of dominant Brahmins. The ideology and its practice resemble the parochial interest served by this party.

Conclusion

Thus after discussing variously it is quite evident that the Bahujan Samaj Party is a movement. Since it not only lacks the language of 'transformation' but remains deeply engaged in the politics of Affirmation. It is a movement or a party aiming transformation rather it was a part of the system which originated as an outburst for not being a participant in the system. Today, it is well accommodated within the system and does not resemble any difference with mainstream political parties which also thrive on the same measure of identity politics which BSP practices.

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