



Dalit Politics In India: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: Post-political discourse in India has been significantly affected by Dalit politics. To avoid the dispersed social power & disciplinary consequences of civil society, they have reestablished their dialectical mode of operation, albeit with a selective focus on identity politics. Dalit politics must be viewed through a prism that can be termed "politics of aspirations." In different historical periods, the shifting voting patterns of Dalits were a reflection of their changing and evolving goals. These goals have surpassed the old understanding of "identification politics" – in which oppressor caste intellectuals forcefully categorize Dalits. Dalit politics, which pertains to groups formerly considered as Untouchables, is most evident in the growing influence of Dalit political parties in populous North India & in overall Indian politics. In this research paper history and present of Indian Dalit politics will be discussed.

Keywords: India, Indian Politics, Culture, Dalit Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Political awareness and powerful Dalit movements in Uttar Pradesh in the 1980s a 1990s caused lower-caste parties to take over the political landscape & identity politics in the Hindi heartland, electoral and mass politics at the same time. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other national parties and the Indian National Congress, which were historically considered Manuwadi (upper-caste) parties, declined, While a Bahujan Samaj Party was able to take state power as a party dedicated to promoting social justice, individual dignity, and self-respect. In contrast, the decade of the 2000s saw the demise of the BSP and the resurgence and consolidation of the BJP. Despite receiving approximately 20% of the vote in each election, the BSP, The party that gained the most votes in the 2007 legislative elections, won single seats with in 2014 Lok Sabha election, a total of 19 seats inside the 2017 legislative elections, and Ten Lok Sabha seats will be up for grabs in the 2019 elections. While there have been BSP defections since 2014, in January 2020, a large number of party workers in eastern Uttar Pradesh joined the Samajwadi Party. (SP). Some have claimed that the BSP has disintegrated as a result of these events, and that Dalit voters no longer support Mayawati.

However, such analyses only consider the electoral success of a major Dalit party. In the twenty-first century, It was a new era for the Dalit struggle in the country and took on a more

nuanced nature. The organisation is currently undergoing internal disintegration, as opposed to the 1990s, The result has been an increase in ambiguity and doubt about ideology and action. There were two important events that led to this outcome. First, as a result of globalization & cultural modernization, It has become more difficult for Dalits to get ahead because of the fall of identity politics as well as the shift from a desire for justice to aspiration. Ambedkarite and pro-BSP Dalits have formed an ideological division with Hindutvawadi and pro-BJP Dalits over the resurrection of the BJP and its promises of economic growth and cultural inclusion inside the saffron fold. The political behaviour of the Dalit movement in UP demonstrates their lack of cohesion. In the 2014 national elections, they supported the BJP, but in recent years they have become angry, hostile, and strongly against the BJP.

Dalits account for more than sixteen percent of our population. Due to constitutionally mandated affirmative action policies, the community's struggle for dignity and recognition has become more robust and organized over the past seven decades. Dalits have made a positive impact on the nation's politics by receiving special protection in state-sponsored employment and education.

The institutions of power, authority, and governance have become relatively subaltern as a result of the foresight and vision of the framers of our Constitution, most notably B.R. Ambedkar, who chaired the drafting committee. He articulated the path to a dignified existence for oppressed and marginalised individuals. However, the struggle continues because the caste problem is more structural than it appears on the surface. The community as a whole is still troubled by violence and the way people are left out.

Representation in key positions of decision-making is still a work in progress. Social capital for Dalits is still a distant possibility, but substantial political capital has contributed to the advancement of the community's interests. So, to understand the direction of the movement, it is important to know how Dalits have expressed themselves politically over time.

Rise of Dalit Political Party

Founded in 2015 as the Bhim Army in the village of Gharkoli in western Uttar Pradesh to combat the rise of caste-based violence in India, the organisation gained popularity between the younger generations of Dalits. Aazad hopes that by transforming the movement into a political party, He would be able to build a political coalition with all of the underprivileged castes. It remains to be seen whether the party can address the country's current Dalit political crisis. The movement's study reveals a conflict. Dalit parties are seeing their support dwindle in elections as a growing number of Dalits choose to join non-Dalit parties, endangering the unity and strength of the movement. When it came to the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the BSP had a majority, but it did not win a single seat. However, in 2017 and 2019,

the BSP won 19 seats in the assembly elections, then 10 seats inside the 2019 Lok Sabha election. Even though Mayawati remains a tall Dalit leader, her party is in disarray.

Conversely, On the ground, the Dalit movement continues to impose itself. As new Dalit leaders take the helm of organisations and movements, such as Azad's ASP, Jignesh Mevani's Una Ayuchar Ladat Samiti in Gujarat, and Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi in Maharashtra, the earlier ideology & mobilization methods employed through older Dalit leaders no longer appear to be effective. They represent a new, aggressive Dalit politics and are young, educated, and popular with the younger generation. It is reflected in their prompt reply to atrocities against Dalits and the immense support they receive. Dalits are looking for a more advanced political party. In the 1990s, they got a certain amount of political power, identity, and self-respect.

Decline & regeneration

The Dalit movement at present confronted with both a decline and a regeneration dilemma. Two significant events are responsible for this circumstance:

- i. Discrimination against the Dalit people has been caused by identity politics as well as a change from social justice-seeking to aspiration brought about by globalisation and cultural modernisation.
- ii. Economic growth and cultural integration are on the agenda for the BSP's resurgence under new leadership. It has caused a rift between Ambedkarite and Hindutvawadi Dalits, who are both pro-BSP.

The most vital obstacle for Azad and his recently formed party is the internal fragmentation of the Dalit community brought about by the rapid & significant changes of the 2000s.

Internal fragmentation and decline

The 1990s saw the gradual creation of a tiny but powerful, youthful, educated, & politically engaged Dalit middle class. This new class reached "critical mass" as a result of the globalization of Indian politics. The Dalit movement had evolved over the last two decades in unison with this shift to a market-based economy.

In contrast to the BSP, growing middle-class Dalit intellectuals is engaged with a range of other issues that are not related to sociopolitical emancipation. They stress the importance of economic empowerment through a variety of new ways. This shows that Dalits from the middle class are becoming more politically active.

A Dalit Agenda, which had been proposed just at Bhopal Conference on January 2002, is the best example of their thinking. Discrimination and state welfare programmes kept Dalits without land and assets, underneath the poverty line, without the need for a stake inside the economy's capital and unable to enhance their socioeconomic and economic standing, according to the authors of the Dalit Agenda.

Many people have been left out of the high-paying jobs in government, business professions, business media, industry arts, and the private sector because only a small group of people have been able to further their education. However, these movements have little in ordinary with the rural communities that require safety from atrocities & assistance in bettering their material conditions. Also desiring upward mobility, the poorer Dalit groups have distanced themselves from traditional parties. People are disappointed that the BSP didn't come up with a socioeconomic plan to fix the specific problems of poverty that Dalit's face.

Despite the BSP's overwhelming victory in the legislative elections of 2007, the Dalits had hoped that the party's success would also lead to a better life for them. People thought that Mayawati's change from a Dalit-focused policy to a Sarvajan policy mostly helped the Jatavs & the upper castes, who had helped her get into power in 2007.

It has thus become widely perceived as just a Jatav-only party. Additionally, marginalised communities undergoing cultural modernization and influenced by the Hindutva ideology are keen to be part of a unified, Hindu identity. It has taken a lot of time for BJP-RSS officials to connect these groups to Hindutva in different ways at the grassroots level. This is a case of "politically induced cultural transformation," as Paul Brass put it in another context, which is when political elites chose some components of a group's culture, give them new significance and meaning, then use them as symbols to motivate the group as a whole.

New Dalit Force

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, there has been an increase in violence against Dalits, and the government's inability to take corrective action. B.R. Ambedkar's 150th birthday was commemorated by the BJP government, which endeavoured to honour him by erecting memorials, appointing a Dalit politician as president, and marking his 150th birthday.

Numerous Dalits believe that the BJP made promises that garnered their support but that the party's actions since assuming power have been blatantly anti-Dalit. Aazad has exploited the growing disappointment with the BSP & BJP to form the Bhim Army and then the ASP.

Aazad, a son of a primary-school teacher from western Uttar Pradesh, with Vinay Ratan Singh, who created the Ambedkar-named Bhim Army, have more than 20,000 followers in the Saharanpur district. They claim that their goal is to "preserve or restore Dalit dignity

through confrontation-based direct action." UP's Dalit community has embraced the Bhim Army since its inception. Bhim Army has aimed to assuage community fears and insecurity by giving people with such a sense of protection against atrocities, while the BSP has focused on electoral politics.

In April 2017, the Thakurs' demonstration in Saharanpur against violent atrocities against Dalits was one of the most significant actions. On May 21, at least fifty thousand Dalits gathered at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi to demonstrate their solidarity. Other problems happened when Azad put up a sign in his village that said "The Great Chamar." Thakurs took action when a Dalit groom was taken off his horse, and in February 2020, people protested against the destruction of a temple devoted to Sant Ravidas in Tughlaqabad, Delhi. All of these actions got a lot of support.

As a precaution, the government of Uttar Pradesh arrested Azad in June 17, 2017. His popularity skyrocketed when, after already being granted bail on November 2017, he remained held under National Security Act. until September 2018.

On the heels of Rohith Vemula's suicide, the Bhim Army also spoke out about the Una incident, in which seven Dalits were beaten by cow vigilantes in Gujarat in July 2016, and the violence against Dalits in Bhima-Koregaon on January 1, 2018. At the Elgaar Parishad rally at Bhima Koregaon, activists including Jignesh Mevani, Vinay Ratan Singh, and Prakash Ambedkar took part. March 2018 protests in response to a government hesitation and delaying action in response to a Supreme Court's order on March 20 that called for revisions to a SC/ST Act 1989 were the most important.

Anger and disillusionment against the BJP are growing among Dalits across India, as evidenced by the scale of the recent demonstration, which took place across several states and resulted in eleven fatalities, numerous injuries, damage to public property, social media use, as well as obvious rage just on streets. These assaults sparked movements in India in favour of leaders like Azad as well as the emergence of a new Dalit awareness. He has kept the Dalit & non-Dalit parties apart from the Bhim Army & ASP.

He first made an effort to become more involved with the BSP, but Mayawati's criticism of him as a competition drove him away. He added that the EWS reserve, Article 370, and the CAA had all received support from the BSP in the legislature, essentially "murdering" the constitution and undermining the Bahujan cause. Moreover, he added, the Congress party rejected Ambedkar and did nothing to help Dalits during its 60-year rule, therefore his organisation will neither support or join it in the 2019 presidential elections.

Traditional Dalit parties need not meet the demands of the Dalits in the same way as these new organisations. There had been no All India Backward (SC, ST and OBC) or Minority Communities Employees Union until the BSP came into existence. The Bhim Army, in contrast hand, will remain a part of Azad's organisation. The Bhim Army maintains around 350 free schools for Bahujan youngsters in Saharanpur, Meerut, Shamli, & Muzaffarnagar because Aazad thinks that universalizing education and healthcare may assist Dalits grow. For unite Dalit Bahujan rallies across the country, he said the ASP would embark on the a parivartan yatra (journey).

An important feature in Aazad's leadership, which previous Dalit parties lack, is that it connects Dalit concerns and aspirations with national issues.

As a result, he has been a staunch supporter of large public protests and preservation of a state's secular structure. Just at Jama Masjid in Delhi, Aazad read aloud the preamble to a constitution, as well as expressing support for the Shaheen Bagh and other protests. "Constitutional morality," "liberty, equality, and fraternity," and "nation-building" are among the ideals he has pledged to maintain for his party. While the BJP sought to create a wedge between Dalits and Muslims, Azad advocated for a pluralistic society and had a more comprehensive perspective on citizenship.

Possibilities & limitations of new Dalit movement

The Azad-led ASP provides hope for a fresh Dalit movement across northern India for many Dalits and activists. He's been compared with Kanshi Ram, a man whose purpose is believed to be incomplete. Opportunity exists for the Ambedkarite-inspired Socialist Progressive Party (ASP), which is led by a charismatic leader and enjoys widespread support throughout western Uttar Pradesh. He also represents the Dalit politics of the 2000s, so his ASP is different from earlier Dalit parties and groups. There has been a major transformation in the social, political, or economic context wherein Dalit politics formerly operated. The Dalit group is searching for a fresh vision of ideas and activities to meet its newly created dreams and aspirations as a consequence of these socioeconomic and cultural distinctions.

Azad is seen as a new leader of the Dalit movement and a replacement for Mayawati, who has faded in popularity.

Is it possible to advance the Dalit movement in the current political climate, despite Azad's apparent ambition, ability, and support? A right-wing Hindu majoritarian party backed by an upper-caste, conservative society & centralized, authoritarian government poses a threat to all disadvantaged groups, including Dalits. Any social movement that calls for more equality & diversity in the face of the current political order will be severely punished.

Is the ASP capable of protecting Dalits, granting their wishes, and addressing national issues such as inclusive citizenship in this situation? As a result, the new Dalit movement faces a Herculean task that will necessitate significant effort & struggle. It remains to be seen whether Azad and his ASP can bring all Dalit subgroups together and achieve these goals.

CONCLUSION

A paradox can be seen by looking at the Dalit movement in the nation. On the one hand, the coherence and strength of the Dalit movement are being weakened as Dalit voters abandon Dalit parties and favour non-Dalit parties. Even in the face of recent atrocities, the vehement response by Dalit leaders like Chandrasekhar Azad or Ravan, this same Una Dalit Aytachar Ladat Samiti led by Jignesh Mevani in Gujarat, and the Vanchit Bahujan Aaghadi led by Prak show that Dalit assertion is still very strong in the state of Uttar Pradesh.. In rural areas wherein older Dalit parties are now being ousted by non-Dalit parties, the both younger, better educated generation as well as the smaller Dalit groups from rural areas are drawn to these organisations Since the Dalit movement has had such a significant impact on national politics in recent decades, the state of Uttar Pradesh serves as the most illustrative case study. Groups such as the Republican Party of Indian in Maharashtra as well as the Liberation Panthers in Tamil Nadu have undergone significant transformations in response to these shifts.

There is a lack of interest in the former Dalit leaders' old ideology and techniques of mobilisation. Dalits now seek a political party a movement that can give them with economic advancement, having achieved a minimal level of political empowerment and self-respect in the 1990s. A look at the current state of Dalit politics in India, as well as the possibilities for its resurgence, is the subject of this essay.

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