



DALITS, RATIONALIZATION AND BEYOND

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Abstract

*In India, Dalits (Scheduled Castes and tribes) are socially and economically oppressed, culturally subjugated, and politically marginalized lies at the core of a considerable body of sociological literature. The Dalits are an integral part of our social and cultural fabric. Their role in an age of science and high-tech assumes greater significance than ever before. They are too precious to be dispensed with. Their exploitation at the hands of the feudal forces causes us to pause and reflect. They need second look today. A dispassionate analysis of Dalits' lifestyle makes it imperative that the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions to their age-old problems be taken into consideration. BSP has also succeeded in the politicisation of Dalit community in U.P. Against the backdrop of these given facts it may be mentioned here that the Dalit community has been impacted upon by **reciprocal determinism** that is politics and economics reinforcing each other. Dalit assertion is a multifaceted phenomenon--cultural, economic, political. So, it is not the economic factor alone which is deciding as has been said by Karl Marx. **There is a positive or linear correlation between politics and economics.** Politics is the cause, and its effect is economics and vice-versa. Reciprocal determinism assumes that politics and material aspects coupled together and re-inforcing each other are most important sources of motivation of Dalits and their empowerment. **Reciprocal determinism is the outcome of the process of rationalization** as it is an alternative strategic measure for the empowerment of Dalits. Politics has now become, particularly in the context of Dalits, a necessary condition or key for economic upliftment as in a conservative society like ours as traditional high caste elites are not prepared to delegate their authority to Dalits. Unification of all the high castes against the lower castes on the issue of reservation is a clear reflection of it. Political mobilization has also overcome economic differentiation as far as voting is concerned though rivalry and factionalism remain.*

Keywords: Dalits, Social oppression, Determinism, Upliftment.



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Methodology: As per the nature of the study (article) Historical research method is opted. The results are based on secondary sources. Study has been conducted on Dalit community of Tundla, Firozabad, U.P.

Discussion and results:

However, things have changed with the passage of time. Dalits have been still distinguished themselves by making strides in various spheres of life. They are today aware of themselves as a separate social and cultural entity. The process of **ideological schism, class consolidation as well as polarization**, heightened self consciousness, uneven growth and the ideological demand for higher social status and status mobility, all these forces combine together in present day Dalit community to distinguish it from traditional Dalit community. There is a drive going on, particularly among the Dalits, for the creation of separate identity, values and relationships which encapsulate the emerging self consciousness. Sharp agitation and recent Dalit upsurge across the country at the insult inflicted upon Ambedkar by desecration of statue in Kanpur and murder of Dalits at khairlanji, Maharastra, is clearly an indication of creative thinking and growing consciousness among the Dalits.

Though social mobility, economic development and political recognition have benefited a few Dalits, the drawbacks of these are manifold. In particular, they have created polarisation and fragmentation within the Dalit community as only a few Dalit sub-castes have benefited from the developmental policies aimed at their amelioration. There has, therefore, developed "**horizontal-vertical utopia**." It refers to the dissemination of the ideology among Dalits that all limited elites who have emerged among them favour their own jati group and neglect the rest of the Dalit community. At the meeting organized by BSP in Lucknow on 27-08-006 to elect Ms. Mayawati as the head of the party she said that her successor would be a man from her own jati. Also, the implementation of Ambedkar village programme, when BSP was in power, in actual practice benefited mainly the better of Jatavs and not the poorer section such as Valmikies, thereby creating schism between section of Dalits themselves.

This substantiates the "horizontal-vertical utopia." As a ramification of such an approach adopted by BSP **elite dominance crisis**, a political crisis that occurs when a

community is dominated by political and economic elites who fail to serve the need of entire society, has come into prominence. Horizontal-vertical utopia shows fragmentation and differentiation on one side and assertiveness on the other. It also hints at the growing consciousness of castes within the Dalit community. It, therefore, becomes imperative that casteism has to be fought not only from without but also from within. This is the reason why Dalits have failed to emerge as a single dominant element in the context of the logic of caste. BSP has not been able to create class solidarity among Dalits. Ambedkar had suggested that the Dalits, tribals and backwards were natural allies due to their deprived position. But horizontal vertical utopia has denied it. The latest move of government to sub-categorise Dalits on the issue of reservation is a tactical move that may further aggravate the situation.

There is a **hierarchy within the Dalits**. The top sub-castes among the Dalits do not dine with, marry or sometimes even touch the lower layers. There is intra-Dalit factionalism and rivalry among Dalits as major economic benefits have been cornered by certain castes among Dalits. When **Raj Kumar**, a Valmiki, was asked if he had any faith in the leadership of Mayawati, he replied in the negative. The reason was simple -- Mayawati favours her own caste and most of the benefits and opportunities have been grabbed by the people of her own caste. Same views were also voiced by the people of the same community.

Despite the establishment of a democratic framework, civil society in India, until recently, remained elitist, and was in Hegelian terms a bourgeois society, limited to a few proper citizens. This shows that a kind of **credibility gap** has surfaced among different Dalit castes. This has created cleavage and fragmentation within Dalit community. But such fragmentation of Dalit community will not prove detrimental rather lead to the progress of Dalits because a feeling of competition will develop among them. It is needless to say that it is the consciousness of relative deprivation among Dalits which is responsible for the development of this competitive feeling.

It is worth mentioning here in the light of the said facts that the development of the desire for the achievement of self-actualization, the need to become all that one is capable of, has accounted for the **rationalization among Dalits**. Rationalization for Dalits is attributed to the **de-institutionalization of convergent thinking**, thinking on conventional lines and the traditional ideology of hierarchical order based on the theory of Brahmanism and **institutionalization of divergent thinking**, creative and original thinking that deviates from the obvious and conventional. The reaction of BSP on the death of BSP's Supremo late Kanshi Ram is indicative of their rational thinking. Traditionally all Hindus irrespective of

their high or low caste immerse ashes of the dead into the holy river Ganga but Ms. Mayawati as discarded this age old tradition and decided to preserve them as relic so as to inspire the masses among Dalits to reject the traditional Hindu mind-set.

BSP has also adopted some cultural symbols to spread its message. The main ones are a **blue flag**, the **elephant** and custom of greeting fellow members by saying "**Jai Bhim**". The blue colour symbolises that the party aims must remain as high and pure as sky; The elephant stands for power and fearlessness. The greeting slogan "Jai Bhim" is a sign of opposition to Brahmanism, manuwadi forces and adoption of Ambedkarism. When **Anita**, a Valmiki, was asked about the caste system, she replied that caste system must be abolished because all men are equal and caste is made by good karmas. She also told that she does not like to be called a Bhangi, a sweeper. When **Dinesh Chandra, a Jatav**, was asked as to what he thinks about caste system, he said it must be discontinued because it has no scientific base. All these factors mentioned above are reflection of the growing rational thinking among Dalits.

Dichotomisation of society on the lines of convergent thinking, status quoist upheld by the high dominant castes and the development of divergent thinking among Dalits has created **ideological bifurcation** between the high dominant castes and Dalits on one hand and also within Dalit community on the other. Such rationality is action oriented and socio-cognitive centric. Rationalization of this nature enables **lateral thinking among Dalits**. There is, therefore, cultural shift and de-culturation due to such rationalization in Dalit community. This has led to culture enrichment of Dalits. This can be seen in the **polarization of moral and legal authority**. Previously what was morally correct was also legally correct but now both moral and legal aspects have been dissociated and play their independent role.

It goes without saying that this is **dissociative-reactive rationality** as it involves the de-diffusion of the ideology of Brahmanism among Dalits which is conservative and status quoist. It is reactive as it has come as a reaction to the traditional oppressive ideology of high dominant castes. Such rationalization has led to conceptual change and diversification of Dalit community. **Ambedkarisation**, a movement emphasising separate identity and self identity, celebration and widespread dissemination of the ideas and writings of Ambedkar, has emerged as a consequence of such rationalization. Ambedkarisation has enhanced consciousness of Dalit identity and low status in caste hierarchy as well as a desire to improve it. Such rationalization will provide self-esteem to Dalits and routinisation and proactiveness in their actions. Rationalization of this nature does not mean that Dalit

community has progressed substantially rather mobility that has been introduced by such rationalization is cognitive. Modernity is such rationalization of Dalit community. But such rationalization is still in the developmental phase as majority among Dalits still remains to be marginalized in ways more than one.

It will be in the fitness of things to mention here that such rationalization has led to **position anxiety** among Dalits. Dalits are said to feel position anxiety if they seriously become upset over their position in society which is of low degree. Position anxiety has been instrumental in the development of needs from existence needs, physiological needs to related needs, being understood and accepted by all, to growth needs, desire for self esteem and self-realization. The process of rationalization has been working through three different stages-**unfreezing** that is casting aside the old ideas and practices, **changing** where new ideas and practices are learned enabling a person to think reason and perform in new ways and **refreezing** where what has been learned is integrated into actual practice. But, none can deny the fact that even tradition exists side by side with modernity as no traditional or modern society is exclusively traditional or modern. There are elements of modernity in traditional society and vice-versa. What is important is that traditional Dalit community in the process of such rationalization may be called a modern society.

Undoubtedly, as a result of this rationalization, decentration has come into play. Dalits have rejected the status quo and have found other ways and means of supplementing their social status. They have developed counter-ideology to Brahminic order and have broken **vertical patron-client relationship**. Dalits have developed achievement motive by rejecting the traditional outlook. This can be seen in their demand for greater devolution of power. **Caste is also in the process of decentring itself from the ideology of low and high** and rather it has become a weapon in the hands of Dalits for further democratization, politicization and secularization of society through parliamentary means. **Caste ideology has changed into cast ideology**. But within the Dalit community caste has become more pronounced.

It is nothing but simple and pure truth that Dalits have shown **indeterminism** by resorting to the ideology of insubordination to the hierarchical order. They have rejected the boundaries that were set for them by the traditional order. Such **indeterminism shown by Dalits depicts anti-foundationalism**. Ambedkar also said that untouchables were not a sub-section of the Hindus, but a distinct element in the natural life of India, as separate and distinct as the Muslims. There is also discontinuity of traditional social values and therefore,

new values like democratisation, politicisation, secularisation and Ambedkarisation have been devised. These norms and values so conceptualized, are based on secular thinking.

It will not be out of place to mention here that homogenisation of sub-castes among Dalits has not occurred rather identity consciousness and socio-economic changes are creating greater awareness of differentiation. Building large scale solidarity across all sub-castes by means of horizontal mobilization is a difficult task. **Transition from caste to class remains an unfinished agenda.** This shows that ideology of all Dalit castes and sub-castes is not coherent and unified but fragmented. Dalits have failed to work as a system in coherence as segregation, exclusion and hierarchy also prevail among them.

As Dalit community has become more stratified, differentiated and fragmented, therefore, the term Dalit may not be generalized and made representative of the entire Dalit community. And to do so may mean a grave mistake. Therefore, we may have to devise jati-specific terms in the years to come. Also the use of the term Dalit as low caste and not class has to be avoided as none of these people themselves want to be called so. **Dalits now have felt that they are constructed category.** The term Dalit is also a positive assertive expression of pride for people of certain caste groups among Dalits.

It will not be out of order to mention here that due to considerable socio-economic internal differentiation **simulation** has been adopted by some of the Dalits. It refers to the masquerading of Dalits as high castes by impersonalization or hiding the real Dalit caste identity and in place assimilating high caste names, particularly of dominant castes. To diminish the negative implications of their caste specific names, some people have been trying to mask their identities for years now. The most common surnames that Dalits adopt are Bharati, Singh, Chaudhary, Das, Kumar, Bahardwaj, Prasad. The original surnames are considered derogatory.

Simulation is faster than sanskritisation and that it is not a process but may precede a process like sanskritisation. It is rather a one-way strategic step which takes place irrespective of the knowledge of the simulated. So transmission of any model like sanskritisation by dominant caste is not necessary. Simulation provides for the self claiming of higher social status. Self claiming comes immediately with simulation unlike sanskritisation where two or three generations are invested before final claim for higher position in social hierarchy can be made.

Like sanskritisation, simulation occurs independent of political power but unlike sanskritisation some economic standard is required. Therefore, **fusion of caste-class**

identities plays a vital role here. Sanskritisation has a social dimension whereas there is economic dimension attached to simulation. Simulation also changes the outlook of persons but the original group to which they belong remains unchanged. Simulation is a manifest rejection of institutionalized inequality fostered by traditional caste stratification system.

It is absolutely needless to say that **anticipatory socialisation prepares ground for simulation**. Through simulation social status gets improved. It is basically a feature of city life, though it may be found elsewhere, where real caste identity cannot be easily comprehended because people have migrated here from different places. In urban areas the religious and caste identities are so much fused with each other that it is hard to divorce them. **Simulation may result into vertical mobility**, position change but pseudo- structural change. It is an alternative source of social mobility. It is not a widespread but limited feature of Dalit community. It involves **conversion**, simulation and **inversion**, reverting back to original identity to take the benefits of protective discrimination. It is a passive movement within the caste system. It is, therefore, an endogenous source of social change.

It is not without justification to say that economic changes have created greater differentiation among Dalits. This has resulted into **polarisation of caste-class identities**. Present Dalit society revolves around politics but the motive behind it is economic. Politics involves electoral competition which breeds fragmentation and sub-fragmentation. It has led to the distributed control of Dalit community. Economic power has become more dependent on political power in the context of Dalits as political empowerment, according to them, will ultimately improve the socio-economic condition of Dalits in a traditional society like ours. Therefore, power motive has become important for Dalits. Economic power according to **Kanshi Ram** is based on political power".

Conclusion:

Undoubtedly, Dalits now believe in **downward filtration theory** you change the tip of the triangle than the change percolates down to the rest of the triangle. Kashi Ram also said that poverty is the result of social and political powerlessness rooted in Brahmanical system and not a economic condition to be dealt with by economic policies". Ambedkar at the conference held in Lucknow on 24 and 25 April 1948 said, "What I want is power political power for if we have power we have social status." In 1961 barely 10% of India's 64.4 million SC population could read and write. By 2001 45% of SC's were literate, a 4.5 times growth in 40 years. Dalits have been looking at education to find a way for upward mobility. But figures relating to Dalits reveal that as many as 36% of the Dalits in rural areas and 38% in

urban areas are below the poverty line (TOI 9/12/06). This shows that education rises but not prosperity. But education has certainly made Dalits politically more conscious. Reservation policy is being continued by the government because Dalits are a political force to reckon with.

BSP believes that political power rather than grass root level revolution is essential to improve the socio-economic condition of Dalits¹³ This is because the latter would be arduous, time consuming and difficult. BSP has also succeeded in the politicisation of Dalit community in U.P. Against the backdrop of these given facts it may be mentioned here that the Dalit community has been impacted upon by **reciprocal determinism** that is politics and economics reinforcing each other. Dalit assertion is a multifaceted phenomenon--cultural, economic, political. So it is not the economic factor alone which is deciding as has been said by Karl Marx. **There is a positive or linear correlation between politics and economics.** Politics is the cause and its effect is economics and vice-versa. Reciprocal determinism assumes that politics and material aspects coupled together and re-inforcing each other are most important sources of motivation of Dalits and their empowerment. **Reciprocal determinism is the outcome of the process of rationalization** as it is an alternative strategic measure for the empowerment of Dalits. Politics has now become, particularly in the context of Dalits, a necessary condition or key for economic upliftment as in a conservative society like ours as traditional high caste elites are not prepared to delegate their authority to Dalits. Unification of all the high castes against the lower castes on the issue of reservation is a clear reflection of it. Political mobilization has also overcome economic differentiation as far as voting is concerned though rivalry and factionalism remain.

Reciprocal determinism is most crucial factor in explaining social behaviour of Dalits. Reciprocal determinism aims at the minimization of economic and power distance between Dalits on one hand and Dalits and high dominant castes on the other. Ambedkar village programme (AVP) was given a push by Ms. Mayawati when she was in power in 1995 and 1997 in U.P. AVP has helped in a great deal to improve the economic condition of Dalits in U.P. in sample villages. Sample, villages under AVP were given more funds for their development ¹.

Union government's decision to constitute a commission to investigate the sub-division of SCs is a ploy to divide and rule. This is to diminish the political power of Dalits. Any decision to split the SC's list and fixing quota against the sub-groups would anger a significant portion of electorate among Dalits particularly Jatavs in U.P. The matter of the fact

is that all these changes that have dominated Dalit society for the last few decades reflect that Dalits have become rational in their approach in dealing with their socio-political ambience. They are within the strides of winning post and they are coming closer to those who occupy a prominent place in social hierarchy. But the darker side of this rationality is that it has attributed to greater differentiation than ever before in Dalit Community. **As a result of rationalisation of Dalits ascription orientation has been replaced by achievement orientation** and that their aspiration level has increased. All these are the indications that the whole socio-political and ideological sphere of Dalits is under the spell of **reconstructionalism** which is a result of globalization. (Study has been conducted on Dalit community of Tundla, Firozabad, U.P.)

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