



**DALIT POLITICS IN INDIA :
FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENT TO ELECTORAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

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Abstract

The political movement of Dalits gained a stronghold in northern India. Historically, the Dalit movement started to gain equality in Indian society. In the post-Independence period Dalit movement emerged under the leadership of Ambedkar. Ambedkar emerged not only as a political leader but also he has emerged as leader for the untouchable community to address the issues from social to political perspective. The rise of Dalit political mobilization in India has gained in a wider dimension both in political activism but also as a social movement which has been supported by wide spread Dalit literature to generate a Dalit consciousness among the downtrodden masses. Today caste has become increasingly important in Indian politics. Taking this into a consideration the formation of RPI and BSP has truly established Dalit leaders in the electoral politics of the country. In this context the article discussed about how social movement of Dalit gained a political movement in the later part of Indian politics.

Keywords: Untouchables, Dalit, Dalit politics, RPI, BSP.



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Introduction:

In India, caste-based politics has always remained at the forefront. The Dalit question is one of the most important topics in today's political and academic debates in India. Dalit leadership and voting pattern of the Dalits are part in India politics. Dalits are underprivileged in all social, economic and political fronts which lead to their misery, discrimination, exploitation, and oppression by the caste dominated society. The *varna* system has divided the Hindu society into four orders-the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Sudras.¹ The first three castes are considered twice-born or 'Dvija' since the men from these

¹ John Campbell Oman, (2003), *Religious Festivals and Caste System in India*, New Delhi: Khana Publishers, p. 42.

castes were entitled to use the sacred thread at the Vedic site of Upanayana, which the Sudras were not, allowed to perform.² Sudras were the people who cultivated the land, washed the clothes and did all types of menial works. Members of the untouchable caste, however, shared the stigma of untouchability; they were frequently denied the chance to eat, smoke or even sit with members of the upper castes, and they often must use separate wells from those maintained for the use of others.³

In the post-independence the Government of India enacted different social legislations to reform the position of Dalits which included removal of untouchability and discrimination against them. Further it was emphasized to elevate the Dalits status in such a way that they have equal status with other segments.⁴ The provisions of voting rights, reservations in education and jobs and in the politics field, are the steps which have been in existence since the adoption of the Constitution.⁵ Efforts are still going on to remove different discriminatory practices against them. One of the major aspects of the socio-economic status of Dalits is their political consciousness and awareness about various political activities and participation in these activities. The Dalit political activities may contribute to various decisions relating to their rights is very much debatable.⁶ Thus political awareness and participation of the Dalits is an important to discuss in this article.

Origin of Dalit politics

The origin of the Indian social structure has a long history. The Indian Vedic literature divided the Hindu social structure into four groups known as Varna system. These groups are arranged in hierarchical order. In the social order, Brahmins occupies the top position in this hierarchy structure followed by Kshatriyas at the second and Vaishyas at the third position respectively. The Shudras have been placed at the last level of the pyramidal structure of the hierarchical varna system according to the Rigveda. Social scientists like anthropologists and sociologists have included another group in the varna system as a fifth group in the hindu

² RanjitRajadhyaksha, (2004), *Encyclopedia of Social Problems and Social Change*, New Delhi: Dominant Publishers, p. 235.

³ Mark Juergensmeyer, (1988), *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchability*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, p. 14.

⁴ Jay Lakshmi (2014), "Relevance of Ambedkar's Contribution In The Upliftment of Modern Days Dalits and Women", *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Volume 19, Issue2, Ver.IV, February, p. 63.

⁵ Ibid., 64

⁶ Ibid., p. 65

social order known as Ashprishyas (Untouchables).⁷ Accordingly, the Hindu social order has been divided into five major social groups arranged hierarchically in which Brahmins at the top and Dalits at the lower level. The existed literatures have demonstrated that the first three castes of verna system are being considered as twice-born categories, known as 'Dvija'. The men from these castes were entitled to use the sacred thread at the Vedic site of Upanayana whereas the Sudras were not allowed to perform.⁸ The Sudra communities have been placed in such an occupation i.e., cultivate lands; mend the shoes, wash the clothes and all types of menial works. The members of this caste have also shared the stigma of untouchability; they were frequently denied to sit with members of the upper castes, and forced to use separate wells from those maintained for the use of others.⁹ In this process the untouchable (Dalits) communities have been excluded from every sphere of life. The Hindu social order also allocates multiple rights and privileged status to Varnas located higher up in the hierarchy and denies the same to those who are lower in authority of the Varna system. The unequal distribution of rights and privileges in a social structure also bears religious legitimacy that has been cemented extreme forms of inequality in Indian society.

In the Hindu social order of India, Dalits are being placed at the five-fold of the social fabric of the verna system. Historically, the Dalit have been exploited and subjected to atrocities due to the social stratification of Indian society. Even in the independent nation it has been reported in every nook and corner Dalits were being easily targeted denying Constitutional guarantees equal rights and privileges to every citizen. Throughout the centuries Dalits are the victims of expression of the existing contradiction, inequality and exploitation in the Indian hierarchical society. Besides this throughout the ages, Dalits were referred with different nomenclatures like Chandals, Avarnas, Achhuts, Adi-Dravida, depressed classes, oppressed Hindu, Harijan, Scheduled Castes etc.¹⁰ However, after the emergence of the Dalit Panther movement, they preferred to be called as Dalits. In this it is important discuss how Dr. Ambedkar was given importance to political rights to every

⁷ John Campbell Oman, (2003), *Religious Festivals and Caste System in India*, New Delhi: Khana Publishers, p. 42.

⁸ RanjitRajadhyaksha, (2004), *Encyclopedia of Social Problems and Social Change*, New Delhi: Dominant Publishers, p.235.

⁹ Mark Juergensmeyer, (1988), *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchability*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, p. 14.

¹⁰ Vivek Kumar, (2005), "Situating Dalits in Indian Society", *Sociological Bulletin*, 54 (3), Sept-Dec., p. 514.

sections of society. He has also taken step to enter into the electoral politics of India in his political life of independent India.

Ambedkar and social transformation in India

Social transformation is one of the step towards gaining political power for Dalit in India. In the process Dr. Ambedkar delivered the inaugural address, in the post independences India, of the conference in which he stressed upon the significance of political power of Dalit. In the speech he stated that ‘What I want is power, political power for my people for if we have power we have social status’.¹¹ This statement by Ambedkar reflects the fear of Dalits in post-independent India. The Constitutional provisions of emancipation Dalits through abolition of untouchability, promises of citizenship and protective discrimination did not convince the Dalits. They were apprehensive about the genuineness on the part of the caste Hindus in allowing the Constitutional promises to be realised. Until then the Dalit struggle for political power had been to secure a place for their voice in the legislative bodies and to gain economic facilities. But now, they continued their struggle for political power to ensure the actualisation of those constitutional promises. The deliberations at the conference injected new vigour into the delegates and inspired them to re-dedicate themselves for the Dalit cause.¹²

In the process of formation of political party Dr. Ambedkar’s intention was not only political but also economic equality in India. The manifesto of RPI also highlighted range of issues concerned not only with Dalits but also for the socially and economically marginalised communities. The party organised several mass mobilisations and protest movements to demand that the ruling Congress must implement these measures. When the government failed to do so, the RPI activists made several attempts to occupy uncultivated land. In 1964 as many as 30000 people were arrested in connection with that action.¹³ During this period there were series of debate on Dalit issues with Congress. While Congress, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, considered discussions of caste distinctions to be a traditionalist discourse, the RPI fought to place the realities of discrimination against the lower castes at the heart of the national debate. While Congress sought to direct the nation

¹¹ Ibid., p. 515.

¹² Owen Lynch, (1969), “Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Myth and Charisma”, in Michael Mahar J. (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 133-35

¹³ Paul R. Brass, (1985), *Caste, Faction and Party in Indian Politics*, New Delhi: Chanakya, p. 224.

towards increasing industrialisation in the 1950s, the RPI argued for radical land redistribution and agricultural reform to improve the economic position of the lower castes.¹⁴ Through its activities and confrontations, the RPI was able to establish itself, albeit for a brief period, for the lower castes and other oppressed masses in the state as a durable alternative to the Congress.

Indeed the RPI greatest moments were the 1962 elections. The RPI contested 68 parliamentary seats out of this it won only three seats in Uttar Pradesh alone. Out of these three seats, Mr. Muzaffar Hussain was elected from Muradabad, second, Mr. B.P. Maurya was elected from Aligarh and the third seat Mr. Joti Saroop was elected¹⁵ from Hathras parliamentary seats. Out the three seats two were from unreserved constituencies and one from a reserved constituency.¹⁶ Even though the state and entire country were still under the influence of the Congress Party, the success of the RPI was undoubtedly a great achievement for the party. It reflected the determination of the Dalits to take power into their own hands and thereby change their wretched socio-economic condition.

The electoral success of the RPI was short-lived. The party could not win any seats after the 1967 assembly elections. Therefore, the party could not present itself as a political alternative to Congress. The reasons for the failure of the RPI experiment were many: first, the briefly successful local coalition between Dalits and Muslims engineered by B. P. Maurya in the city and district of Aligarh was driven by political opportunism rather than historical sympathy between the two groups. Predictably the partnership did not last beyond the 1967 and 1969 state assembly elections.¹⁷ Second, the RPI's claim of being both a party of the poor and the party of 'Ambedkarites' confused its workers and supporters, the landless labourers workers in factories and other wage earners. As such for those who were wedded to class-based politics, the party was supposed to be organising the labourers and workers alone. Contrary to this expectation, the party's manifesto also described itself as Ambedkarite party,

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 226.

¹⁵ Joti Saroop was born in 1927 at Hathras, Uttar Pradesh. He was an Indian politician, elected to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament of India from Hathras (SC) as a member of the Republican Party of India.

¹⁶ R. Chandidas, Ward More House, Leon Clark, Richard Fontera (eds.), (1968), *India Votes: A study book on Indian elections*, New York: Humanities press p. 246.

¹⁷ Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, (1998), *The Untouchables: Subordinations, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 213.

and it pledged to 'engage itself in organising the oppressed masses of India, particularly the Buddhists SCs, STs, and OBCs.¹⁸

As a result, it was appeared there was void in communication between the leadership and the workers and supporters. The gap of communication led to disappointment of supporters of the party and the departed large group of people who were interested in class-based politics. Further the middle-class Dalits were content with the new opportunities thrown up by the Constitution of India such as the abolition of untouchability, reserved seats and promises of economic betterment. But pursuing these opportunities they wanted to enter the power structure and improve their socio-economic conditions rather than lead a movement to challenge the established social and political order.¹⁹

The emergence of Dalit Political Activism:

The emergence of Backward and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) in 1978 and the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samithi(DSSSS) in 1981 was the brainchild of Kanshi Ram. Kanshi Ram was formed these organization to respond the institutional discrimination against fellow Dalit employees by upper-caste employees. The followers of Kanshi Ram addressed him fondly as *Saheb* or *Manyawar*. Kanshi Ram also considered to be 'the messiah of the oppressed' and the embodiment of Ambedkar. He was born on 15 March 1934 in humble Ravidasi Sikh (Dalit) family in Khawaspur village of Ropar district in Punjab.²⁰ Kanshi Ram was fortunate enough to get education. In 1958 after his graduation, Kanshi Ram took up a job as a researcher in the Explosive Research and Development Laboratory (ERDL), an ammunitions factory in Pune. In the professional carrier, Kanshi Ram grew up in protected military environment and was follower of Sikhism, a religion that preaches egalitarianism. In the early years of his life Kashi Ram had little experience of the oppressive nature of the caste system and the suffering of Dalits as untouchables. It was for the first time in Pune he was exposed to the stark realities of caste.²¹ Kanshi Ram stated that:

I was first exposed to the miseries of the Mahars and Mangs. After that, I read *Annihilation of Caste* and *What Gandhi and the Congress Have Done to the*

¹⁸ Sambaiah Gundimeda, (2016), *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, New York: Routledge, p. 61.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 64.

²⁰ Anand Teltumbde, (2006), 'An Enigma Called Kanshiram', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4: p. 4531.

²¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, (1998), *The Bahujan Samaj Party in North India: No Longer Just a Dalit Party? Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 18(1):p. 35.

Untouchable. These are the two books, which have influenced me the most. Later I came to know about Mahatma Jotirao Phule.

In 1965, in the ERDL (Explosive Research and Development Laboratory) cancelled two holidays which was meant to celebrate the birthdays of Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Gautama Buddha and in its place sanctioned a holiday on the birthday of Tilak and on Diwali festival.²² During that time Dalits were minority in the ERDL but they dared to raise voice on the cultural hegemony of the upper castes. Moreover, in Pune, particularly in the location of ERDL was located, young Dalits were continuously engaged in discussing the ideas of Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar. Dinabhana, a Dalit employee in the laboratory was enraged by the list of holidays and protested against the decision, leading to his suspension from the ERDL. Although Ambedkarite organisations had a strong presence in Pune but not single Dalit organisation took up the issue of the incident. After Ambedkar's death particularly in the early 1960s, RPI Dalit leaders were busy fighting against each other but the cancellation of the two holidays appeared to be a non-issue for them.²³ Kanshi Ram was enraged on the incident and supported Dinabhana and organised a protest against the decision of the management. Moreover, he filed a case against Dinabhana's suspension in a district court of law despite intimidation by the administration. It took two years that the court verdict came with revoking the suspension order of Dinabhana's and restored the two holidays.²⁴

During that time Dalit movement and politics in Maharashtra were dominated and controlled by the self-styled Ambedkarites who were divided into two broad groups: one group consisted of the RPI leaders from the Mahar caste and the other Congress Dalit leaders who others Dalit castes non-Mahars. In the later stage the former splintered into many factions, the latter group was more or less tamed by upper-caste Congress leaders like Y. B. Chavan.²⁵ During the initial phase of activism, Kanshi Ram got disappointed with the Dalit politics of RPI brand but he worked for the party for nearly eight years. Most of Kanshi Ram ideas and argument took shape during this stage.

²² Sudha Pai, (2002), *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 87.

²³ Sambaiah Gundimeda, (2016), *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, New York: Routledge, p. 85.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 87.

²⁵ Sudha Pai, (2002), *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 88.

Dalit political participation:

Over the years BAMCEF disenchanted with the *chamcha* politics of the RPI and the Congress Dalit leaders. Kanshi Ram and his close associates at the ERDL decided to develop an organisation that would spread the ideas and ideals of Ambedkar and Jotiba Phule.²⁶ During this time Kanshi Ram was joined by D. K. Khaparde²⁷ a committed Dalit employee, and together they began to formulate plans for an organisation to be formed by educated employees from the lower castes. On 6 December 1973, they established BAMCEF with the object of fighting caste discrimination against the lower castes within the civil service.²⁸ The motto, 'Educate, Organise, and Agitate', was adopted from Ambedkar's teachings. In 1976 a functioning office of the BAMCEF was established in Delhi.²⁹ The base in Delhi was a good move of BAMCEF and later it got to spread in Punjab, Haryana, UP and Madhya Pradesh.

A significant feature of BAMCEF was that unlike other Dalit socio-political organisations, it was relatively free from monetary constraints.³⁰ Almost all the members were government employees, and those salaried jobs enabled them to support the organisation's activities with generous monetary contributions. In the early 1980s, the BAMCEF claimed to have almost 200000 members, among whom were 15000 scientists and 3000 MBBS graduates, 500 Ph.D. and 7000 other graduates and post-graduates.³¹

The primary aim of BAMCEF was to raise the consciousness of Dalits about their plight and press for social action. BAMCEF raised social consciousness among Dalits through various forms of literary and cultural events, such as launching the journal, *Oppressed Indian*; celebrating the anniversaries of Ambedkar's birth and death, restarting the Ambedkar Memorial Football Tournament and felicitations for Dalit poets (Kavi sammelana) on

²⁶ Sambaiah Gundimeda, (2016), *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, New York: Routledge, p. 86

²⁷ He was born 13 May 1939 in Nagpur, Maharashtra, a Mahar Buddhist after completion of his B.Sc. from Institute of Pune. Whilst there he met Kanshi Ram, whom he enlightened about the movement of Ambedkarism. A co-founder of the precursor to BAMCEF in 1971 and later the president of BAMCEF.

²⁸ Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, (1998), *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 220, and See, Vivek Kumar and Uday Sinha, (2001), *Dalit Assertion and Bahujan Samaj Party: A Perspective From Below*, Lucknow: Bahujan Sahitya Sansthan, p. 58.

²⁹ Sambaiah Gundimeda, (2016), *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, New York: Routledge, p. 86.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 87.

³¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, (1998), *The Bahujan Samaj Party in North India: No Longer Just a Dalit Party? Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 18(1):p. 36.

AmbedkarJayanti.³²The social action activities have also been carried out through public awareness programmes like ‘AmbedkarMela on Wheels’. This programme was audio-visual account of Ambedkar’s life and views together with contemporary material on the oppression, atrocities and poverty faced by Dalits. This ‘Mela’ was one of the biggest mobilising campaigns undertaken by BAMCEF, taking place across north Indian states, which spread from Jabalpur to Jammu and Allahabad to Jaipur.³³

The BAMCEF, under the leadership of Kanshi Ram, had always nurtured the idea of political power for the oppressed Indian. But Kanshi Ram could not have achieved his ambition by confining BAMCEF activities to middle-class and educated Dalits alone. To spread the his idea of Dalits emancipation, Kanshi Ram constituted the ‘Dalit ShoshitSamajSangharsSamiti’ (DS-4) on 6 December 1981. Although DS-4 was not a full-fledged political party, but its activities were more political than BAMCEF.³⁴ No government employee could become a member of DS-4, which anyway targeted the common Dalits to raise their awareness level and prepare them to participate in political activities. It has also mobilize to have annual membership fee of DS-4 was Rs 3 with the criteria that those who are not belong to “twice-born castes” could become a member³⁵ of the organization.

In the process the DS-4 was divided into ten wings, each having a different role or responsibility. The first three were the Jagriti (consciousness), Mahila (Women's) and Chhatra(Students) wings. In such a situation the most active was the Jagriti Wing.³⁶ Its members travelled across villages and small towns of north India trying to sensitise common Dalits to their social, cultural and economic conditions. They popularised the message of Kanshi Ram and Ambedkar through speeches, music and theatre. ³⁷ Activists of DS-4 travelled all over the country on bicycles fluttering blue flags. Kanshi Ram knew that unlike the powerful political leaders, the BahujanSamaj could afford to use only small vehicles like

³² SambaiahGundimeda, (2016), *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, New York: Routledge, p. 87.

³³ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁴ Badri Narayan, (2014), *Kanshiram leader of Dalits*, New Delhi: Penguin published p. 53.

³⁵ A. K. Dubey, (1997), *Kanshiram: EkAlochnatamakAdhyayan*, New Delhi: RajkamalPrakashan, pp..52-53.

³⁶ Badri Narayan, (2014), *Kanshiram leader of Dalits*,New Delhi: Penguin published, p. 53.

³⁷ A. K. Dubey, (1997), *Kanshiram: EkAlochnatamakAdhyayan*, New Delhi: RajkamalPrakashan, p.53

bicycles, popular among the masses, on a big scale. He was convinced that the two wheels and two legs together could achieve a great deal.³⁸

As movement through the countryside, DS-4 activists used to sing several songs to rouse the Dalits. Kanshi Ram himself sang along with the activists. They also chanted slogans like “*Tilak, tarajuaurtalwar, jootemaroinko char*” (*tilak*, a symbol for the Brahmans; *Taraju*, or scales, a symbol for the baniyas; and *talwar*, a symbol for the Kshatriyas; ‘Beat them up four times with shoes/ Brahmans, Baniyas and Kshatriyas and all’).³⁹ DS-4 organised a cycle rally in 1983-84 to mobilise people in the countryside. The first cycle rally started from Kanyakumari on 6 December 1983, the next from Kargil on 18 December 1983, the third from Kohima on 19 January 1984, the fourth from Puri on 28 January 1984 and the last one from Porbandar on 22 February 1984. All these rallies converged at the Boat Club ground in Delhi on 15 March 1984.⁴⁰

In these rally nearly three lakh DS-4 activists were participated. They had instructions to address 7500 gatherings and make sure that at least ten crore people attended.⁴¹ Cycling along the activists raised a number of slogans: “*Babasahebamarrahein*’ (Long live Babasaheb), ‘*Kanshi Ram Zindabad/Zindabad, Zindabad*’ (Hail Kanshi Ram), ‘*Vote hamara raj tumhara: nahichalega, nahichalega*’ (Our vote, your rule: won’t do, won’t do), ‘*Jiski jitni sankhyabhari, uskiutni hissedari*’ (The share in power should be proportionate to the size of the community), ‘*Kanshi Ram teri nekkamai, tune sotikaum jagai*’ (Kanshi Ram, you have earned a good name; you have awoken a slumbering community), ‘*Baba tera mission adhura, Kanshi Ram karegapoora*’ (Baba, your unfulfilled mission will be completed by Kanshi Ram), ‘*Bharat kimajboorihai, Kanshi Ram zarooihai*’ (To alleviate India’s plight, Kanshi Ram is necessary), ‘*Saredeshmeinek hi naam: Kanshi Ram, Kanshi Ram*’ (The country echoes with just one name: Kanshi Ram, Kanshi Ram), ‘*Ab bahujan kibari hai-ikkeesvi sadi hamarihai*’ (It is now the turn of the bahujans; we will own the twenty-first century), ‘Kshatriya Brahman baniyachhod, baaki sab hain DS-4), and so on.”⁴²

³⁸ Satnam Singh, (2005), *BahujanNayakkanshiram*, New Delhi: Samyak Publications, p. 35.

³⁹ Kamlakant, (2006), *DalitonKe Messiah Kanshiram*, Delhi: Raja Pocket Books, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Badri Narayan, (2014), *Kanshiram Leader of the Dalits*, New Dalhi: Penguin published, p.54.

⁴¹ Ibid,

⁴² Ibid, p. 55.

Prior to launching the BahujaSamaj Party (BSP) Kanshi Ram tested the Dalit political perspective by contested the Haryana assembly elections through DS-4 in 1982. He referred to this as a 'limited political activity'.⁴³ In these elections, DS-4 obtained 47,499 votes 1.11 per cent of the total votes. That was much better than the performance of three other political parties, the Communist Party of India (CPI), The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) and Congress (Socialist). He was heartened by the result since he was not looking to win a seat. He declared that by 30 June 1983 DS-4 would be in a position to form a national party for the Dalits.⁴⁴

Role of BSP in Political movement

The Dalits constitute one of the poorest and marginalised sections of the population in Uttar Pradesh. Their socio-economic exclusion from the productive sources has made them suffer from the trauma of social inequality, economic backwardness and psychological inferiority. However, the conditions of Dalits have not remained that pathetic and horrible over the period. The socio-economic transformation took place even though the pace of change has been slow. The new employment opportunities in both public and private sectors have minimised their dependence on landownership thereby altering the nature of old patron-client relationship. Culturally, the Scheduled Castes have also improved their conditions. The catalyst for change has been education and spread of electoral process. Small urban elite have also come up within the Dalit community in the post-Independence period, particularly among the Chamars. They were the first to avail the education facilities and were consequently well placed to avail the benefits of the reservation policies. Some of them have prospered in their traditional business, which has equipped them to form the vanguard of the new Dalit assertiveness in mid-1980s. An emerging Dalit middle class comprising the academicians, Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, engineers, journalists and prospective entrepreneurs shaped the political consciousness of Dalit communities in Uttar Pradesh, and the formation of BSP strengthened the Dalit politics in the state.

The post-independence, Dalit Movement in U.P. was divided into three phases. The first was from 1956-1969 when Dalits decided to form their party under the leadership of

⁴³ Ibid, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Kamal Bharti, (1996), *KanshiramKe Do Chehre*, Rampur UP: Bodhisattva Prakashan, P. 13.

BhimRaoAmbedkar. The second phase is about the failure of Dalit political parties that enabled the Congress to secure Dalit support under the leadership of Indira Gandhi by sharing the slogan of 'GaribiHatao'. The third phase started from the early 1980s when the Dalit Movement entered into competitive democratic politics with the emergence of the BahujanSamaj Party. In the post criticism of Dalit Movement had distanced itself from the initiatives for social transformation and focused only on political motives and goals.⁴⁵ The emergence of political consciousness among Dalits in the post-Ambedkar phase was started after formation of Bahujan platform by Kanshi Ram in Uttar Pradesh.

Uttar Pradesh was witnessed a path-breaking movement under the leadership of Kanshi Ram who had put Dalit Politics in mainstream politics in the region.⁴⁶ It was also the era of emergence of Dalit Panthers. Kanshi Ram established a category called Bahujan, which comprises 85percent of the society.⁴⁷ He used this category explicitly as a political tool for the Dalit mobilisation. Keeping this view in his mind, Kanshi Ram established a non-political organisation called the All India Backward and Minorities Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) on December 6, 1973.⁴⁸ The membership of the organisation was open only to Dalits employed in the public sector. The BAMCEF widened its base swiftly across the country, though it remained unnoticed by the mainstream media. To counter this media bias, the organisation launched its own journal, "Oppressed Indian", and later scores of daily/weekly newspapers in most Indian languages.⁴⁹

In 1989, BSP entered into the competitive electoral politics as it was the time that the Dalit Movement in U.P. turned into a whole political movement with less focus on social reforms and economic equality. The BSP was successful in increasing its social base continuously over successive elections. The BSP's political strategy was mainly based on caste rather than class, even if it claims that the party works for the lower class people. However, it was heavily dependent on the lower castes and could garner political support

⁴⁵ SudhaPai, (2001), 'From Harijan to Dalits: Identity Formation, Political Consciousness and Electoral Mobilization of the scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh'. In Ghanshyam Shah (ed), *Dalit Identity and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage publication, p.286.

⁴⁶ AnandTeltumbde, (2006), "An Enigma called Kanshi Ram", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 4, Vol. 41, Issue no 43-44, pp. 4531-4532.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4533.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4534.

⁴⁹ Ibid,

only from the Scheduled Castes and no other sections of society. This development restricted the expansion of the BSP's electoral base.⁵⁰ Therefore; BSP brought a decisive and surprising shift in its basic ideology and electoral strategy. Apart from Dalits mobilization, BSP also focused on 'social engineering' to bring Brahmins and other upper castes together through the policy of Sarvajan. Though, the BSP claims in all public forums and political manifestos that its policy brings the Dalits and upper castes together, it included only Brahmins in its political strategy with explicit focus. This social engineering brought Dalits and Brahmins together, which resulted in a huge victory for the BSP in the 2007 State Assembly election in Uttar Pradesh.⁵¹

Conclusion:

The political activism among the Dalits in India has been expressed through the literature of social and political career of Ambedkar . It has broadens the understanding the socio-political-cultural conditions of Dalit communities that envisions the transformation of society through a visionary movement of Ambedkar. It also emphasisesfor the transmission of knowledge from one generation to other to build capacities of the future generations for an exploitation free society. Therefore, it has been learned that political activism among the Dalits has gradually evolved from Ambedkar's social movement to political activism and created a political space and challenged upper castes' hegemony in all spheres of life i.e., social, political, economic, and cultural activities. In fact, it is due to the political changes taking place at the grassroots level are making Dalit politics and literature progressive. In spreading the political movement of Dalits was closely associated with the agony, marginalisation and exploitation by the upper caste people. on the other hand it has empowers Dalit leaders to rise against exploitation and establishment of equality and egalitarian society.

In the larger context to understand the emergence Dalit politics was truly meaningful after presence of Kanshi Ram's social movement and formation of political party by the Dalit leader. The formation of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in UP marked the beginning of Dalits becoming a decisive political force in Indian politics. This was something distinct from the past when they had little else to do than seek favours and concessions from dominant political

⁵⁰ Jens Lerche, (2003), 'Hamlet, Village and Region: Caste and Class Difference Between Low Caste Mobilization in East and West UP'. In Roger Jeffery and Jens Lerche (eds), *Social and political Change in Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Manohar Publication, p.186.

⁵¹ A. K. Verma, (2007) "BSP's Strategy for Uttar Pradesh: Wooing The Brahmins for a New Alliance", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 25, pp. 2647-2648.

parties. So far Dalits were being treated as vote banks of upper caste candidates and political parties but at present they had become decisive voters and emerged as a active political leaders. This has emergee in earlier elections as a stark reality following the formation of BAMCEF and DS-4 that led to the birth of BSP. The special ideology of Dalit politics has always been focused on retributive justice, eradication of caste, proper implementation of constitutional provisions and protect the political leadership. The BSP was able to woo voters of down trodden castes and formed government in Uttar Pradesh. In the process the government adopted a programme that was particularly tempting for Dalits and helped the party in mobilization of the downtrodden. Thus with the advent of BSP, Dalits were definitely able to stand in the electoral politics of the country.

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