

DALIT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA AS A VEHEMENT PRESENTATION OF DISTINCTIVE VOICES OF DALITS: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT:

Whenever we talk or study about emancipation and movements of Dalits in India; one question comes to our minds who are Dalit? Dalit is a term generally associated with the Schedule castes. They possess large number of sub-castes and are usually found involved in performing menial jobs like scavenging, agricultural laboring, leather work etc. They are still the marginalized, oppressed and subjugated section of India today. Thus for the rectification of their lost status and respect, Dalit movements came in to play. The aim of these movements is to exclude the caste ideologies and shower the concepts of fraternity, egalitarianism in the society. This paper aims to highlight the role of Dalits movements in India, which enabled the Dalits to generate diversity of revolts or reactions for their lost identity and rights in the society of barbarians. Besides that these movements awakened Dalits about their discrimination and exploitation so that they could easily replace their miseries and tyrannies hurled on them by the upper caste hegemonies.

Key Words: *Dalit, Dalit Movements, Untouchability, Discrimination, Fraternity, Consciousness and Identity Upheaval.*

India is a country which believes in secularism but one harsh truth of Indian society is that the Dalits are not treated as human beings and are severely humiliated on different grounds. The practice of untouchability and humiliation of Dalits is still the concern of Indian people. In order to fortify and rectify the degraded identity and status of Dalits in the society of hegemonies, various great personalities took a step forward in order to resurrect their position in the society. For the upheaval of their grade in the society, these personalities with the illusionary power set in motion some movements and organisations. The aim of these movements and organisations was to arouse the Dalit consciousness so that they can generate a revolt against the prevailing hegemony and fight for their rights. The motive of Dalit movements was to mend their identity in the society of atrocities and

excursionists. Dalit movements emerge in different parts of the country so as to restore the socio- economic condition of Dalits. The impact of these movements dismantled such social impediments and halts and also ameliorated the condition of Dalits to some extent. It was only because of some great leaders who billow their vox against the barbaric treatment of upper classes towards Dalits. These include Mahatma Jotirao Phule, E.K. Nayar, B.R. Ambedkar, and Mahatma Gandhi etc., who took pains in order to snatch the rights of Dalits from the clutches of superior classes. According to Nick Crossley, the social movements are significant as: “they are the key agents for bringing about change within societies” (Crossley, *Making Sense of Social movements* 8). Initially the pathetic condition of Dalits was felt and explored by Jotirao Phule and then B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar was highly influenced by Marxism and gave an impetus to Mahar and Kunbi peasants in the form of a movement in order to destroy the supremacy of landlords. This movement was against the capitalists, landlords and upper class atrocities.

Dalit movements emerged in 1920s and were called as Adi movements. These movements were busy in exploring and developing the status and identity of Dalits in Indian society. The word ‘Adi’ means ‘original Indian’. In terms of ‘Adi’, Omvedt says: “the adi ideologies were pervasive ideas that won a popular base, as census reports show, and expressed the powerful emotional resistance to Brahmanism and caste hierarchy that was embodied in Dalit organisations everywhere in the colonial period” (Omvedt, *Dalit Visions* 39). These movements include the untouchables’ attack on upper castes in order to disintegrate the prevailing hegemony. The harbingers and participants of Adi movements claimed to be the aboriginals of India and their identity is defined on the basis of racism in the hierarchal system. The activists in these movements declared that it was the advent of Aryans to India that ossified their status from an indigenous to foreign. In terms of the emergence of Adi movements, Juergensmeyer states:

The Adi- Dravida movements in the south seems to be the first movements in the country to have formulated these ideas; although Ad Dharm in Punjab, in the north, claimed to be first use the concept of ‘Adi’. The ideas seems to have been taken by the Ad Dharm in Punjab as well as by the Adi Hindu movement in today’s Utter Pradesh (Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision* 25).

Thus Adi movements propagated their ideologies throughout India. The Adi movements further arrogate that the so called untouchables are the original residents of India and also are authentic masters of their land India. Regarding the authenticity of Adi Hindus as real Hindus, Omvedt further states: “It did not automatically follow from the argument that the ‘untouchables’ were Adi Hindus that they existed prior to, and separate from, the

Hindus. It could, albeit exceptionally, mean that the Adi Hindus, were the first and the ‘true’ Hindus” (Omvedt, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution* 122). The important Dalit Movements and their motives are highlighted below:

(i) Ad Dharm Movement

In 20th century colonial India, different movements aroused in diverse parts of India in order to liberate the Dalits from the webs of higher castes and provide them their self- identity, honour and self- worth. Ad Dharm movement was a movement appeared amid the Chamars in Punjab in 1925. The antecedent of this movement was Mangoo Ram. Some other oppressed leaders were also associated with this movement. Regarding Ad Dharm movement, first meeting was held in Jalandhar in 1925. In the same period, Mahar movement emerged in Maharashtra under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar. This movement rejected all the religions and their beliefs and was incorporated to provide a separate individuality for Dalits. The main objective Ad Dharm movement was to excavate curse of untouchability from the society and to develop a new identity for these depressed classes that would be free from taints and patches. The contribution of Ad Dharm movement also succeeded in awakening the intuitions and ideologies of the trampled communities throughout the state of Punjab. Besides that Ad Dharm movement propagated the poetry of Ravi Das. Ravi Das was a poet of Bhakti era and was like an apostle for Chamars. Ravi Das through his poetry challenged the hierarchy, tyranny, oppression and atrocities of the dominant classes as: “And I born to be a carrier or carrion/ am now the lowly bow/ they seek the shelter of my name/ servants of the Sun/ whose service is the service of the Lord” (Jeurgensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision* 86). Ad Dharm movement disseminated the new texts and myths and the poetry of Ravi Das in order to highlight their suppression and strategies to be taken for the dissociation of the belief of the dominant classes. The first concert of Ad Dharm movement was held in 1927. This conference was held in order to declare publically that the so called untouchables are the aboriginals of India and the so called Brahmins as aliens to our land. Besides that it was aimed at the legacy and fraternity among Dalits. A poster giving information about this conference as:

We are the original people of this country, and our religion is Ad Dharm. The Hindu qaum came from outside and enslaved us. When the original sound from the cunch was sounded, all the brothers came together- Chamar, Chuhra, Sainsi, Bhanrje, Bhil, all the untouchables- to make their problems known. Brothers, there are seventy million of us listed as Hindus, separate us and make us free. We trusted the Hindus, but they turned out to be traitors. Brothers the time has come: wake up, the government is listening to our cries. Centuries have passed, but we were asleep, brothers... Come together to form a new life (Jeurgensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision* 46).

It is evident from the texts that the word *qaum* is applied to the ‘untouchables’, which means ‘a nation’. The poster also reveals that the untouchables are equivalent to Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Ad Dharm is a religion which is the outcome of the India’s indigenous people, who are now humiliated and exploited on the basis of hierarchy and posted them at the bottom of hierarchical system. Despite such endeavours taken by the Ad Dharm movement towards the upliftment of Dalits; could not entirely transform the mental state of upper castes and hence the humiliation and discrimination towards the Dalits remained continuous.

(ii) Independent Labour Party (ILP)

Independent Labour party was emerged in 1936 in the hands of B.R. Ambedkar. This was a political movement aimed at the manumitting the Dalits in all aspects like social, political, economic and educational. The development of this party was very essential as all the prevailing political leaders were the members of the higher castes. It was obvious that they will never utter a word in favour of people of the lower castes. Since the lower class people do not have any political party that could have highlighted their pathetic condition. Thus for this purpose, B.R. Ambedkar germinated the Independent Labour Party in order to represent the Dalits in first election held in 1937. The purpose of this party was to elate and upheaval the status of inferior classes among in arena of atrocities. Besides that this party was directed towards the welfare of these exploited classes.

(iii) All India Schedule Caste Federation (AISCF)

All India Schedule Caste Federation was also initiated by B.R. Ambedkar in 1942. It was also a political party aiming at the harmony of all untouchables in order to emerge in the form of a forceful political party. This party was against the congress as they were not taking any step towards the development of Dalits. The foremost motive of this party was to concord the Dalits and polish off untouchability from the society.

(iv) Republic Party of India (RPI)

Republic Party of India (RPI) was actually the outgrowth of All India Schedule Caste Federation. The political party was produced in 1957 under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar. Equality and unity was the main concern of this party. It was a party launched against the barbaric representations of the upper classes. Republic Party of India has contributed a lot towards the restoration of Dalit condition in India. RPI meritoriously took part in the evolution of organisations of women, students and workers. The reason of the decline of this party was that all the members of this party took pride in themselves by resembling themselves with Ambedkar. This resulted in the feud and conflict between them. They engaged themselves in competing with each other and forgot their goal

of propagating their movement. As a result of this the party got ramified in to groups. It was because of their inner conflicts that the party failed to highlight the miseries and hardships faced by Dalits in the society of hegemonies.

(v) Dalit Panther Movement and Manifesto

The forking and dissociation of Republic Party of India (RPI) depressed and fussed the entire Dalit masses especially Dalit youth. The Dalit youth took some major steps in order to harmonize the Dalit masses and prepare them how to indulge themselves in strife against the prevailing ferocious order. The youth also teach them, what is wrong in their ideologies and what chief initiatives should be taken to refrain themselves, so that they can get their rights and justice in the society of superiors. This ideology of the Dalit youth gave rise to Dalit Panther Movement in 1970 in Maharashtra. The Dalits living in the villages were suppressed and humiliated mercilessly. In order to restrain these atrocities, Dalit Panther Movement was developed. The contribution of Dalit Panther movement is immense and countless towards the well- being of Dalits. Regarding the contribution of this movement, Hardtmann states:

The authors and poets in Dalit Sahitya were closely linked to the social and political activists in the Dalit Panthers. In other cases Dalit Panther members, not writers themselves, were strongly influenced by the literature and poetry; likewise, the poets, authors came to be influenced by the socio-political activities taking place and this was reflected in their writings. The fused networks of Dalit Sahitya/ Panthers also involved social workers at the grassroots level, with their work places among the urban people. Furthermore, the movement involved Dalit students and unemployed youths as well as urban workers and agricultural labourers in Maharashtra (Hardtmann, *The Dalit Movement in India* 72).

Dalit Sahitya and Dalit Panthers are same like the two sides of a same coin. After one year of its development, the plans and curriculum of Dalit Panther movement were introduced in a manifesto known as Dalit Panther Manifesto. As per this Manifesto, all those who are victims of social, political and economic suppression are our allies; power, money and prestige are our enemies. Dalit Panther Manifesto was published in 1973. The Manifesto was wholly and solely dedicated to B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jotirao Phule. The Manifesto was only in favour of Dalits who are entirely suppressed and oppressed in Indian society. Dalit Panther Manifesto is embedded with a revolt and rebellion against their tyrannies and atrocities.

In this Manifesto, Republic Party of India (RPI) was also criticized as the leaders of this party do not promulgate the party in accordance to the sayings of Ambedkar and hence muted the revolutionary voice against the upper classes. Due to their own mistakes, the hegemonies began to destroy them completely. Killings of the lower classes were at its zenith. This hideous and heinous panorama is delineated by Murugkar as: “In a period of one to one and a half year, 1,117 Dalits were murdered. The land grew barren, not a drop of water was available. Honour was violated, houses gutted, people killed. Along with very question of living, physical indignities grew sharper” (Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement* 237). Dalits compared their strife with the combat of Black Panthers and bluntly went against the Brahmanical order. The Dalit Panther Manifesto demanded the resurrection of Dalits in all social, political, economic and educational facets. Besides that they do not treat their movement as lowly and coward, but outspoken and candid. According to them, they have rejected their emotions and have determined to face the enemies in a fierce way. Dalit Panther Manifesto is famous for its three slogans. They are: there is no way out that would satisfy us, we do not want a little place in the Brahmin alley, our intention and ideologies is to dominate the whole country. The members of the Dalit panther Movement took some chief visionary and revolutionary strategies in order to rule India, but at the same time they are disdained and dejected with the prevalent legitimate order. Their hatred, reluctance, despondency and pressure of the legal authority are also visible in the final lines of Manifesto as: “the present legal system and state have turned all our dreams to dust. To eradicate all the injustice against the dalits, they must themselves become rulers. This is the people’s democracy. Sympathizes and members of the Dalit Panthers, be ready for the final struggle of dalits” (Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement* 239). Initially the Dalit Panther movement was devoted to the ideologies of Ambedkar, but later dissociated in to two parts. The cause of such division was that the Panthers were accused of being associated with Marxist vision and thought. Thus the well developed and established movement finally fell short of a good leadership. It was Arunkamble and other leaders who for the second time reconciled all the matters and Dalit panther movement got a new birth in 1974. Despite of many problems and divisions faced by the Dalit Panther movement, it still succeeded in fortifying and restoring the Dalit condition to a large extent. There are some other movements such as Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF), Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharash Samiti, Bahujan Samaj Party etc., whose contribution is immense and huge towards the rectification of Dalit condition and identity. These movements through their strategies have changed the condition of Dalits to a large extent. But the fact is that even in the modern India Dalits are still exploited, discriminated and harassed. Rohith Vemula case; Burning of 18 year old girl in Uttar Pradesh by upper caste hegemonies recently; a Dalit man beheaded in Utter Pradesh when he was trying to enter the dominant caste temple. These incidents are the testimonials of upper caste dominance and tyrannies in the so called secular and modern India.

CONCLUSION:

From the predating analysis it is absolved that the untouchables of the present time were the aboriginals or original residents of India. They had their own well developed culture and tradition and were highly respectable and dignified persons. Their degradation of lordliness and dignity was only because of the invasion of Aryans to their mother land, India. The development of Varna system by the Aryans localized the aboriginals (Dalits) in to the lowest Varna and sprouted with a new nomenclature known as Dalits or Untouchables. In order to remove this baneful and hideous practice of untouchability from the society, many acclaimed personalities like Jotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Mangoo Ram etc., initiated many movements famously known as Dalit Movements. These movements were aspired to overhaul the lost dignity and identity of these depressed classes. These movements meritoriously gave a new impetus to the Dalit cause. After gaining the consciousness, Dalits candidly began to fight for their rights and justice. So the contribution of Dalit movements towards the fortification of Dalit condition immeasurable and uncountable.

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