

Evolution of Historical Consciousness Among Dalit Women with Special Reference to Chamar's of Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

This paper deals with social and historical consciousness among Dalit Women in Uttar Pradesh from 1950 to the present with special reference to Chamar women. It will examine the process of evolution of historical consciousness of Dalit communities through their social struggles and movements, and their emergence as a 'political public' in the State-oriented democratic political setting of contemporary Uttar Pradesh.

This paper is represented through stories and narratives that span the oppressed historical moments of the marginalized, documenting various social upheavals in Uttar Pradesh. The paper takes various alternative sources, alive in the oral tradition and 'collective memory' of the grassroots to explain contemporary history of Dalit mobilization and evolution of consciousness.

It will unfold the suppressed multiple layers of Dalit consciousness, hitherto ignored by mainstream discourse. Uttar Pradesh has its own unique geographical, social and cultural features that impact the lives of Dalits within the State; it is also a new dimension to explore the knowledge about Chamar women as well as Dalit Women agitation and historical consciousness in new time-space.

Keyword: Consciousness, Identity, Democracy, Dalitwomen, Social Exclusion.

Introduction

Indian society is a mosaic of many social groups. It is quite undeniably the most stratified society in the world. Over and above huge income disparities, there are caste, religious, and community differences that are deeply engraved into everyday social relations. No doubt, the nature of caste and community interactions has changed over time, but considerations along ascriptive lines still remain important markers of the social domains. Here the voices and protests of Dalit women are almost invisible.

In fact when we use phrases like, marginalization of women in the development process, or feminization. Except for a few, the total segment of this population leads a miserable life. Socially discarded for a long period of time, they are compelled to live a vulnerable life. In colonial period writings of orientals: Max Mueller, Katherine Mayo describes the pathos of Indian women. Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927) portrayed dalit women as "Bazaar dayi" with special reference to Chamar women. According to Charu Gupta, dalit women denotes as thagni (cheat), chatori (greedy), kutany (dirty vamps). In the writings of Uma Chakrabati, Ram Narayan Singh Rawat, Badri Narayan, Sharmila Rege there are much knowledge about dalit women.

As untouchables and out caste Dalit women face not just violence inflicted on them by the dominant castes, but also state violence at homes and outside. Chamar Women is socially excluded and face widespread discrimination on the basis of work, Burdened with work both outside and inside the home. Chamar women get the historical awakening for their rights, social development to organize themselves for political consciousness, participation, and mobilization in Uttar Pradesh.

Bernard S. Cohn (1959) described about 'little kingdoms' for a lineage, usually land lords. How their hegemony influenced the social change and their influence on the life of venerable sections in rural societies. As Ram Narayan Singh Rawat (2012) talked about the Dalits achhut identity. How lower caste Associations and Caste Panchayats played a crucial role for Dalit's ideology and identity construction

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as well as social mobility. Dalit women are the victims of economic, social, literary, cultural, and political exclusion.

This paper will track the unequal distribution of opportunities and to explore the symbolic as well as very material meanings of inequality among the Dalit and Chamar women. It will explore the condition of Chamar women who are facing double discrimination, being a Dalit and being Chamar women in Uttar Pradesh and provide new dimension for their social development in present time and space.

The formation of the Dalit identity and proper understanding of the evolution of identity movement there is a need to enquire the Identity formation is a historical context. Identity formation is based on the experience of the Dalits in relation to the community.

The experience about oneself and the community is a part of the existing socio-economic, political, cultural order. Identity as a concept is based on the experience of oneself in relation to others, similar beliefs and cultural expressions that cause to formulate the identity. This can as well be applied to the identity formation of the Dalits women against the backdrop of various phases of the consciousness building movements.

Given the complexity and multifaceted nature of identity, the question of how one assesses a social identity is important. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the ingenuity of social scientists, many different methods have been developed over the years. Disputes have also developed as to which approach is the best. Probably the simplest way to designate a social identity is to assign it arbitrarily, as is typically done in the minimal group experiments. Almost as simple is an approach in which group membership per se is the basis for assuming social identification.

Thus, if one can determine that a person is a woman, a professor, or an Indian, it is possible to assume that the social identity is present. A problem for this assumption, however, is that social identity is more appropriately viewed as a subjective, rather than objective, state. Thus, while every student at a university can reasonably be called a student, it is not necessarily true that every student feels strongly identified with that category. Knowing how important or central an identity is to the person is necessary in order to predict how much the identity will influence the person's beliefs, emotions, and actions. To deal with this potential problem, many measures of identification have been developed in which the respondent is asked to indicate how important or unimportant a particular identity is. Social identity involves more than just categorization, however. As suggested earlier, key features of social identification include sets of beliefs, emotional associations, and motivational considerations.

Some investigators have developed more extensive questionnaires to tap a variety of aspects of social identification. One issue in developing such measures is how generic versus how identity-specific they should be. A generic measure is one that can be used to assess any social identification, and thus it allows investigators to make comparisons between

different social identities in terms of their strength or centrality.

An item on this type of generic scale could be the following (this one taken from the Collective Self- Esteem Scale developed by Luhtanen and Crocker): "Being a member of a social group is an important reflection of who I am." In this case, any specific social identity group could be substituted for the general term "social group."

There has been a long tradition of intellectual reconstruction of the Dalit identity in India. The eminent activists who contributed to the process include Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar, among others. Before them, Buddhist philosophy and the Bakti saints made a remarkable contribution in the form of questioning the Brahmanical hegemony.

They questioned the religious restrictions on worship during the 10th and 13th centuries, because of which the Bakti movement became popular among the shudras and ati-shudras. It was the Bhakti movement, which helped and constructs an identity in opposition to the Brahmanical identity.

The mystics who led the Bhakti movement include Ramanand and Raidas in the North, Chaitanya and Chandidasa in the East, Eknath, Choka Mela, Thukaram and Narsinh Mehta in the West and Ramanuja, Nimbaraka and Basava in the South. Their contribution to the anti-Brahmin thought lies in opposing caste distinctions and asserting equality before god. M.G. Ranade called the Bakti movement being unbrahmanical. However; the saint poets did not advocate detachment from normal worldly life as a prerequisite for the salvation. They advocated normal family life in society. Unlike the Brahmin priests, Bakti poets disapproved of renunciation, asceticism and celibacy as the means of enlightenment. The significant contribution of the Bakti poets is that the untouchables identified themselves as anti-brahmanical by which they formed a unique non-Brahmin identity. Identity construction is a product of colonial political modernity in India.

In this process, caste or communal Associations played an important role in identify formation and socio-political assertion of community. During the national movement, at one level political mobilization based upon on issues took place, at the same time, caste was an important source of mobilization of people. As Indian social organization is based on caste hierarchy, this process crystallized the caste identity. This became a medium or platform to express the collective interests of communities. Uttar Pradesh has been laboratory of political assertion and transformation of dalits women as well as Chamar women identity formation aspiration to capture the political power, which they believe to transform the larger project of emancipation of Dalits from several centuries' old misery. The proposed study is an enquiry into the dynamics of the Lower Caste Associations in shaping the notion of Dalitism and its multiple processes.

The Lower Caste Associations had played an important role in the development of Dalit movements of Uttar Pradesh. These Associations

could be defined as try to get the aim by the people of Lower Caste group. In other words, when people of same caste gathered at a place, to a definite aim, the objective of Association of Lower Caste being established. Association is nominated on the basis of their specific aims and definite castes/sub castes. And if it is necessary then these are registered.

British rule in India provided a context for redefinition and articulation of Indian social concepts with new tone. Indian social systems were judged with the parameter of western social systems. This context provided a chance for swapping social reforms in different parts of India. Much of academic history as focused on this process in the name of renaissance. But this process by and large confined to the problem that elite society was put to during the British rule. At the same mainstream renaissance in India could not made caste discrimination and untouchability as an issue.

Indian renaissance though, mainly confined to elite society, fresh ideas slowly percolated in the lower rungs of society which produced the organic intellectuals as spokes persons of their social problems with new tones and rigour. We have bunch of Dalit intellectuals starting from Jotiba Phule to Ambedkar who propounded the social thought that represent the deep rooted problems and possible solutions for Dalit society. Parallel to caste Hindu, caste and cultural Association, Dalit castes also initiated caste Associations with twin objectives of social emancipation and articulation of their problems with a united voice. In the much of academic and activists writings more emphasis has been devoted to certain popular personalities and their ideas. This exercise brought about two problems: firstly, organic consciousness of Dalits at grass root levels has not been brought into limelight, secondly, the creation of Dalit self with the ideas propounded by important Dalit leader and its situational operational aspects had not been documented by the existing academic literature. Next to the Bakti movement, the "Adi" movements were significant in the formation of the Dalit identity. Gail Omvedt argues that "The mobilization of the oppressed and exploited sections of society, the peasants, Dalit, women and low castes that Phule had spoken of as shudras and ati-shudras occurred on a large scale in the 1920s and 1930s, under varying leaderships and with varying ideologies." The "Non-Aryan" or the non-brahmin movements in Maharashtra and Tamilnadu, the Dalit movements in Panjab and Karnataka were against the Aryan conquest and Brahman exploitation through religion and culture. These movements, being aimed at the argument of the original inhabitants, have a common tag "Adi" which means original inhabitant. Most of the Dalit movements like "Adi-Dharma" in Punjab, "Adi-Hindu" in UP and Hyderabad, "Adi-Dravida," "Adi-Andhra" and "Adi-Karnataka" in South India have a common claim of the Dalits and Shudras being the original inhabitants of India. Gail Omvedt writes: It was in the 1920s, however, that Dalits began to organize strongly and independently throughout many regions of India.

The most important of the early Dalit movements were the Ad-Dharm movement in the Punjab (organized 1926); the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra, mainly based among Mahars which had its organizational beginnings in 1924; the Namashudra movement in Bengal; the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamilnadu; the Adi-Karnataka movement; the Adi-Hindu movement mainly centered on Kanpur in U.P.

The ideas propounded by important Dalit leaders like Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Ji Maharaj, Periyar, Narayana Guru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had significant impact on the Dalits of U P, for not only generated new ideas but also provoked them to initiate a platform to articulate their demands. This move is mainly aimed to fight against deep rooted prejudice and atrocities against Dalits. Swami Achhuta Nand Harihar started a movement in Uttar Pradesh to create awareness among the people of Lower Caste which further came as "Adi Hindu Movement." His activities and idea created a tide of awareness against inequality towards lower caste peoples in not only Uttar Pradesh but also in whole Northern India. He had maintained good relations with the Dalit leaders of South India. His "Adi Hindu movement" systematically popularized the ideas on lower caste as well as Dalit progress in U.P. This process resulted in evolution of several Lower Caste Associations development and identity construction as well.

Many historical and anthropological studies have extensively documented the state of Uttar Pradesh and various facets of its rural life. Susan Wadley studied Karimpur village and published her work, *Shakti: Power in the Conceptual Structure of Karimpur Religion* (1975), from Chicago. To continue the exploration, Bruce W Derr (1979) studied the growing abundance of food and poverty in the same village, Karimpur during the period 1925-75. Bernard S Cohn (1987) studied the Chamars of Madhopur (Senapur). Incidentally, Senapur is a Thakur-dominated agricultural village situated 25 miles north of Varanasi (Benares). Cohn, in his study, explored the functioning of various pasts such as traditional and historic pasts of the Chamars of this village. William Rowe (1968), in the same village, looked into the process of mobility initiated among the Noniya – traditionally salt-makers asserting their Chauhan status. Rudra Datt Singh (1948) also studied the same village to understand the division of labour. He collaborated with C S Coon in bringing out the discussion on the unity and extensions of an Indian village. R D Singh also studied the theme Family Organisation in a North Indian Village (1948).

A study of community project in a "Rajput" and a "Tyagi" village was published in S C Dube's book, *India's Changing Villages* (1958). Mc Kim Marriott (1955) did intensive fieldwork in the early 1950s, in the Kishangarhi village of Aligarh district in UP. In Faizabad district, Harold Gould (1958) selected a small village called Berauli for understanding jajmani (client-patron) relations as well as the political processes operating at the local and the district levels. P C Joshi (1974) lived in village Bijatka in Meerut district and recorded his field observations about the social classes in the rural setting. Jean Dreze spent a

little over a year in Palanpur in 1983-84, and had since revisited the village on many occasions to study the functioning of the village economy. Raheja's work *Poison in the Gift* (1988) was based on intensive work in village Pahansu, in Saharanpur district.

U.B.S. Raghuvanshi's *shree Chanvar Purana* (between 1910-1916), the *Jaiswar Mahasabha's Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha* (1926), Pandit Sunderlal Sagar's *Yadav Jivan* (1929), and Ramnarayan Yadvenu's *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas* (1942). Jatiyas, claimed a Jatav-Kshatriya status by associating their lineage to the Yadav tribe of Lord Krishna. Jatiya Chamars were predominantly located in western Uttar Pradesh, with a large presence in the Meerut, Agra, Moradabad, and Badun districts. Jaiswara Chamars were dominant in eastern Uttar Pradesh, where they asserted a Kashatriya status by claiming descent from the Chanvan dynasty. Jatiyas and Jaisarasa are the two major Chamar jatis, and together they constituted two-fifth of the Chamar population of Uttar Pradesh.

The *Jaiswar Mahasabha of Lahore's Suryavansh Kshatriya*, a ten-page chapbook that had a print run of a thousand, is a simplified retelling of the *Chanvar Purana* story. Written in a very accessible style, it addresses the Chamars directly, urging them to liberate themselves by reclaiming their true Kshatriya identity.

The publication of these two texts, in Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh and Lahore in Punjab, is also an indication that the story of *Chanvar Purana* had become popular in North India, and it is thus worth discussing Raghuvanshi's themes and claims at some length. Secondly the evolution of a Chamar agenda represents a radical departure from the first stage, which lasted from 1922 to 1928. Ganesh Shankar vidyarthi noted this shift in an editorial of April 27, 1925.

This period was marked by the "birth of a new Adi-Hindu movement in north India" among the achhuts of Uttar Pradesh, led by Swami Achhutanand. Vidyarthi underlined the popularity of the Adi-Hindu movement from Delhi to Kanpur, and especially in the Agra-Etawah region of western Uttar Pradesh. In their biographies of Swami Achhutanand the Chamar writers Mangal Jatav and Rajpal Singh put the first meeting of the Adi-Hindu movement in Etawah in December 1923. In 1926 police reports began to mention meetings in Etawah, Allahabad, and Kanpur in which Achhutanands declared that achhuts were the original inhabitants and rulers of India. Despite these early signs, the December 1927 All-India Adi Hindu Conference organized by Swami Achhutanand can be taken as the foundation of the movement, when its program was formally announced. The movement acquired a formidable presence in western and central Uttar Pradesh in 1928.

Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu published *Bharat ke Adi Nivasiyon Ki Sabhyat* in Lucknow. Even though Jigyasu was a close associate of Swami Achhutanand, he was not a Dalit. Mahant Bhodanand Mahasthvir mentioned his own work in his

introduction to Jigyasu's book. Jigyasu addressed not just Chamars or Dalits but 80 percent of India's population peasants, workers, artisans, lower castes, tribal peoples, and "untouchables." His work is the first conception of bahujan (oppressed majority) politics by a Chamar intellectual and activist. But despite his inclusive vision the issues he raised primarily concerned the Dalits.

Jigyasu opened his book with an appeal to all Dalits: *Adi-nivasi friend! Embrace this true glorious history, which the Arya jati destroyed through their cunning and deceit. Read this to erase from your mind weakness, confusion, shame; open your heart like a lotus to the light of reawakening.*

Jigyasu's call reflects the efforts of Dalit intellectuals of the 1920s to retrieve a history of "untouchables" from Brahmanical sources. They saw the unearthing and recovery of a Dalit history erased by the Aryans and the Hindus as the new agenda of Dalit historiography. Dalit activists and writers unanimously rejected "what the Brahman-pandits have said with regard to 80 percent of the population, that they are descendants of the natural-unnatural succession of an illegitimate or mixed varna. According to Jigyasu, the victorious Aryans had erased "the glorious literature and history of their opponents, the daityas-danavas-asurs, by characterizing them as black and irrational people in their epics. Because of this, no historical records remained with which to write a history of dalit and Shudra jatis.

The chamars and Dalits writings and the strategies of political organization that they used suggest their consciousness movement. They claimed Kshatriya status by demanding status equal to that of caste Hindus. The core difficulty confronted by the Chamar activists was the fact that their "impure" origin and "unclean" occupation condemned them to an "untouchable" present, and this fate was recognized and accepted by the British. By writing histories of their caste and by political mobilization their community, the Chamars challenged British and Hindu representations of both their past and their present.

A more inclusive achhut identity, which sought to define all "untouchables" as Adi-Hindus came in to existence. Writing histories that identified Dalits as the original inhabitants of India and launching political struggles to mobilize all "untouchable" castes in Uttar Pradesh, chamars were at the forefront of the Adi-Hindu movement. This phase also saw the beginning of a new politics of intervention, in which an achhuty agenda for social and political transformation through state action was put forward. The idea of a united achhut identity and politics acquired dramatic popular support among various Dalit caste groups beginning with the Adi-Hindu movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and it continued to gain popularity as the Scheduled Caste Federation emerged in the 1940s and further in the Republican Party of India.

This idea formed the platform upon which a successful political mobilization was made possible.

The achhut identity is equally vibrant, notions of Dalit identity: the Jatavs, Raidassis, Kureels, and Ad-Hindus claimed Kshatyriya status, and the Ad-Dharmis saw themselves as a small community outside of Hinduism. In Uttar Pradesh, the Scheduled Castes Federation was the first organizations around the notion of a united achhut identity with a common agenda. The Republican Party of India was formed in order to negotiate the new opportunities that independence had brought and help redefine Dalit political objectives, without abandoning the commitment to an achhut identity and politics.

The role of Congress and Kishan movements of Uttar Pradesh gave some condition for the awakening to the Dalit women. Democracy played a pivotal role in the process of creating consciousness and identity. Women are key member of the family by which awakening and consciousness run through generations. The emergence of Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party asserted Dalit in its glorified form. Specially Bahujan Samaj Party Leadership prominently used the Historical icons, folklores, Stories, Dramas to awake the Dalit mass for their development and mobilized Dalit mass in regional level as well as whole northern India. Now the political mobilization for the Dalit became more successful.

Conclusion

Dalit women of Uttar Pradesh get the social awakening which come them from their leaders and family's male persons in defined form. Their belief and faith became more sustainable in social consciousness and mobilization. Dalit women were actively participating in the Lower caste associations, Anti caste movements and Ambedkar led Movements in the pre independence period. They are still bearing the burden double-day, sexual division of labor and overall patriarchal ideology and not saying anything about it. Why is it so? It is not sufficient to answer it only in terms of political economy and brahminical ideology. It is generally argued by many social thinkers that in India women are protected by community, caste, kinship and family networks. This neglects the fact that women are the gateways of caste system and the crucial pivot on whose purity - sanctity axis the caste hierarchy is constructed. Despite these Ideological developments, dalit women are marginalized and subjugated. Dalit Movement has remained patriarchal and sees the dalit women's oppression merely as caste oppression in spite this in the process of Identity construction and evolution of historical consciousness Dalit women as well as Chamar Women get aware about their Socio-political, cultural and economic rights. They are able to ask for social Justice and know what is just for their future.

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