

# Perspective of Dalit Question in Post-Independent India

## Abstract

The Word 'Dalit' refers to the ideological socio-political transformation of scheduled castes and ex-untouchables. It indicates their heightened protest against centuries old upper-caste hegemony by way to rejection of upper-caste cognitive paradigms and creation of their own cultural idioms, literature and ethnic harmony. Ultimately, the word 'Dalit' denotes a complete liberation from the oppression and exploitation in all aspects of Indian society and human life.

Sociologists refer Dalits as a class and they emphasise that it is only historical phenomenon. One can not see class as a graded equal 'structure' or even as a category which happens in human relationship formatted on hierarchical and endogamic factors. In the case of Dalits, their relationship with the upper castes/classes, who have socioeconomic and politico-cultural dominance, determines their interests and consciousness. However interests and consciousness are not the same phenomena nor do they have a one-to-one relationship. At different times and places, consciousness may differ despite of interests remaining the same. In the context of Dalits, the conscious is different from what one can see in the case different castes of 'scheduled caste' and 'Harijans'. Consciousness is a phenomenal projection and an instrument of assertion of the rights of the oppressed people through cultural objects and activities. The question is not simple of bread and butter for Dalits, but of social honour, social standing, social equality and socio-cultural upgradation of scheduled castes as very humans.

The research in social sciences, within the broad philosophical or ideological frame work, here achieved substantial advances and improvements in understanding varied forms of political, social and protest movements and anti-establishment organizations in India. The hegemonization process in socio-political institutions always projected overlordship in defining the theme and designs of historical reconstruction during the colonial and post-colonial times. A new social language equips the aspiring groups of people with new beliefs, values and norms. A powerful conceptual tool is thus created for examining dominance in everyday life in all aspects. A social movement is successful if its ideological or cognitive apparatus is powerful enough to bring about commensurate structural changes in the society. Change dominate the ages. The tradition which kept the caste enigma as a tool to maintain graded inequality among Indians came to be discussed in open places and writings and speeches which are dare to meet any challenge. The target is attaining egalite, the equality as humans. This paper aims to deal with Dalit question and the causes led to the rise of Dalits upsurge in India.

In Marxism, the term Dalit has to be a class emerging from the dissolution of all classes, a class in a civil society and not a class of civil society. Such a class has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, the wrong done to it is general and not a particular wrong. In India, after the decline of Buddhism, such as a class has no traditional status but only a human status. Perhaps, it is a class which seeks a total or a complete emancipation from the chains of dominance, hegemony and control. Gail Omvedt rightly says this particular class is the class of proletariat.<sup>1</sup> Although class consciousness is determined by existence and not vice-versa, it becomes a means of uniting and mobilizing the proletariat. Is such collective consciousness commensurate with the existential conditions of the proletariat? George Lukecs says that 'for a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interest and consciousness enable it or organise the whole of society in accordance with the class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive movement? This does not preclude the use of force. It does not mean that the class-interests destined to prevail and thus to uphold the interests of the society as whole can be guaranteed automatic victory.'<sup>2</sup>

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## Anthology : The Research

One can never perceive Dalits and caste Hindus in such a situation of class struggle. Can Dalits be treated as a thing, one of the categories of Indian society? Gandhijee called them 'Harijan' and perhaps, a sense of compassion and empathy is reflected through the use of word 'Harijan' which means God's gift, like any other-human beings.<sup>3</sup> It was an arrangement for a protective discrimination.<sup>4</sup> But Dr. Ambedkar rejected and protested the word 'Harijan' as another identical word to reidentity the 'untouchables' or Dalits and untouch the status quo policy in social and economic life of caste feudal society.<sup>5</sup> The word 'Harijan' was replaced by 'scheduled castes' which actually does not imply any caste included in the Varnasramic design.<sup>6</sup> After independence, the question of 'social justice' and 'empowerment' of the Dalits by providing reservation in jobs has been made a central concern of power politics in India. A new class of beneficiaries and leadership emerged from among them. The articulate leadership of the scheduled castes thought it is necessary to create ideological and political militancy. Thus, the Dalit class is coined as a revolutionary phase in Dalits transformation.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, The Word 'Dalit' refers to the ideological socio-political transformation of scheduled castes and ex-untouchables. It indicates their heightened protest against centuries old upper-caste hegemony by way to rejection of upper-caste cognitive paradigms and creation of their own cultural idioms, literature and ethnic harmony. Ultimately, the word 'Dalit' denotes a complete liberation from the oppression and exploitation in all aspects of Indian society and human life.

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The question of 'social status' has been central point in case 'Dalits', though the economic standing and political power continue to remain substantive issues in determining their position in Indian society. Several scholars have emphasised that principle of purity-impurity is a scalar yardstick, and it operates to keep the different castes separate from one another.<sup>11</sup> Differences in the degree of pollution thus creates closed segment in terms of inclusion of some and exclusion of other members.<sup>12</sup> All interactions and

ties, commensal and connubial, are guided by the principle of pollution-purity that is endogamy in nature. Anti-caste movements were launched initially against such pollution-purity-based hierarchization of caste groups. Violation of cultural restrictions imposed upon various lower castes resulted in the imitation of styles of life of upper by lower castes, and this process of imitation of styles of life is characterised as Sanskritization.<sup>13</sup> Mindlessly, the entire social and cultural terrains have been thrown into turmoil. It has thrown the balance between the traditional society and the modern state into jeopardy, moving away from the earlier 'fit' between social diversity and democratic institutions to a growing lack of fit between the two.<sup>14</sup> In the process, the state itself has become more centralised and more oppressive, particularly in case of the deprived, the weak, the discriminated and the excluded-victimised sections of the society.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-independence period of six decades, various efforts have been made to reduce the thickness of the enigma of caste in the social process and in time eliminate it from the operation of the same. These efforts have been unsuccessful. Part of these efforts is based on the idea that as secularism will undermine communal and religious identities and hatreds, it will undermine caste identities and hatreds as well, or as held by some others that class consciousness grows, caste consciousness will decline. But secularism will never unite religions groups or castes and moreover, it will never undermine the difference between different castes and groups unless or until it annihilates the caste or caste identity.<sup>16</sup> Instead, secularism will be a compromising word to the caste and communal elements, because casteism is a religious phenomenon. Until Hinduism exists, it will persist as an indomitable bodyguard.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, in the last few decades, the Dalits came out to darely register their disappointments with the Indian state and Bihar state and its nexus with the dominant caste groups due to the continuation of oppression and discrimination. They started seeking out their own future on the basis of their own identities and numbers. This led to a strong mobilization twisted by the consciousness of caste, sub-caste, tribe, ethnocentric and other identities.<sup>18</sup> The Dalit upsurge is now in competition with the other social groups to prove a mettlesome participation in resisting the oppression and consolidating the Dalit solidarity and empowerment. This upsurge is not a caste based war, but an anti-caste war for social and economic equality. This struggle is found to mobilise beyond the logic of class struggle or socialism. Dalits are quite clear about what they want to do for their socio-economic and political solidarity on par with the other backward communities and minorities. They constitute a major challenge to both the politics of the left and the politics of Brahmanical forces and so called 'new social movements' of new elites of backward castes. Dalits also register their challenge to the Nehruvian perspective which guided and prophesized the post-independent hegemonist thinking on social change, economic development, modernization, secularism modern education and electoral democracy.<sup>19</sup> All these were supposed to move the country towards a

progressive, non-hierarchical, non-segmental open society. In this regard, the role of Satya-Shodhak Samaj by Jotiba Phuley, Republican Party of India by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit Panthers of India by Thirumavalavan, Bahujan Samaj Party by Kanshi Ram, Puratchi Bharatam by M. Murthy and Puthiya Tamilagam by Dr. Krishnasamy is of great historical importance.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the emergence of Dalits and their upsurge will further improve and develop the sense of mission launched by the leaders like Jotiba Phuley, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and M.C. Raja and others whose leadership paved the way for their ultimate liberation.

#### **References**

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