

Movement for the Changing Social Status of Untouchables in India: A Sociological Study

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Abstract: *Untouchable identity is a complex one. It encompasses not only a long history of struggle against religious discourse and discrimination, but also increasingly against socio-economic structures. The untouchable identity relates not merely to a denial of rights but also a demand for dignity, and in some cases a desire for revolution. Hence, the struggles of the Dalits have not merely centered on issues such as Untouchability, perpetuation of atrocities, minimum wages, land rights, employment and political representation but also issues of identity, self-respect and dignity. As Kothari argues, the untouchables identity that has emerged, now seeks to turn the logic of "casteism" on its head and we find that those who would normally seek out the obliteration of caste distinctions are those who are seeking to use it to change the social order.*

Article 330 and 332 of the Constitution provides for reservation of 79 seats in the Lok Sabha and 557 in the Vidhan Sabha, for the Scheduled caste seats in Lok Sabha and 315 in Vidhan Sabha. However it is noticeable that those who get elected belong to the ranks of the educated, wealthier lot and those taking a more militant line are denied party representation. But in the present system such opportunities are still limited and many MLA/MPs find themselves being co-opted by the ruling elite or unable to use their political powers to bring about socio-economic change. Hence the introduction of political democracy or economic equality has proved problematic.

1. INTRODUCTION

In present time is an historic movement not related only Dalit's, but for all untouchables fight to our basic human rights and principles of justice, equality, liberty etc. India a rising star and increasingly important player on the world stage must not be allowed to ignore the in justice and oppression within its own borders any longer. In Hindu traditional society of India, Dalit status has often been historically associated with traditional occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as any involving scavenger, sweeping, meet seller, leather work, Hunting and drum beating, butchering or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses waste. Untouchables worked manual labours cleaning streets, latrines, sewers. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting to the individual and this pollution was considered contagious. as a result, Dalit were commonly segregated, and banned from full participation in Hindu society. For example, they could not enter a temple, school or well and were required to stay outside the village. Elaborate precautions were sometimes observed to prevent incidental contact between untouchables and higher Hindus.

Discrimination against untouchables still exists in rural areas in the private sphere, in every day matters such as access to eating places, schools, temples, water sources. Historically, the caste system has formed the social and economical frame work for the life of Indian peoples. In its essential form, this caste system involves the division of people into a hierarchy of unequal social groups where fundamental rights and duties are assigned based on the birth and caste are not subject to change. Untouchables are "out castes" falling outside the traditional four classes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Dalite are typically considered low, impure and polluting based on their birth and traditional occupation, thus they face multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and exclusion from the rest of society.

Basically in this study means of untouchables to take of Dalit's. The word of "Dalit" may be derived from Sanskrit language, and means "ground" "suppressed" "crushed or" broken to pieces". Firstly used of this word by **Mahatma Jyoti Ba Rao Phule** in nineteenth century, and in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile " Untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus. But in present times of many Dalit use the term to move away from the more derogatory terms their caste name or even the term untouchable. The contemporary use of Dalit is centered on the idea that as a people they may have been broken by oppression but they survive and even thrive by finding meaning in the struggle of their existence towards human dignity.

Mahatma Gandhi coined the new term, "Harijans", meaning children of God **Dr. B.R.Ambedkar** proposed the words" protestant Hindus" or Non conformist. Finally, as recommended by the Simon commission, the scheduled castes was adopted by the Government. In addition the terms basically related scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/ST) are the official terms used in Indian Government documents to identify former" Untouchables and tribes. However, in 2008 the National commission for scheduled castes noticing that "Dalit" was used interchangeably with the official term "Scheduled Castes" called the term "Unconstitutional" and asked state Governments to end its use. After the order, the chhattisgarh state Government ended the official use of the word" Dalit"

AdiDravida, Adi Karnataka, Adi Andhra and AdiDharmi are word used in many state as: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karala, Karnataka and Punjab to identify people of former" Untouchable"

2. UNTOUCHABLE'S IN MODERN INDIA

In 20th century various social, religious and political movement rose up in India against the caste system and in support or aware of the human rights of the Dalit community. After the independence of India in 1950, the constitution of India was adopted and largely due to the influence of **Dr. B.R.Ambedkar**. He was chairman of the constitutional drafting committee; it departed from the norms and traditions of the caste system in favor of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity, guaranteeing all Indian citizens basically human rights regardless of the caste, creed, gender or ethnicity. The implementation and enforcement of these principles has unfortunately, been an abysmal failure.

The agrarian struggles and social reform movements that took place in India in the latter half of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century, and the independence movement threatened the old order based on custom and introduced ideas of protest and challenge instead of acceptance and submissiveness. The struggles threw up many leaders from the lower strata. It was the agitations and movements that they led that compelled the authorities to initiate many of the measures which in later years were absorbed into the welfare policies for the poor and deprived sections.

The appointment of a commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to look after the interests and welfare of these people, was a landmark in the history of the country. The Untouchability offence Act, 1955 or Act No XXII of 1955 was still further step towards the removal of the social disabilities, and social disabilities are treated as offences punishable.

Despite the fact that "Untouchability" was abolished under India's constitution in 1950, the practice of "Untouchability" the imposition of social disabilities on persons by reason of their birth in certain castes, remains very much a part of rural India. "Untouchables" may not use the same wells, and visit the same temples, drink and eat from the same pots in rural India. Dalit children are face discrimination in the school life. Mostly dalits continue to live in extreme poverty of our life, without land or opportunities for better employment or education. Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts top dominant caste creditors.

N.PaulDiwakar is presently the convenor of the national campaign on Dalit Human Rights formed in 1998, is a coalition of civil society organizations and dalit activists to address the issues of human rights and development concerns of dalits and strengthen the movement for the elimination of the practice of discrimination and untouchability and violence against dalits. The so-called sehcheduled castes of India, erstwhile untouchable communities and presently termed

dalits by most movements political bodies in the country, number 167.2 million people (census 2001). In addition, there are at least 42 million Muslim, sikh and Christian dalit who in one form or another are vulnerable to discrimination and also to different and particular form of backlash violence.

3. UNTOUCHABILITY A CRIME

Indian constitution provide equally rights and opportunities of each citizens and also prohibits the practices discrimination and untouchability in any form. Through the efforts Dr. **B.R.Ambedkar**, iconic leader of dalits, who led the Dalit liberation movement and the Indian constitution has made Untouchability a crime and provided safeguards against it. Article 17 of Indian constitution abolished Untouchability and its practice in any form is forbidden. Article 25 (2.-b) of the constitution provides that Hindu religious institutions of a public character shall be open to all classes and sections of Hindus. This provision is contrary to the traditions of some sects of Hinduism that prohibits Untouchable members from entering temples. Two important legislations were enacted to give effect to these articles. The protection of civil rights Act, 1955 punishes the preaching and practice of Untouchability.

Untouchables (SC/ST) Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989.Criminalizes certain acts against members of Untouchables class such as traffic in human beings, free labour and forced labour in any form. A related law, the bonded labour system, abolition act 1976 provides for a special program for identifying bonded labourers, and for their liberation and rehabilitation. While this law does not especially significant to them because the majority of bonded labourers belong to the scheduled caste.

4. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

In this context that the present study are analyze the movement changing social status among Untouchable peoples in India. The Untouchable peoples for the study constitutes scheduled caste and scheduled tribes of India. Though they are scatter over the entire are all nation which have larger concentration of Untouchables than other community. For the aim of investigation we have taken changing social and economic status and getting equal human rights, start movement such a study may be quite useful in increasing our present knowledge.

5. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study are following that

- To find out whether the changing social & economic status among untouchable peoples in India.
- To identify responsible factors for the improvement of the status, of Untouchables.
- To find out role of Dalit reformative movement in the changing status of Untouchables
- To find out improve status development level between ancient and modern periods of Untouchables.

For the purpose of the study, refer to change among two periods of Untouchables in areas such as social economic, Political & occupational participation, in the society.

6. DALITS FOLLOWERS OF RELIGION & IDEOLOGY

According the report of Sachar committee 2006, revealed that scheduled castes and scheduled tribes of India are not limited to the religion of Hindu. The sixty one round survey of the NSSO found that 31.9% followers of Buddhists and 21 % of the Sikhs, and 65% of the Christians, and 75% of Hindus. In India belonged to the notified scheduled castes or scheduled tribes of the constitution.

Table. *Religion and follower's*

Religion	Scheduled caste	Scheduled tribe	Total
Buddhists	32 %	7.1 %	39.1 %
Christian	9 %	56.0 %	65.0 %
Sikhs	21%	0.9%	21.9%
Hindu	38 %	35 %	75.0 %

Mostly Scheduled tribes Societies have their own indigenous religions. Mundas have a munda religion for example. These indigenous or native are religion are infused with elements of the local dominant religions, so that Munda religion contains many Hindu elements, some Christians and sikha, Boudh and other elements.

The large majority of the Dalits in India are Hindus, although largest in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and other states have converted to Buddhism often called Neo-Buddhism and followers of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar ideology.

Historical examples of Dalit priests include chokhamela in the 14th century who was India's first recorded Dalit **Saint Ravidas**, born in to Chamar caste. He was belong to cobbler's family. The 15th century Saint Shri Ramananda Raya also accepted all castes, including Untouchables, into his fold. Most of these saints subscribed the medieval period that rejected casteism. The story of Nandanar, is popular where in a low-caste Hindu devotee, who was rejected by the priests but accepted by God. Due to isolation from the rest of Hindu Society, many Dalits continue to debate whether they are 'Hindu' or 'Non Hindu'.

7. REFORMATIVE MOVEMENT OF DALITS

The earliest known historical people to have rejected the caste system were **Gautam Buddha** and **Mahavira**. Their teachings eventually became independent religions called Buddhism and Jainism. The earliest known reformation within Hinduism happened during the medieval period when the Bhakti movement & Ramanuja actively encouraged the participation and inclusion of Dalits. Ramanuja took dalits disciples publicly into his fold and even took them into temple. He put forth the dalit born Nammalvar as the philosophical head of the sect and propagated Nammalvar's works as Dravidaveda.

The sikh reformist satnami movement was founded by Guru Ghasidas, born a dalit family. Another notable guru was Guru Ravidas was also a dalit. Other reformers, such as Jyotiba Rao Phule Ayyankali of Kerala and Iyothethe Thass of Tamil Nadu Worked for emancipation of dalits. the 1930's saw key struggle between Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's and Mahatma Gandhi over whether Dalit would have separate or joint electorates. Although he fail to get. Dr. B.R Ambedkar for a joint electorate, Gandhi nevertheless began the " harijan Yatra" to help dalit population. Palwankar Baloo, a dalit politician and a cricketer, joined the Hindu mahasabha in the fight for independence.

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's movement divided two part's (i) **Social reformativ movement**: that's movement belong to Dalit improvement and restriction on durg's Alkhohol, non vegetarian food etc. and forced adopt rituals and religious activities. (ii) **Alternative movement**, that's movement give the suggestion for all dalits convert in to boudh religion. Namantar movement was part of a 16-year dalit campaign to rename Marathwada University as a Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University. in 1977, the chief minister of Maharashtra Vasant dada patil, promised the dalit panthers that a renaming would happen; the Maharashtra legislature passed a resolution to this effect in July 1978. Founder of BSP **Mannjwar Kanshi Ram** & ex chief Minister Uttar Pradesh **Miss Mayawati** also belong to stand political platform of scheduled castes in Uttar Pradesh .

8. DALIT BUDDHIST MOVEMENT

In Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra and a few other regions, Dalit have come under the influence of the neo-Buddhist movement initiated by Dr. Ambedkar. In the 1950's Dr.Ambedkar turned his attention to Buddhism and travelled to Sri Lanka to attend a convention of Buddhist scholars and monks. While dedicating a new Boudh Vihar near Pune, Dr.Ambedkar announced that he was writing book on Buddhism, and that as soon as it was finished be planned to make a formal conversion to Buddhism. Dr.Ambedkar twice visited Myanmar in 1954. The second time in order to attend the third conference of world fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955 he founded Bharatiya Boudh Mahasabha, or the Buddhist society of India. He completed his final work, the Buddha and his Dhamma in 1956. it was published posthumously.

After meeting with Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Hammalwa Saddhatissa, (11) **Dr. Ambedkar** organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporter in Nagpur on 14 october 1956. Accepting the three refuges and five precepts from a Buddhist monk in traditional manner, Dr

B.R. Ambedkar completed his own conversion. He then proceeded to convert an 5 Lakh of his supporters who were gathered around him. Taking the 22 vows, Dr. Ambedkar and his supporters explicitly condemned and rejected Hinduism and Hindu philosophy. He then travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the fourth World Buddhist conference. He completed his final manuscript, *The Buddha or Karl Mark* on 2 December 1956.

9. PREVENTION ATROCITIES ACT AND UNTOUCHABILITY

The prevention of atrocities Act is a tacit acknowledgement by the Indian government that caste relations are defined by violence both incidental and systemic. In 1989, the government of India passed the prevention of Atrocities Act, which clarified specific crimes against scheduled caste and scheduled tribes as “atrocities” and created strategies and punishments to counter these acts. The purpose of the Act was to curb and punish violence against Dalits. Firstly, it clarified What the atrocities were: both particular incidents of harm and humiliation, such as the forced consumption of noxious substances, and systemic violence still faced by many Dalit’s , especially in rural areas of India . Such systemic violence includes forced labour, denial of access to temple, Water and other public amenities, and sexual abuse of Dalit women.

Secondly, Act created special courts to try cases registered under the prevention of Atrocities Act. Third, the Act called on States with high levels of violence to appoint qualified officers to monitor and maintain law and order. The Prevention Atrocities Act gave legal address to Dalit’s, but only two states have created separate special courts in accordance with law. In practice the act has suffered from a near complete failure in implementation. Police have displayed a consistent unwillingness to the register offences under the act.

10. UNTOUCHABLE’S STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The Indian constitution has duly made special provisions for the social and economic uplift of the Dalit’s, comprising the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in order to enable them to achieve upward social mobility, these concessions are limited to only those Dalit’s who remain Hindu. There is a demand among the Dalit’s who have converts to other religious that the statutory benefits should be extended to them as well to overcome and bring closure to historical injustices.

Since the introduction of the Indian constitution, a deliberate attempt had been going on in India from the part of government machinery to improve the social & economical life of untouchables through different programmers. Numerous facilities have been provided to the dalits with a view to enable them to take their rightful place in to society. Through the five year plans the government have made target for the improvement of social conditions of untouchables in general and scheduled caste woman in particular consequently, the position of the Untouchable man and women had changed there is noticeable improvement in many areas such as education, occupation, political and other socio cultural fields.

Another major political issue is over the affirmative action measures taken by the government towards the up liftment of dalits through quotas in government job and college, university level admissions. About 15% seats on central level and state level seats decided by the state government’s. A measure sought by **Dr. B.R.Ambedkar** and **Kanshi Ram** other dalit activists in order to ensure that dalits would obtain a proportionate political voice. In 1977 **K.R.Narayanan** was elected president of India. In 2007 **Miss Mayawati** was elected of a chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, both personality belong to dalit community. In Indian parliament reserved 79 seats for Scheduled Caste, 40 seats reserved for Scheduled tribes and state assembly reserved 557 seats Scheduled castes and 315 seat reserved for tribes.

At present more improvement in our life, and gets largest change of all areas through dalit movement & constitutional provisions etc.

11. CONCLUSION

Historically, Dalit movement is the process of identifying and destroying the obstacles in the existing order to take productive forces to the educational, social, economical development and make similar to higher caste. But in modern era, Dalit literature was energised by the advent of leaders like Mahatma Phule, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram. Present dalit have been successful in business, politics, education and higher administrative post but the present dalit people suffer

from the practice of untouchability in less percentage than past time. In order to achieve social equality, the heinous practice of untouchability in any form is legally forbidden under article-17, of the constitution and the enforcement of any disability arising out of this is an offence punishable in accordance with the law. Further article 15 combined with articles 16, 19, 23, 25 and 29 are also closely related with article 17 in attempting to abolish various manifestations of Untouchability.

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