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## **UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL AND PRESENT SCENARIO OF DALITLEADERSHIP IN PUNJAB**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This is the main source of developing the understanding towards life as well as art in order to enjoy it. It assumes further importance, when it helps to create space for marginalized communities. In the case of Dalits, consciousness is highly important discounting the means through which it develops. Undoubtedly the images of Dalit icons that have been placed in the minds of Dalit people and a large amount of literature produced on this subject is the main reason behind this awareness. Literature has an important role in this respect. It is the mirror of society. That is why nowadays, Dalit literature has become the main source of creating consciousness in Dalits. This paper analyses the importance and impact of Dalit literature as a source of assertion in Dalits with special focus on Punjabi society.*

**Keywords:** - Dalit, Punjab, Dharm, Social, Society

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The term “Dalit” has been derived from the Sanskrit root “dal” which means burst, split, broken and downtrodden. In the annals of Indian history, Dalits have been referred by different nomenclatures like-Chandals, Avarnas, Achhuts, Adi-Dravida. Many other words have also been used for Dalits e.g., „Scheduled Castes“, „Depressed Classes“, “Oppressed Hindus”, “Harijans” etc. Mahatma Gandhi called untouchables as Harijans- children of God. The term „Dalit“ was used by Dr. Ambedkar in his fortnightly “Bahishkrit Bharat” in 1930s. It was a Hindi and Marathi version of the term Depressed Classes, which was used for Dalits by the Britishers in Government of India Act 1935 for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. The term Scheduled Castes was used for the first time in the Constitution of India. After the emergence of „Dalit Panther Movement“ in Maharashtra in 1967, the term „Dalit“ got popularized. In the mid-1970s, again the Dalit leaders coined a new identity in the name of Bahujan with the emergence of BAMCEF.

Kanshi Ram used the term Bahujan to encompass Dalits, Adivasees, Other Backward Classes and minorities together for a greater alliance. In recent years, the term “Dalit” has been discarded as a social reactionary category by a section of community who prefer Bahujan with both the Buddhist as well as Dalit categories.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Sikka, Sonia (2012)** In the context of the philosophical literature on multiculturalism, I argue in this article that models of cultural identity based entirely on the nonvoluntary possession of a set of cultural characteristics are seriously incomplete. In particular, such models cannot address the need, among some groups, to reconstruct, invent and imagine alternative positive identities as a result of historical injustice, and to fill in the content of ‘culture’ accordingly. As an illustrative case, I survey processes of identity construction among ‘Dalits’, members of former ‘untouchable’ and other lower caste communities in India, with a focus on the role of historical consciousness and existing power relations in the imagination of Dalit culture. Dalit strategies of identity negotiation reveal the understandable need, on the part of the members of this community in progress, to produce a cultural identity that makes sense, psychologically and politically, given who they cannot imagine themselves to be, due to the fact of historical oppression. My analysis does not merely target essentialism, nor is it meant to be deconstructive of identity claims. Rather, I highlight select elements within the negotiation of Dalit identity to illustrate (1) the relevance of real historical relations of discrimination and inequality to the construction of culture; (2) the equivocal character of ‘choice’ within this process; and (3) the emancipatory possibilities provided by imagined narratives of cultural selfhood.

**Sharma, N. (2012)** Despite being a highly stratified society characterized by caste and class divisions and a state with highest scheduled caste population, Punjab is seldom considered for studying its caste system or a case study of Dalit assertion. The objective of this paper is threefold - to examine the caste system in Punjab, to discuss the issue of political marginalization among scheduled castes and finally to analyze the current phase of assertion among the two largest scheduled castes groups in Punjab - the Ad-Dharmis and the Mazhabhis. The paper argues that in the absence of a strong political force to represent the interest of scheduled castes, cultural activism has become an important strategy of assertion leading to greater conflicts in the state. The current phase of cultural assertion of the scheduled castes in Punjab, as witnessed in the emergence of deras, large scale construction of separate gurudwaras and increasing cases of caste and community related violence, could be regarded as end products of social exclusion, lack of long-term economic advancement and political marginalization of the scheduled caste community in the state.

**K. Satyanarayana (2016)** This essay argues that the colonial archive provides a very heterogeneous and at times contradictory representation of Indian society that stands in contrast to its homogeneous portrayal in colonial sociology. The field of postcolonial studies has relied

heavily on colonial sociology (caste and tribe surveys and the census) to produce dominant representations of Indian society and history, especially related to caste. This essay aims to modify the postcolonial understanding of the archive by arguing that it might be more productive to underline the unique strengths of district and provincial repositories in contrast to imperial archives based in the metropolitan centers of Delhi and London. Undue focus on colonial sociology has reduced the diversity of colonial archives to a single imperial monolith. Documents of local conditions, such as the land revenue surveys, often contain details that were not concerned with sustaining the objectives of all-India colonial sociology and provide strikingly contrary perspectives on caste and Dalits.

**Lanjouw, Peter (2011)** Standard approaches to decomposing how much group differences contribute to inequality rarely show significant between-group inequality, and are of limited use in comparing populations with different numbers of groups. This study applies an adaptation to the standard approach that remedies these problems to longitudinal household data from two Indian villages -- Palanpur in the north, and Sugao in the west. The authors find that in Palanpur the largest scheduled caste group failed to share in the gradual rise in village prosperity. This would not have emerged from standard decomposition analysis. However, in Sugao the alternative procedure did not yield any additional insights because income gains applied relatively evenly across castes.

### **III. DALIT LEADERSHIP IN PUNJAB: FROM AD-DHARM MOVEMENT TO BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY**

In the history of Dalits in Punjab, two major developments have occurred in pre and post-independence period. The first one is the Ad-Dharm movement and second one is the formation of BahujanSamaj Party which is also considered a movement according to SudhaPai. Both these events serve as the mile stones and sources of inspiration for Dalits particularly in Punjab and broadly in India. Against this background, it is worthy to analyze the leadership pattern of these two major developments. This chapter reflects on the emergence and development of Dalit leadership from Ad-Dharm movement to BahujanSamaj Party.

It is divided into two parts- the first part discusses what kind of Dalit leadership emerged with the origin as well as aftermath of Ad-Dharm movement in Punjab. The second part discusses the emergence as well as decline of BSP, its ideology, strategies to create awareness among Dalits and the role of its leaders to uplift Dalit community in Punjab. Three basic ways have been suggested from time to time to provide salvation from caste discrimination to Dalits: Sanskritization, Conversion and Social Reform movements. The term “Sanskritization” used and popularized by M.N. Srinivas, was implied to adoption of Hindu rituals for removing the effect of caste and untouchability. The Conversion is the second way to get rid of caste-based discrimination. In the South Indian states, it was a very popular way to get relief from deprivation and humiliation on account of the caste status.

The Buddhism is the most respected religion for conversion. Dr. Ambedkar also adopted conversion as a way to get liberation from casteism in the last years of his life and got converted from Hinduism to Buddhism. Dalits followed the path or conversion to get relief from their sorrows and miseries originating from their caste status. They converted to other religions e.g., Islam, Sikhism and Christianity but could not succeed in achieving an equal status in the religions they converted into. The instances of conversion still continue but discrimination still remains there. Jagjivan Ram has explained this discriminatory nature in his book:

“As a part of the traditional social order, the untouchables were excluded from becoming partners in the process of history-making. All achievements of India and all her successes were confined only to the upper castes. The masses constituting the lower classes were made to work for the advancement of society but were excluded from being partners in the process of history-making. They were deliberately kept outside history. Thus, they were outside creative national endeavors.”

- **Ad-Dharm Movement in Punjab**

Early 20th century was very progressive time period for the Dalit community in India especially in Punjab. A number of movements have their beginning around 1920s. The most prominent among these, Ad-Dharm movement started in early 20th century in Punjab on account of non-acceptance of previous movements that had been organised by upper castes such as AryaSamaj movement, Singh Sabha movement, Ahmadiyya movement, Christian movement etc to eradicate the hierarchical caste system. Though these movements worked for upliftment of untouchables and many programmes were initiated for their welfare, but all these efforts were not enough to abolish the stigma of untouchability. Moreover, each movement intended to its own benefits. At that time, in Punjab, lower caste people were also getting influenced by Christianity. Another fact is that according to British census authorities, untouchables were considered as Hindu.

- **Ad-Dharm Movement: Leadership Pattern, Agenda and Strategies**

Ad-Dharm movement has produced many committed leaders who worked for their community. Prominent among leaders are like Mangoo Ram Mangoowaila, Sant Ram B.A., VasantRai, Thakur Chand, Swami Shudranand, Hazara Ram, Master Gurbanta Singh, Seth Kishan Das, Sadhu Ram and Mangoo Ram Jaspal. These leaders of Ad-Dharm movement had effectively done their job in leading and motivating the Dalits of Punjab. It was an independent Dalit movement and their agenda was very clear which aimed at the creation of a new religion or qaum like other religions. As Juergensmeyer (1988) explained, “Its main motif was novel: the idea that untouchables constitute a qaum, a distinct religious community similar to those of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, and that the qaum had existed from time immemorial.”

#### **IV. IMPACT OF THE MOVEMENT: 1931 CENSUS**

Any type of Dalit movement whether socio-religious, socio-economic or political, is based on the ideology to impact assertiveness and build a new social order based on equality. The main motive of this type of the movement is the creation of an egalitarian society with the idea of justice, liberty and equality. The effect of the movement was revealed through census 1931 as it was a great event for Dalits in Punjab. It was an opportunity to show their strength and assert their identity. Mangoo Ram also expected to bring other untouchable communities into the fold of Ad-Dharm and emerge as a viable community at the regional level. "Jodhka (2009) also argued that Ad-Dharmis succeeded in making a new beginning with a new identity despite opposition from other communities.

They pressurized British government to conduct a caste-based census in 1931. They had no faith in Hinduism and wanted to enlist themselves as Ad-Dharmis. Therefore the leaders of the movement convinced the British Government to list Ad-Dharm as a separate religion. The British Government accepted this idea as they wanted to know, how clearly change has taken place. The members of AdDharm movement worked hard towards this cause related to census. They made rallies and contacted the people door to door so that they became aware of their rights and enrolled themselves as a member of Ad-Dharm for dignity and separate identity. The other communities like Sikhs felt threatened from this movement. They created new problems for the supporters of this movement. They destroyed their food and even beat up the AdDharmis.

**Decline of the Movement:** A number of reasons became the causes of decline of the movement. One is the rift between Dr.Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi which led to the Poona Pact. As Jodhka (2009) explained that "The beginning of the decline of the Ad-Dharm movement can perhaps be located in the famous Poona Pact of 1932 between Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar and the formation of Scheduled List in the Government of India Act 1935." Another reason is the rift within Ad-Dharm movement leaders that led to the establishment of two separate organizations in 1930s:

the Ad-DharmMandal lead by Mangoo Ram and the All Indian AdDharmMandal lead by VasantRai. Mangoo Ram group worked on the idea to create new religion for untouchables because they felt humiliated by other religions. The VasantRai group of the Ad-DharmMandal (AIADM) was following the ideology of the AryaSamaj. Sadhu Ram also joined Rai's group. There was another rift in Ad-DharmMandal with the factional confrontation between Seth Kishan Das and Master Gurbanta Singh. Seth Kishan Das, wealthy leather merchant Chamar by caste, joined Ad-Dharm movement and contributed in its growth through financial support. He was close to Mangoo Ram. Master Gurbanta Singh was an AryaSamaji and worked in Mandal as a General Secretary.

## **V. BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY: LEADERSHIP PATTERN, AGENDA AND STRATEGIES**

The leadership pattern of BSP is very clear and it is one man oriented. Kanshi Ram, leader of the movement was “a visionary Dalit activist and organizer who, in the seventies and eighties, almost single-handedly changed the idiom of Dalit politics”. He formally adopted Ambedkar’s famous slogan, “Educate, Organize and agitate” as the motto of his campaign. But he never desired the position or any type of profit. As Sahajal (2014) mentions an interesting incident in his book that he was once offered the position of President of India by the Congress party but he rejected the offer and saying that this position will tie his hands and he shall not be able to work for his own community.

Indeed, he was an honest and fearless leader who dedicated and sacrificed his life for his community. He has been considered a second Messiah by Dalits as mentioned by Dalbir Singh in his book. In the very beginning, he had realized that only by achieving political power, an egalitarian society could be established. Kanshi Ram suggested Mayawatis his successor who eventually became Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh four times. She has also been working with dedication on the footprints of her master. After the death of Kanshi Ram, she carried on his mission to liberate Dalits from all miseries in every field of life and provide them equal space in society. Because of BSP, Dalits have been able to distance themselves from traditional structure. Kanshi Ram has said that without ideological transformation, social transformation cannot be brought in favor of Dalits.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

In this study, we have discussed the caste system in India with a special reference to the Dalits. In the context of Punjab, the dominant caste is the Sikh, and it is considered an egalitarian religion. The study of contemporary social scientists like Surinder Singh Jodhka and Ronki Ram reveals that the caste discrimination prevalent in Sikhism motivated the Dalits to assert the right to equality. The immediate reaction of this assertion was the foundation of Ad DharmMandal by the Dalits of Punjab, as they have seen the formation of Adi movements in different parts of the country. The rise of Dr. BhimRaoAmbedkar endorsed this assertion, and the Dalits not only in Maharashtra but also in Punjab, started their struggle for both social and political rights.

It started a phase of consciousness among the Dalits. In the study of Punjab generally and Jalandhar particularly, there are three dominant dalit castes namely, the Ad Dharmis, the Meghs and the Balmikis with the localities of BootanMandi, Bhargava Camp and Ali Mohalla, respectively. The leaders of these castes have dominated the local politics in Jalandhar. Among them, the Ad Dharmis and Meghs are artisans whereas the Balmikis are the laborers. Being artisan, it was easy for the Ad Dharmis and Meghs to assert themselves. Traditionally, they belonged to the leather industry and sports industry, respectively. With the progress of leather and sports goods industry, they became economically sound and educated. It made them aware of their socio-political rights.

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