



HISTORICAL CONCIOUSNESS TOWARDS DALIT: A SPECIAL FOCUS ON PUNJABI DALITS

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ABSTRACT

Punjab has been witnessing the rising consciousness and assertion among Dalits through literature and images of Dalit icons. It has been helpful to create a distinguished identity and self-respect among them. Dalit literature and images of Dalit icons have succeeded to create an impact on their lives and they have become assertive through these means. Dalit literature, images of Dalit icons have played a major role in the essence of socio-religious as well as cultural assertion in the lives of Punjabi Dalits. This paper tries to analyse various developments in order to know the importance of Dalit literature in the lives of Dalit people and also how these images and literature have become the ray of assertion for these people with a special focus on Punjabi Dalits. 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.

Keywords: - Dalit, Punjab, People, Politics, Region

I. INTRODUCTION

To analyze the history of Dalit politics in Punjab, it is essential to first understand the meaning of the term 'Dalit'. This term originated from Hebrew language word 'Dal' which means 'Trampled under the feet'. In the context of Indian society, it means 'Trampled under the feet of upper caste'. So, Dalit is that strata of society which is backward, poor, untouchable and exploited. But in the modern perspective the meaning of term Dalit has changed. It has become a ray of hope for the downtrodden section of society. In the context of Punjab, Dalit symbolizes the Chamars, as they constitute majority among the Dalits. They are economically and politically more influential as compare to other categories of Dalits in Punjab.

The political history of Punjab is a record of struggle for power among the different contenders of power mostly the upper sections of society. The Dalits remained, by and large, neglected in the socio-religious sector, and by extension, in politics for a long period. For this, Christian missionaries, AryaSamaj, Singh Sabha Movement and many other missionary organizations



made effort to attract the Dalits in their mission. They remained successful in their task to some extent as Dalits joined Christianity, AryaSamaj, Singh Sabha Movement and other missionary organizations.

II. REVIWE OF LITERATURE

SINGH, SURINDER (2019) The article argues that that often the marginalized sections per se and Dalits, in particular, configure and shape a web of new socio-cultural traits, artefacts and monuments which provide them distinct social and physical spaces to contest the suppression of mainstream culture which historically placed them at the periphery. New Dalit cultural spaces are politically constructed which have become the venues of their identity formation, construction of contested culture and cultural assertion. Their incessant segregation from mainstream cultural spaces has become a vehicle to seek new socio-cultural spaces either within or outside the mainstream social structure of the society. This process of new socio-cultural spaces formation is ultimately harnessed with the construction of contested cultural spaces. In Punjab, since the 20th century, the construction of new socio-religious spaces and identities has become the modus among the Dalits to disassociate from disparaging spaces and identities.

JUDGE, P. S. (2015) in a multi-religious social formation, the understanding of caste and caste hierarchy requires a different theoretical and methodological approach from the conventional one. This article examines the case of Punjab society in which Sikhs and Hindus co-exist and the former claim to be an egalitarian religious community. Although caste hierarchies could be multiple in such a setting, the forces influencing dominance and change have remained same. Education and occupational changes have transformed the nature of hierarchy in Punjab.

RAM, RONKI. (2017) Punjab houses the highest number of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in comparison to all other States in India and much higher than the national average SCs population. Despite the common nomenclature - SCs, Dalits are sharply divided into 39 castes scattered over varied religions and Deras. This caste heterogeneity impacts their upward social mobility and political mobilization in multifarious ways.

TAYLOR, STEVE (2013) Drawing upon longitudinal, ethnographic research within the United Kingdom and India between 2004 and 2011, this article discusses the migration- development nexus within the Doaba region of east Punjab. It points out that Doaban transnationalism is shaped by, and shapes, the social structure of the region. It focuses upon the relationship between contemporary Doaban transnationalism and caste and argues that multifaceted Doaban transnationalism is not only shifting the dynamic caste relations of Doaba but is also deepening the established patterns of caste domination and inequality.



III. DALITS IN PUNJAB:

In Punjab, the center of the Dalits is Jalandhar Doab region. This area lies between two rivers, the Sutlej and the Beas. The districts of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala and Nawanshahr of present Punjab, constitute majority of the Dalits population. The Dalit population in Jalandhar is considerable, has been so throughout recent history, and the Dalits in this area have also played an important role in shaping the politics of this region. Hence, studying the Dalits of Jalandhar district has the potential for providing significant insights into the understanding of this upwardly mobile community. In Jalandhar, three politically and numerically significant Dalit communities are the Ad Dharmis, the Meghs and the Balmikis with their important localities of BootanMandi, Bhargava Camp, and Ali Mohalla, respectively, though, they are found all over the district.

IV. HISTORY OF DALIT ASSERTION AND THE IMPORTANT ORGANIZATIONS:

The Dalits of Jalandhar remained aware of their rights since the beginning of 20th century. Its historical evidence is the foundation of some organizations by them like, BalmikiSabhas, Ad DharmMandal and MeghUdharSabha. These were the organizations of the Balmikis, the Ad Dharmis and the Meghs, respectively. The Dalits on the platform of these organizations started their struggle for socio-political rights. They have established different pressure groups, over the years, such as Vigilant Brotherhood (International) of the Ad Dharmis by Manohar Lai Mahey in 1989, State BalmikSabha of the Balmikis by Mona Gill in 2003, BhagatMahasabha of the Meghs by Raj Kumar in 2000, and many more with their headquarter at Jalandhar. These pressure groups are not only working to protect and promote the interest of Dalits but also make them aware about their rights in society. Along with the social mobilization, they started influencing the political setup of the state.

- **Dalit Politics in Punjab In The Post-Independence Period:**

The Dalits constitute a big vote bank, so different political parties pay attention to attract them in their favor. Almost all the political parties both national and regional established special cell for this stratum of society in their party organization. The Election Manifestoes of all the political parties give special attention to this section just to attract them in their favor. The Dalits themselves realized their strength and importance in the political setup and that is why instead of becoming a vote bank of any party they formed their separate parties and through them they started directly participating in elections. The important political parties of the Dalits are Scheduled Caste Federation, Republican Party of India, BahujanSamaj Party, BahujanSamaj Party (Ambedkar), BahujanSamajMorcha etc. The active participation of Dalits in politics brings



a change in the social, economic and political setup on the one hand, and on the other hand, it changes the position of Dalits in the social, economic and political setup in Punjab.

V. HISTORY OF DALIT ASSERTION IN PUNJAB

Dalits are not known by the same name in all the states of India. Even their sub-castes are further divided into many parts. Briggs has also mentioned that Chamar itself had about 1156 Chamar castes and sub-castes as reported in the 1891 census of India. Of all the communities which have gained prominence in the last few decades, the Dalits in Punjab and elsewhere also, have risen from the shackles of the old traditional communities to the present-day communities, which are now an important component of almost all the walks of life, either politically, socially, economically and culturally.

In this chapter, the investigations have been done particularly of the role of the Dalit population in the political scenario in Punjab and also the process, whereby, they have attained the present status. In this chapter, an effort has made to reflect upon the prehistory of Dalit assertion in Punjab.

We take a quick look at the caste system, its variations across India and academic efforts to make sense of it. Then we notice the location of Dalit in Punjab. Then, we examine the early assertion by the Dalit by going into a brief description of the Ad Dharm movement.

- **History of caste system in India:**

The caste system is the most peculiar feature of the Indian sub-continent. It is playing an important role in social life, since a long time. It is such an Indian institution which has no counterpart anywhere. Though caste is primarily a social institution but it has always had some political aspects. Presently, caste is the most controversial issue in Indian politics as it is getting stronghold, critics even call it a stranglehold, in the field of politics. The notion of caste has also a strong grip on the minds of educated people. It varies from region to region in a significant manner. The Dalits were not allowed to mix up with the Dvijas (twice born). A trivial understanding of the caste system suggests that in Hindu social order the three upper castes are termed as Dvijya as the sacred initiation ceremony is held to be their second birth i.e., in their respective caste. The fourth caste is not permitted the sacred initiation and therefore, they are not considered to have been born second time in the present life. The three upper castes or Dvijya are the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishya's. One of the more popular beliefs among the activists of the dalit classes is that the Shudras were the original inhabitants of the land. They were forced to follow brahminical laws. They were not allowed to educate themselves and wear sacred thread. They were regarded as servile class.



- **The Dalit perception of caste:**

The Dalit perception of the caste system and its inequities has found much voice in recent years. It is difficult to say exactly what this Dalit perception of the caste system is but, as a sample, one can look at the version provided by Ramesh Chandra. According to this only the Shudras together with Panchamas have been socially degraded and politically exploited. The caste system in this view has its origin in the concept of the Varna system or may be the Varna system had its origin in the vast mass of castes and tribes that could have existed before the authors of the Hindu Scriptures designed the Varna system. The caste system prevailing in the contemporary society cannot be explained fully with a reference to the concept of Varna.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to trace the history of dalit politics in Punjab. Inevitably, this meant investigating the interface between the colonial social and economic context of Punjab, the rise of formal political representation and Dr. BhimRaoAmbedkar's significant efforts at encouraging the Dalits to come out in the formal political arena and the special spaces provided by independent India for dalit assertion. Dalits were considered as the lowest strata of the society by the caste Hindus. They were given the menial works to perform and the return for it was also very low. With the advent of the British rule, the Dalits got some rights on the basis of equality.

However, they were not implemented in the private sphere of life. In Punjab, the young educated Chamars, inspired by the AryaSamaj, founded the Ad DharmMandal. They were attracted by some of the ideals of AryaSamaj which held open the promise of purification or shuddhi to the low castes. They became disillusioned by the control of upper castes in the movement and rejected completely the paternalistic implications of shuddhi that untouchables needed to be 'purified'. They considered the British rule better than the Brahmanical rule. They initially least favoured the national movement. They put forward their demands in front of the British and tried to get these demands fulfilled.

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