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Theorizing The 'Dalits' : An Analysis

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Abstract:-The caste system in India has created discrimination and exploitation, which has been protected by the system, since this is institutionalized. The social and economic position of 'dalits' has been portrayed by various studies. The 'Dalits' are interpreted by scholars in empirical and theoretical approach. This articles has given analysis to the 'dalits' considering the theoretical approach.

Keywords: Theorizing ,Dalits , Analysis , caste system .

1. INTRODUCTION:

'Dalits' in 'Maharashtra' (in India) have long social history. They have been considered by various scholars, most of them were sociologists. In the western world, there have been various theories propounded by scholars on the issue of social and economic change, deprivation, production and distribution. Many theories can be applied to the 'Indian' social structure, with a basic difference that, there was a 'class' differences and here was 'caste' differences. The researcher has given theoretical analysis with respect to some selected theories.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued that, the social order was made by human beings and therefore could be changed by human beings. In Hobbes's (1651:49-66) view, human beings are governed by a selfish "perpetual and restless desire for power after power". Anarchy- "every man against every man" is curbed only by the fact than men fear death. As all men are rational, they may be convinced to adopt convenient article of peace in order to avoid social anarchy and death" (Quoted in Bert Adam & Sydie:2002:13-14). In the context of Indian society, the social system based on 'caste hierarchy' was a creation of human beings. This system was benefiting one section of the society and 'dalits' were kept away from the economic benefits. This was the creation of human beings for gaining power and sustaining the power for longer period. In this matter Ambedkar (1946) argued that, 'Shudras' (untouchables or 'dalits') were originally 'kings' and in the later period they were made as 'slaves'. This was the creation of that section of the society, which wanted socio-cultural and economic gain.

Ambedkar B.R. (1946: 239) argued that, the 'Shudras' were originally king and in the later period they became slaves. The author writes that, "The kings belongs to the 'Shudra' group. The Shudras were one of the 'Aryan' communities of solar race. The 'Shudras' ranked as the 'Kshatriya Varna' in the 'Indo-Aryan' society. There was a time when the 'Aryan' society recognized only three 'Varnas', namely, 'Brahmin', 'Kshatriya' and 'Vaishyas'. The 'Shudras' were not a separate 'Varna', but a part of the 'Kshatriya Varna' There was a continuous feud between the 'Shudra' kings and the 'Brahmins', in which the Brahmins were subjected to many tyrannies and indignities. As a result of the hatred towards the 'Shudras' due to their tyrannies and oppression, the 'Brahmins' refused to invest the 'Shudras' with the sacred thread. Owing to the loss of the sacred thread, the 'Shudras' became socially degraded, fell below the rank of the Vaishyas and came to from the fourth 'Varna'".

Thus, it is clear that, human beings (Brahminism) were governed by a selfish and restless desire for power, which later made the 'Shudras' ('dalits') as fourth 'Varna'. This fourth 'Varna' had to live without social, economic and cultural power in the social system.

Hegel George (1770-1831) argued that, the social history was a history of conflicts, the purpose of which was 'the progressive realization of humanity's capacity for reason and freedom. The reason and freedom were attained by the individual's pursuit of selfish interests and social strife, rather than moral intentions. Further Hegel says that, human beings do not simply interpret their world-they also critically reflect upon that world. The understanding of the social historical world by the human beings turns into awareness, which changes their moral standards and consequently, the social world. (Hegel Quoted in Bert Adam & Sydie : 2002 : 27). Indian social history is also filled with conflicts. Conflicts about social, economic and cultural power, by understanding this history human beings turns into awareness. 'Dalits', especially 'Neo-Buddhists' understand their social history and hence certain social awareness and aspirations have been generated. Ultimately, 'Neo-

1

Buddhists' have changed socio-cultural and economic structure in the society.

2. MEANS OF PRODUCTION:

Karl Marx and Frederic Engels have developed a theory on the means of production. Through production, the members of society are able to satisfy their basic wants and needs- the need for food, clothing and shelter as well as other developed tastes. Organization of the process of production is necessary features of all societies, but the way in which these relations are organized assumes a particular historical form. (Jonathan Joseph: 2003:6)

Marx Karl (1975:425) writes that, "the mode of production is material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life" Historically, it can point to different modes of production such as the communal system of primitive society, the slave system of ancient society, the serfdom of feudalism and the wage-labour economy of capitalism. (Jonathan Joseph: 2003:6)

Marx Karl's objective is to explain the economic law of the capitalist mode of production. In case of Indian society, 'Brahminism' was playing a role of 'capitalism' and the caste system had created a slavery system for 'Shudras' ('untouchables' or 'dalits'). In the caste hierarchy, the 'Brahmins', 'Kshatriya' and 'Vaishyas' were given different modes production to survive, whereas the 'Shudras' were not given any proper means of production. The 'untouchables' or 'dalits' (earlier known as 'Shudras'), were victim of historical materialism.

Marx Karl wrote about worker-capitalist relations, where exploitation of worker gives a profit to capitalist. In this situation, the workers are forced to sale their labour power to the capitalist, because they do not have ownership of the means production and must therefore find a work in order to survive. (Jonathan Joseph: 2003:8). 'Dalits' had no share in means of production. They had no proper source of livelihood. The caste hierarchy had given some tradition inferior work of service, for which they were being paid in kinds, most of the times food or grains. Besides that, they were being treated in inhuman way. Due to lack of means of production, 'dalits' continued to serve the village for long period of time. 'Dalits' had to depend on upper castes for their survival. Therefore, 'dalits' tolerated severe economic exploitation over a period of time. They did not oppose the system in a systematic way. This was true that. the condition of worker in capitalism was far better than the condition of 'dalit' in 'Brahminism'.

In the approach of Marx Karl, the capitalism and its exploitation created two social groups- One- 'Bourgeous' (the owner of the means of production) and

Two- 'Proletarians' (the workers, who do not own the means of production)

The existence of two classes in the society brings the class conflict between them. This conflict results into the 'proletarian' movement. Marx and Engels (1973: 78-79) argued that, "..the proletarian movement is the self-consciousness, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of immense majority and ultimately the gravedigger of capitalism".

In Indian context 'dalits' could not defend its interest in pre-Ambedkar era, since the Indian society was divided into various castes. Even among 'dalits', there were different castes. (As on today, there are 59 castes in Scheduled Castes or 'dalits' are registered in Maharashtra). The inter-caste social interaction was restricted by the caste system. Therefore, the division of society into various castes neither defended their interest nor brought (proletarian) movement. This was a vicious circle of the system. After the emergence of Dr. Ambedkar B.R. (especially after 1927), the untouchable movement began to defend their social and economic interests. The 'untouchables' movement led by Dr. Ambedkar and in the post-Ambedkar period 'dalit' movement in 'Maharashtra' began. As a result of these movements, 'dalits' began to demand their share in means of production. Through the 'Ambedkarism', 'dalits', especially the 'Neo-Buddhists' (selected respondents) in the cities have achieved their highest educational, occupational and income status. They have established a new social identity. They have changed the socio-cultural structure. This is nothing but, the 'Neo-Buddhists' have refused the earlier structure and established new structure. Finally, significant size of 'dalits' (Neo-Buddhists) received the significant share in the means of production and resources.

3. INSTITUTIONALIZED 'DEPRIVATION' AND 'POVERTY':

Institutionalized deprivation and poverty was seen among 'dalits' over a long period of time in pre-Ambedkar era. The rate of institutionalized deprivation and poverty sustained for longer period, since it was established by the social system. The caste system was established with economic motive. Ambedkar B.R. (1936: 25-96) argued that, "whatever may have been the purpose behind the origin of the caste system, later as it evolved in its classical form, it certainly involved an economic motive, the purpose of which was income maximization through coercion rather than economic efficiency of any sort".

The economic motive of certain caste group was to gain from the social system. This motive was protected through the caste system. Since, 'dalits' had no place in caste system, the poverty and deprivation was sustained for longer period. The Deprivation among 'dalits', was determined and protected by the caste hierarchy over a long period of time. According to Valentine (1971), "what is distinctive of life at socio-economic level is determined primarily by the structure of society as a whole and by force beyond the control of the poor". The structure of society had forced 'dalits' to live with lower socio-economic status and inferior traditional occupations on the basis of caste hierarchy, which resulted into higher rate of deprivation over a long period of time. Rejecting the deprivation in a systematic way was beyond the power of 'dalits'.

The deprivation of 'dalits' was institutionalized by the caste system. This became a common practice. The 'institutionalized' deprivation was hard for 'dalits' to break it. They became slaves of the system and deprivation sustained for longer period. After the emergence of Dr. Ambedkar; the deprivation of 'dalits' gradually decreased. Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy and institutional safeguards brought remarkable socio-economic and cultural transformation among 'dalits', especially the 'Neo-Buddhists'. The significant size of 'Neo-Buddhists' (ex-untouchables), have ended their deprivation and are living in prosperity.

The deprivation and poverty for longer period blocks the aspirations. The deprived person locks their optimism. Katz (1970) argued that, "the deprived people are socialized to self-imposed failure". In case of 'dalits' during in pre-Ambedkar era, the level of aspiration was very low; whereas in the post-Ambedkar era, the level of aspiration among 'dalits', especially the 'Neo-Buddhists' (in cities) has increased to remarkable level. (This aspiration level has recorded by the researcher in case of selected respondents from Neo-Buddhists). However, large majority of 'dalits' (including Neo-Buddhists), are still living in poverty and deprivation (in both village and cities) with low level of aspiration. But it is a fact that, the level of aspiration among 'dalits' in post-Ambedkar era is higher than that of in pre-Ambedkar era.

4. DOUBLE CULTURE:

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) argued about the social organization. According to him, the basic element in social organization is oppression. Response to oppression could take three main forms: a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or finally, a determined attempt at self-development, self-realization, in spite of prejudice and discrimination. (Du Bois : 1901: 4; quoted in Bert Adam & Sydie: 2002:297). This is perfectly true in case of 'dalits'. The oppression against 'dalits' promoted a systematic and democratic revolt under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar B.R. As a result of this, the social, economic and cultural development of 'dalits' (Neo-Buddhists) could take place.

Du Bois (1903:103) also stated about the double-consciousness based on the feeling of the strangers or outcast in his own land. He spoke this about African-American Negro. According to him, "An American Negro has two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" Thus being an outsider in his land becomes 'marginal man', the individual not fully integrated into either society or culture. [quoted in Bert Adam & Sydie: 2002:299)

This confused consciousness or double consciousness also can be found in case of 'dalits'. The double consciousness in relation of religion could be found among the 'Neo-Buddhists'. Many 'Neo-Buddhists' were practicing a double culture, 'Hindu' and 'Buddhism', which are contrary to each other. Dr. Ambedkar introduced 'Buddhism' as an alternative to 'Hinduism'. As per the 'Oath' under 'Buddhism' (in India), it is expected that, there should not be practice of 'Hindu' culture. However, the researcher found that, there exists double culture among the 'Neo-Buddhists'. The researcher stated this mixed culture as 'Hinbuddhism'. Therefore, the position of 'Neo-Buddhists' was like- "They did not left the 'Hindu' culture and did not accept the 'Buddhist' culture". They were living in double culture in a confused state.

5. HEGEMONIC STRUCTURE:

Gramsci Antonio (1975) has given the concept of 'Hegemony'. According to him, "…the 'Hegemony' referred to the ideological ascendancy of one or more groups or classes over others in civil society. Capitalism continued to survive because the workers accepted its general outlook-the cultural dominance of the bourgeoisie made the resort to political force unnecessary to maintain their power. Thus the masses had to be freed from enthrallment to the cultural hegemony of the capitalist classes before a successful challenge to the state could occur". (Gramsci quoted in Bellamy Richard: 2002:33). 'Dalits' have effectively threatened the 'Brahminical' hegemony in the field of education and literature. The 'dalit' movement has brought the structural changes in the social system. The 'dalit' literature has been an important source of mass assertion and mobilization. The writing creating by the 'dalit' intellectuals have brought the social, economic and cultural transformation. These changes are said to be 'new social identity'. This is nothing but a threat to the hegemonic state.

6. CONCLUSION:

The 'Neo-Buddhists' (ex-Mahars) or 'dalits' have gone through serious inhuman treatment and exploitation for hundreds of years. They were facing high degree social and economic discrimination based on the caste hierarchy. The caste hierarchy was blocking 'dalits' from the development. They had no free access in the school or educational system. The public places were banned for them. However, Dr. Ambedkar's famous statement "Educate, Agitate and Organise" brought a change in the mind set of the 'dalits'. Dr. Ambedkar created an inspiration and motivation among the 'dalits', especially the youths of 'Mahars' (Neo-Buddhists) . As a result of this, they started to get education, in spite of all inhuman treatment and caste barriers. They reached higher educational level and obtained better jobs in the government sector through the 'reservation'. They reached to the highest inter and intra-generational occupational mobility. 'Migration', 'Education' and 'Reservation' brought a considerable social and economic changes among the 'Neo-Buddhists' in 'Maharashtra'. There has been increasing size of elites among 'Neo-Buddhists'. Above all, the 'Neo-Buddhists' also have accepted the 'Buddhism' as their new religion, which changed the cultural base. As a whole, the change in the socio-cultural and economic structure inspired by Dr. Ambedkar has

brought the social, cultural and economic transformation among the 'dalits', especially among the 'Mahars' (Neo-Buddhists). The 'Neo-Buddhists' in Maharashtra have created an ideal model of development, which may benefit the rest of 'dalits' and backward castes in India.

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