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**Dalit Movement  
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Politics and Priorities**

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# DALIT MOVEMENT AND EMERGENCE OF THE BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY IN UTTAR PRADESH: POLITICS AND PRIORITIES

Shyam Singh\*

## **Abstract**

*After witnessing the prolonged efforts of the Dalit movements in various parts of the country to bring about radical changes within the social structure and processes, the Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh (UP) came out with a political agenda, which assumes that the state is an important means to bring about social change. The emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party is an illustration of this approach. The strategy of putting the political project above all has diluted the identity of the Dalit Movement in Uttar Pradesh, and this is reflecting in the political and developmental priorities of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh.*

## **The Perspective**

The Dalit movement in India has roots in the reformative *Bhakti* Movement. The *Bhakti* Movement thrived in pockets across the country over several centuries. The *Bhakti* Movement was not an organised movement but a conglomeration of the individual efforts of various saints and social reformers who pursued their ideas through their writings, folk culture and belief in one divine power. The *Bhakti* Movement was anti-caste, anti-elite, pro-women, pro-poor, anti-Sanskrit, and affirmed that genuine love of God was sufficient to find solutions to social problems. The movement attracted large numbers of the lower castes and poor, including women (Srinivas, 1996). Though, the *Bhakti* Movement has not spoken exclusively for the Dalits or proposed any agenda for radical changes in the social structure of Hindu society, it has established a pattern of questioning the Hindu social order which later provided a platform for an organised Dalit Movement with a strong voice for social reforms.

The failure of the efforts of the social reformers of the *Bhakti* Movement to bring structural changes in the existing social order of Hindu society through non-violence and appeals pushed the present Dalit Movement into politics. The political project has become crucial for the Dalit Movement to improve the lives of the oppressed and downtrodden. It was easy for the successors of the Dalit Movement to use 'caste' as a political strategy to enter into political discourses as the relationship between caste and politics is seen as a relationship for the specific purpose of organising public activity (Kothari, 1970). These trends were followed by the Dalit Movement that began in UP during the late Seventies and Eighties, and accentuated during the Nineties.

Uttar Pradesh had not responded much to the Dalit Movement in the pre and early post-independence periods. However, during the late Seventies and Eighties, things changed dramatically and the state witnessed a resurgence of the Dalit Movement with a clear political agenda for social change. The movement had a leading objective to capture state power for the Dalits. This objective was equipped with the expectation that once Dalits get enough economic and political benefits using state

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power, it would automatically improve their social status. Enhanced economic and political status has continuously provided enormous power to the upper castes and ensured them a dominant social position. To make this happen, the Dalit political party, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), was formed in 1984 and it is the chief political party in UP politics.

Even if the Dalit Movement of northern India puts its political project as a top priority, the ideological concepts, such as 'social mobility', 'relative deprivation' and 'reference group', remain central to the Dalits' social, economic and political status (Guru, 1999). Orthodox Hindu culture and traditions are recognised by the Dalit leaders as the factors responsible for the marginalisation of Dalits. This ideological stand of the Dalit Movement has influenced its developmental and political priorities and in maintaining Hinduism and the upper castes as its foes. The formation of the BSP as a political party was a strategic part of the Dalit Movement and was expected to continue to be the spearhead of the movement. But on the contrary, the BSP is being seen as a harbinger of major changes in the fundamental ideological propositions of the Dalit Movement which was supposed to be espoused by the protagonists of the movement.

In the mid-1990s and the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the BSP brought major changes in the nature and ideology of the Dalit Movement in UP in terms of setting up political coalitions first with Hindu minded political parties like the BJP and the Congress and later it formed a coalition with its all-time opponents, the Brahmins through 'social engineering'. The latter is being posed by the BSP as a social coalition rather a political tie. This development brought about vivid changes in the BSP with major changes in the social development policies of the present BSP government (2007 onwards). This paper aims to examine the deviation of the BSP from the fundamental ideological position of the Dalit Movement. This relationship is looked at from two levels - firstly the BSP's ability to fulfill the goals of the Dalit Movement through its political and developmental agenda while it has been in power, especially, after the introduction of its 'social engineering' project, and secondly, the perception of BSP cadres at the local level about considering the BSP as a part of the Dalit Movement.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The first section is a discussion on the appearance and advancement of the Dalit Movement in UP. In this section, the phenomenon of the emergence of the BSP as a part of Dalit Movement is also discussed. The second section comprises a discussion on the politics of the BSP and the continuing changes in its political and developmental priorities. The third section presents the perceptions of the leaders and functionaries of the BSP at the district and local level about the party's developmental and political priorities and its relationship with the Dalit Movement. This section is based on the primary fieldwork undertaken in Auraiya district of UP. The last section presents an analysis and the conclusion.

## **Narrative of the Dalit Movement in Uttar Pradesh and the Emergence of the BSP**

The political consciousness and the participation of the Scheduled Castes (SC) in UP in the politics of the state have traditionally been low. UP did not witness anti-caste Dalit movements in the colonial period unlike the southern and western parts of India (Pai, 2001). There were diminutive and less influential streams of lower caste agitations, not necessarily violent, during the colonial period in UP

(then United Province). It was hard for those agitations to keep their identity alive and separate from the vast anti-colonial movement. The anti-colonial movement in the United Province came under the umbrella of the Congress, prominently under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhian movements were accommodative and provided significant space for lower caste people though they were given minimum representation within the party. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, there was huge participation from the Dalit community. The emergence of Dalit leadership in Gandhian movements was enough for Dalits to raise their voice against the atrocities meted on them by the upper castes and the Hindu religion. But, Dalit mobilisation, which was a part of the Independence Movement could not raise social issues along with the political issues. The Gandhian movements were successful in associating Dalits only with 'political' but not with social or economic concerns. The early years of post-independence in UP were quite celebrative for the Congress as it cemented its political and electoral base in the state. The Dalits were one of the main constructors of the electoral base of the Congress in UP, and there was no striking political turbulence from their side which could exclusively be termed as a Dalit Movement.

Sudha Pai (2001) has divided the history of the post-independence Dalit Movement in UP into three phases. The first is from 1956-1969, when Dalits decided to form their own party under the leadership of Dr B R Ambedkar with the Republican Party of India (RPI). The second phase is about the failure of Dalit political parties that enabled the Congress to secure Dalit support under the leadership of Ms Indira Gandhi by the sharing in the consensus on '*Garibi Hatao*'. The third phase starts from the early 1980s when the Dalit Movement entered into competitive democratic politics with the emergence of the BSP with the criticism that the Dalit Movement had distanced itself from the initiatives for social transformation and focused only on political motives and goals.

In the first phase (1956- 1969), UP did not witness a strong presence of the Dalit Movement. This period was full of political and economic turbulence created by the land reforms. Though, the pace of the Dalit Movement in UP was not impressive, Dalit issues got predominance in the interpretation of the effectiveness and impact of land reforms in UP. Several agrarian reforms were introduced in the post-colonial age within the framework of the socialist view of the Indian state, which of course, is reflected in the Constitution of India to improve the quality of life of the depressed classes with the motive of bringing social and economic equality and equity in society. The results of these agrarian reforms, however, did not prove beneficial for the target groups. Many scholars called the agrarian reforms as a 'failed task' or 'a fiasco' (Joshi: 1970, Sen: 1962). A study of the agrarian reforms in Basti, a district of eastern UP, shows that the untouchable class got very little or nothing from the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1954 (Singh, 1978).

The real beneficiaries of these land reforms were the tillers of the land. Landowners did not till their land. The intermediate castes (Now OBCs) tilled the land and took their share. After the introduction of the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1954, landowners, who were mainly from the upper castes, had to forfeit land in excess 10 acres. These landowners started to sell their lands. Dalits and other depressed classes did not have the purchasing capacity to buy the land. Therefore, the intermediary castes who tilled the land purchased those lands (Singh, 1982). However, lack of purchasing power was not only reason that prevented the Dalits from taking the benefits of land

reforms; it was more a matter of deprivation of the entitlement. Omvedt and Patankar (1979) have discussed it at length.

According to Omvedt and Patankar (1979), two parallel hierarchies developed in the caste system of India. One hierarchy developed in the domain of agrarian relations ranging from landlords to independent peasants to tenant-cultivator to field servant. The last category comprised the untouchables - a form of semi-slavery. The parallel hierarchy developed in field of services ranging from priest at the top to the goldsmith, barber to washerman and leather worker. The entire land policy evolved in the colonial period and during the freedom struggle was focused on the ideology of 'land to tillers' which excluded the lowest hierarchy in the agrarian system i.e. the untouchable field servants. The failure of the land reforms in bringing equality among the Dalits in UP was enough to encourage them to launch the Dalit Movement. This was not a tough task because the contemporary Dalit Movement had a strong presence in the political and social spheres in other parts of the country. Surprisingly so, it did not happen. The Dalits kept their faith in the Congress, which was the chief propagator of land reforms. For the Dalits, snatching away land from the upper caste landowners was a crucial development. Landowning capacity of the upper castes enabled them to exercise the power over the deprived classes. Therefore, taking away land from the landlords was a historical development, even if it proved less beneficial for the Dalits. Therefore, instead of putting Dalits against the Congress as land reforms failed, this phenomenon cemented the trust of the Dalits in the Congress which was also enjoying the reputation it had earned throughout the freedom movement as 'protector of the nation'. The nationalist sentiments also protected the political interests of the Congress and the upper caste people who were then largely associated with it.

One important reason for not letting the Dalit Movement take the floor in UP was the social structure based on Hindu traditions and beliefs. The norms and values of Hindu society to a great extent determine the distribution of opportunities to ownership of land and they have influenced the economic and political relation of people in UP (Singh, 1982). Though social and economic relationships based on the religious interpretations have not been accepted by the Dalits they were deeply internalised by them. The second important reason was that Dalits, floating from bondage to one landowner to others could not develop a solid base in rural UP (Singh, 1982). This restricted the ability of the Dalits in raising and maintaining a movement against the well established social hierarchy.

During the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, concern over Dalit's interests was raised at different forums at the national level in public and private under the leadership of Ambedkar. Ambedkar was a national figure and he had an impact across the nation. When Ambedkar was very influential in national politics no second line leadership emerged in UP to carry on the legacy of the Dalit Movement established by him. The Dalits in UP, in the first couple of decades after the independence, could not mobilise themselves socially or economically; thus, their capacity to mobilise themselves politically was also restricted. Table 1 shows that during the early decades in post-independent India, political parties representing Dalit interests were less influential. The All India Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) failed in finding any political room in the state. In the 1951 state assembly elections, the SCF was not prepared to contest for all the 347 seats. It could only muster 32 candidates out of which 20 lost their deposits. The SCF was the first all-India political party formed exclusively for the Scheduled Castes. The

party was the result of Ambedkar's efforts to create a separate political party for Dalits. In first two Lok Sabha elections (1951 & 1957), the SCF could not win any seat from UP.

**Table 1: Performance of Lower Castes Parties in UP State Assembly elections (1951-1969)**

Year	Seat Contested (total seats)	Won	Deposit Lost	Vote % of total polled votes	Vote % in seats contested
<b>All India Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF)</b>					
1951	32 (347)	0	20	1.49	8.48
<b>Republican Party of India (RPI)</b>					
1962	123 (430)	8	97	3.74	12.32
1967	168 (425)	10	139	4.14	10.08
1969	172 (425)	1	146	3.48	8.26

**Source:** Election Commission of India

In 1957, the SCF had to wind up and turned into a new political party – the Republican Party of India (RPI). The RPI could manage a little political leverage in consecutive state assembly elections but failed to produce impressive political equations and remained marginalised in state politics. In the 1962 state elections, the RPI secured 3.74 per cent with eight seats it increased in next election by 4.14 percent with 10 seats. This improvement was the result of the RPI's coalition with the Muslim leaders in four districts of western UP. This coalition was a reaction to the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1961 (Brass, 1968). In the 1969 assembly elections, the political base of the RPI deteriorated drastically. The party could win only one seat out of 425 seats (3.48 percent). In the Lok Saba elections in 1962, the RPI won three seats and only one seat in 1967 general elections in UP.

The RPI had two clear goals; one was to defeat the Congress, which was dominated by Brahmins and the second was to improve the condition of the Scheduled Castes. The RPI, however, faced major failures in bringing this agenda to the political front. This failure was laid in the nature of UP society and politics during that period (Pai, 2001). The leaders within the party could not arrive at a consensus on how to achieve these two goals. Some of them wanted to seek support from the Congress while others favoured a separate identity (Lynch, 1969). Therefore, the RPI could not stand up to the strong organised structure of the Congress which was built at the local level by *Brahmins*, Rajputs, Scheduled Castes and Muslims. The Congress could manage the Scheduled Castes by making them as the stable electoral base of the party despite the fact that it was highly reluctant to put them in the party structure. For example, in 1968, there was not even one representative from the lower castes and only one SC member among the presidents of its branches at district or town level (Jaffrelot, 2003).

In the post-Ambedkar period, the hegemony established by the Congress was one of the important reasons for the poor influence of the Dalit Movement in India in general and in UP in particular. This hegemony was strengthened by the reputation that the Congress enjoyed throughout the freedom struggle and later by its accommodative politics. The Congress was successful in accommodating vibrant forces, which were expected to create political turbulence for the party and provide what they wanted. The Congress paid compensations to the *zamindars* to compensate for their losses due to land reforms legislations, set up special agencies to assist small farmers, supported the

minimum wage policy for the landless, and provided reservation in educational institutes and the administrative services for Scheduled Castes (Hasan, 1989). The Congress was also aware of the Muslim votes. The party appealed to Muslims by offering them positions in party and government organisations and by giving their candidates party tickets to contest elections (Hasan, 1989).

This hegemony continued until it was challenged in the late Eighties (though the dissatisfaction with the Congress started 1970s onwards) by the backward and lower caste forces and the Hindu wing under the Jana Sangh and later the BJP. The decline of the hegemony of the Congress was a watershed development in state politics and it provided space for regional political forces. These forces were results of the mobilisation of local interests in terms of castes and communities. The Congress was unable to produce any kind of counter-mobilisation to these forces and it caused significant damage in the paternal electoral base of the party. The decline of the Congress was not limited only to the new political upsurge; it was underwritten by the inability of the Congress to provide an effective blueprint for the social welfare and development during its rule in the state in the first 40 years after independence (Kohli:1987, Dreze and Gajdar: 1997). Therefore, the roots of Congress' hegemony were shaken as much because of its inability to maintain it as it was challenged by the others.

After the failure of RPI as a Dalit political party, the 1970s and 1980s were crucial for the Dalit Movement in UP. The state witnessed a very animated and path breaking movement under the leadership of Kanshi Ram who had put Dalit Politics in mainstream politics in the state. It was also the era when the Dalit Panthers emerged. It was a gathering of Dalit youths with a more militant approach to voicing their concerns. Kanshi Ram, however, was not influenced by these waves of extremism and paved the way for a wholesome political movement. He had a broader view than any other Dalit leader in the past of a movement that could unite all the social sections affected by the discriminatory social arrangement of Hindu society. Kanshi Ram argued that only 15 per cent the upper castes was ruling over the 85 per cent backward and lower castes along with religious minorities. Therefore, the fraction of 85 per cent should come together and take the advantage of democratic politics - being the majority they could rule over the country forever. Very importantly, Kanshi Ram used the basic principles of representative democracy, which had been criticised by the early Dalit leaders for not giving space to the Dalit community, i.e. rule of the majority as a political strategy. This strategy is reflected very clearly in the slogan "jiski jitni sankhya bhari, uski utni bhagidari" (share in power according to the ratio in population). Kanshi Ram's view of an egalitarian society was not an idea of absolute equality but of the 'rational distribution' of the power based on the population strength. In his theory, he is more realistic than the earlier propagators of the Dalit Movement.

Kanshi Ram established a category called *bahujan*, which comprises 85 per cent of the society. He used this category explicitly as a political tool for the Dalit mobilisation. Keeping this view in his mind, Kanshi Ram established a non-political organisation called the All India Backward and Minority Castes Employees Federation (BAMCEF) on December 6, 1973. The membership of the organisation was open only to Dalits employed in the public sector. The BAMCEF widened its base swiftly across the country, though it remained unnoticed by the mainstream media. To counter this media bias, the organisation launched its own journal, *Oppressed Indian*, and later scores of daily/weekly newspapers in most Indian languages (Teltumbde, 2006). The BAMCEF remained a base organisation which accepted



membership only from the government employees so that they could contribute economically for the implementation its further agendas. This was a strategic and organised technique to precede the Dalit Movement. After leveling the ground for his progress to the political arena, in 1981, Kanshi Ram established the *Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti* popularly known as DS-4, which was a political organisation. The political project of Kanshi Ram was backed by aggressive strategies with the devastating language its slogans - '*brahmin, bania, thakur chor, baki sab hum DS-4*'.

In 1984, Kanshi Ram turned the DS-4 into a full-fledged political party, the BSP, launched on Ambedkar's birthday with the slogan 'vote hamara, raj tumhara; nahi chalega, nahi chalega' (we vote but you rule, it won't continue). The goal was based on an axiom of Ambedkar that political power was the key to all problems (Teltumbde, 2006). The establishment of the BSP as a political party was part of a broader Dalit Movement initiated by Kanshi Ram in northern India mainly in UP. In the late Eighties, at one point of time Kanshi Ram was heading four Dalit organisations, i.e., BAMCEF, Buddhist Research Centre, DS-4 and BSP. All these organisations were considered as different parts of a complete Dalit Movement wherein the BSP would fulfill the political goals that Kanshi Ram had formulated. The BSP has been very successful in grasping the Dalits votes in UP. The reasons for this success are very obvious.

**Table 2: Performance of BSP in UP State Assembly Elections (1989-2007)**

Year	Seat Contested (total seats)	Won	Deposit Lost	Vote % of total polled votes	Vote % in seats contested
1989	372 (425)	13	282	9.41	10.72
1991	386 (419)	12	299	9.44	10.26
1993	167 (422)	67	44	11.12	28.53
1996	296(424)	67	28	19.64	27.73
2002	401 (403)	98	91	23.06	23.19
2007	403 (403)	206	36	30.43	30.43

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 2 shows the journey of the BSP as political party in UP. At the beginning of its political career, the BSP could make its presence felt only marginally, but very soon it occupied an influential place in state politics. When the BSP contested the election for the first time, it had already nearly 10 per cent of the votes as its social base. The Assembly elections in 1993 proved a turning point for the BSP when it made a political coalition with the SP to prevent the BJP from coming to power. This election was launched the BSP and it created more political space with an increase in its vote share from 10.26 to 28.53 per cent of the seats for which the party contested.

The year 1989, when BSP entered into the competitive electoral politics, was the time when the Dalit Movement in UP turned into a complete political movement with less focus on social reforms and economic equality. This change in the Dalit Movement was underscored by the major developments in the political landscape of UP. The rise of the Hindutva politics of the BJP, violent communal tension for building a temple in *Ayodhya* and the announcement of the Mandal Commission report's recommendations, all set the stage for the polarisation of communities along caste and religious lines.

These opportunities provided a clear avenue to the BSP to use its political leverage. The BSP was successful in increasing its social base continuously over successive elections, as Table 2 reflects.

The BSP's political strategy was mainly based on caste rather than class, even if it claims that the party works for the lower class people. However it was heavily dependent on the lower castes and could garner political support only from the Scheduled Castes and not other sections of society. This development restricted the expansion of the BSP's electoral base (Lerche: 2003, Duncan: 1999). Therefore, BSP brought a decisive and surprising shift in its basic ideology and electoral strategy. During the initial years of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the BSP focused on 'social engineering' to bring *Brahmins* and other upper castes together through the policy of *Sarvajan*. Though the BSP claims in all public forums and political manifestos that this policy brings the Dalits and upper castes together, it included only *Brahmins* in its political strategy with explicit focus. This social engineering brought Dalit and *Brahmins* together, which resulted in a huge victory for the BSP in the 2007 state assembly election in UP. The BSP organised several "*Brahmin Jodo Sammelans*" in different parts of the state, and also formed "*Bhaichara Committees*" in every district for developing cordial relations between the *Brahmins* and the Dalits (Verma, 2007a). The logic offered to rationalise this peculiar coalition was that if both castes could remain on one political platform, the atrocities and deprivation of the Dalits that were being caused by the *Brahmins* could be stopped (Verma, 2007b).

### **BSP- Dalit Politics and Changing Priorities**

The BSP has been changing its political stance very frequently as a result of the rapid political changes in UP. The BSP changed quite a lot in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When the BSP started as a political party in early 1990s its agenda was based on 'self respect'. Mayawati herself had asserted "self-respect is more important to the Dalits than material gains" and "what we are fighting for is dignity and self-respect" (Mayawati, 2001). This agenda pushed the BSP into an aggressive public dialogue against the political parties dominated by the upper castes, i.e., the Congress and BJP. The public language that the BSP used for the expression of its political views through the media and party literature was very aggressive. The political language of the party leaders (Kanshi Ram and Mayawati) sometimes was hard line. For example, at one point of time Kanshi Ram asserted that he was focusing on UP so that "he could break the neck of enemies". He planned to set up a fighter section of party cadres so that they could face those who captured the polling booths (Akela, 2006).

The political will of the BSP to unite the *bahujan* in the late Eighties and early Nineties to strengthen the party base by capitalising on the antagonistic public orientation against the upper castes. This strategy helped the BSP in mobilising Dalit votes but it could not capitalise on the other components of the *bahujan* category. During the early 1990s, the BSP tried to establish the SC-OBC coalition which was presented as an embodiment of Kanshi Ram's idea that '85 per cent' of the *bahujan* should grab power in the state. The BSP-SP pre-election coalition in the 1993 state election was a step towards turning this idea into reality. However, this coalition did not prove successful. The conflict between the BSP and the SP became a battle of two political strategies trying to win over a common social base and it turned into a battle for supremacy (Mishra, 1995).

The political priorities of the BSP were largely influenced by the immediate need of the party to become the chief political actor in UP and to grab power. So much so that the prime goal of the party during 1989-95 was to propel political instability in the state, so that none of the political parties could form the government in the state. Kanshi Ram confirmed the party strategy as: "We wish that no political party could get proper majority, then only we will be politically important for others" (Akela, 2006). The unstable political situation in the state helped the BSP to declare itself as an appropriate political option to lead the state. This situation also would be helpful to put the BSP in the driver's seat. There was growing impatience among the party leadership not to wait for the whole tenure of five years of the state assembly. Quick elections, in the case of unstable government, helped the BSP to modify its vote share. Table 2 shows that the BSP's vote share in the state was increasing in successive elections very rapidly. This increasing electoral base comprised Dalits.

The BSP has been very careful about opening its party forum to all sections of society particularly the upper castes. Leadership positions in the party were closed to upper caste people. During one interview Kanshi Ram said, "There are lots of other parties which accommodate upper caste people but they should avoid us" (Akela, 2006). This ideology of BSP established it as a centralist party or a party of a social clan in competitive democratic politics. Therefore, the political priorities of the BSP during its early years were surrounded by the need to acquire a dominant place in UP politics. It ultimately paved the way to power in the state. The party believes that state power is the 'key' or agent to introduce social change (Pai, 2002).

Before 1995, when the BSP government was in power in UP, the developmental agenda was absent in the party's long term political blueprint. The party literature, public addresses of the party leaders and their interviews with the media did not contain anything or had very little about the party's stand on the development of the country in general and UP in particular. Sudha Pai (2004) supports this view in her analysis of the political strategy and government programmes of the BSP in UP. She states that the party lacks an economic vision and it does not have any dear agenda for the economic upliftment of the Dalits. Kanshi Ram opined that such questions were unimportant and appropriate policies of economic development would be adopted once in office. Equality of political opportunity was central for him (Pai, 2004).

The second phase of the BSP's political life, we call it the post-*bahujan* phase, started from 1995 onwards. This period was very crucial for the BSP to strengthen its electoral base. There was an exemplar shift in the ideological standpoint of the party when it made a post-election coalition with the BJP to acquire state power. The BSP always labeled the BJP as a party of upper castes and a follower of Brahmanism. For the BSP, the BJP was not only a political rival but as also a party of those who have a history of exploiting the Dalits for centuries. The BSP formed its government three times in UP (1995, 1997, 2002-03) with the support of the BJP. This development not only put the future of Dalit Movement in UP in jeopardy but also reflected a prototype change in the BSP's political agenda and its political priorities. It would be fair to mention that this change happened only in the BSP's corresponding behavior with the BJP. When it came to its electoral base, i.e., Dalits, the BSP was very firm in working for the Dalits only even if it had formed a government with the help of the BJP.

The party has started many welfare programmes and benefits were provided to the Dalits exclusively. In 1995, scholarships for Dalit students up to eighth standard were given. This was expected to have benefited about 72,00,000 students, and for that the government arranged Rs 1,110 million. Fifty-three new student's hostels were to be constructed and old student's hostels to be renovated. The BSP government also arranged coaching centers to prepare SC/ST students for the civil services examinations at the state and central levels. Mayawati started the *Ambedkar Rojgar Yojana* (Ambedkar Employment Scheme) for Dalit women, for which government arranged Rs 600 million. The outlay for family health/planning programmes was increased and 50 per cent of the beneficiaries were Dalits. In 1997, Rs 700 million was allocated for setting up schools on the ashram model for the children of the Balmiki (SC) caste. Scholarships were increased during this period. Marriage support money for SC girls was increased from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000. For the treatment of the sick Rs 1,000 was provided. The allocation of funds for Indira Awaas Yojana (Indira Housing Scheme- IAY) was increased four-fold.

After attaining the state power in 1995 and 1997, the BSP's priorities for development were clear. The party's focus was more on rural development. The party viewed rural development as development of SC/ST. The BSP government adopted the Ambedkar Village Programme (AVP) as a premier programme for village development through which the interests of its social base could be secured. This programme was initiated by the SP Government in 1991 but later it was largely credited to the BSP. This programme was introduced only in those villages where SC/ST population was 50 per cent or more. Under the AVP, 36 schemes and programmes were selected to implement in each village where some of the programmes were related to rural infrastructure like roads, electricity, public buildings and so forth. Although the number of schemes and programmes has been changing over time, a major chunk of the plan was related to programmes of social assistance and security. Construction of toilets under sanitation programmes, immunisation, safe drinking water and housing facility under the IAY, widow pension, old age and disability pension, scholarship for children, construction of school buildings, family welfare and employment benefits were all important elements of the AVP. The Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, mainly Dalit families, were entitled to these benefits. In the first two tenures, the BSP hoped to improve the lives of 92 lakh SC/ST families through the AVP. During first three tenures of the BSP government 19,176 villages were declared as Ambedkar villages. That top priority was being given to this programme by the BSP can be understood from the orders given by then Chief Minister Mayawati to stop all other social welfare programmes and divert funds to Ambedkar Villages (Pai, 2003).

During the first three tenures of its rule in UP, the BSP focused much on the welfare of the SCs and STs. The party provided reservation for Dalits in government and also ensured that posts were filled as soon as possible. Under the social welfare programmes, the BSP government concentrated on the rural housing and education for the Dalit children. However, in the field of education, the government could not make structural changes and it became a major problem in UP in delivering education to the oppressed classes. The BSP's only focus was on providing scholarships to the Dalits. Another major policy preference of the BSP was its cultural policy aimed at symbolisation of Dalit culture and politics. The BSP celebrated many Dalit festivals and melas, established many arches and *smaraks* in the name

of Dalit leaders and social reformers. The names of many districts were changed and the new districts were named after Dalit icons.

The BSP's cultural policy was the embodiment of symbolic politics. It had two aims. First was to break the dominion of the upper castes in colonial history, which was the result of a long independence movement under the leadership of the Congress. This hegemonic domination was further accentuated by the developmental projects run by the Congress governments in terms of establishing monuments, parks, museums and libraries that glorified the contributions made by its leaders. This helped the upper castes and the Congress to establish and maintain their dominance in politics for long periods. The second aim of the BSP was to establish the same order of dominance as the Congress, which can help it to hold on to political power for long. The BSP has established many Ambedkar statues in its previous three tenures, but it did not work because the people simply discarded the BSP's agenda because they perceived Ambedkar as the founder of the Constitution not as a Dalit icon. Therefore, the BSP is now focusing also on parks and monuments in the name Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, even though there is widespread protest from other political groups.

After its third tenure the BSP in UP, experienced its limits. The party's performance in state elections from 1993 to 2002 party was restricted to within the 100 seats which was less than half of the majority required to form a government in the state. This limitation put severe pressure on the BSP to expand its social base. It moved radically from its ideological legacy which was established by Ambedkar and maintained by Kanshi Ram, even if both had different orientation towards the means to achieve a common goal. The BSP tried to expand its social base by making the upper castes, particularly *Brahmins*, join the party not only in the government but also to accommodating them in the party structure which earlier was closed to them. The BSP changed its basic slogan of '*bahujan*' (majority) to '*sarvajan*' (all people) which included the upper castes in the ideological framework of the party. BSP chief Mayawati referred to her party icon B R Ambedkar to prove that this coalition is not against the party ideology: "Ambedkar not only accepted a *Brahmin* surname given to him by a *Brahmin* teacher but also married a *Brahmin*." She also termed *Brahmins* as '*manav*' (humans) and not '*manuwadis*', and as leaders of social change (Verma, 2005). Mayawati deviated far away from the ideology of her mentor Kanshi Ram by turning his basic political strategy from '*Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Bhagedari*' (representation of each caste according to its share in total population) to '*Jiski Jitni Taiyari; Uski Utni Bhagedari*' (representation of each castes on the basis of their ideological preparedness to accept BSP's ideology) (Kumar, 2007).

The BSP's political priorities took the ultimate shift after 2003. In the 2007 state elections, the party gave 139 out of 402 seats to upper caste candidates including 89 *Brahmins* and 38 *Thakurs*. The BSP not only gave importance to the upper castes but it was also conscious of the OBCs and the Muslims who are a major part of the population of the state (Table 3). The OBCs represent around 34 per cent of the total population while Muslims account for 18.5 percent (Census 2001). The BSP fielded 110 OBCs and 61 Muslim candidates in the state assembly elections in 2007, but the political strategy of the party focused on the Dalit-upper caste coalition. The strategy of the BSP was to grab maximum votes of *Brahmins* and *Thakurs* along with its unyielding SC votes. *Brahmins* and *Thakurs* constitute 11 and 7.6 per cent, respectively, of the total upper caste population (21.3 %). The Scheduled Castes

constitute 21.15 per cent of the total population of the state. This coalition brought a clear majority to the BSP in the 2007 state assembly elections in UP with increased vote share not only from upper castes but also from the OBCs and Muslims (Table 4).

**Table 3: Population of Social Groups in UP**

Social Groups	Percentage in Total Population
SCs	21.15
STs	0.06
OBCs	33.4
Muslims	18.5
Upper Castes	21.3

**Source:** For SCs, STs and Muslims (Census 2001),  
For OBCs and upper castes (Pai, 2007)

**Table 4: Caste-wise Support of BSP in UP Assembly Elections (1996-2007)**

Caste/Communities	Percentage of Voters		
	1996	2002	2007
SCs	62	69	77
OBCs (non-Yadav)	13	20	27
Muslims	12	10	17
Upper Castes	4	5	16

**Source:** Kumar (2007)

Among the upper castes, the BSP added *Brahmins* prominently to its electoral and gave them many ministerial posts in the government in 2007. The time was ripe for the BSP to bring changes in the political and developmental priorities it had been practicing for more than 20 years. In an interview, Mayawati disclosed that as part of her developmental priorities she would keep four sectors at the forefront of the government's efforts, i.e., rural development, urban development, employment generation and public services. She advocated the need to establish 'regional employment generation centers' in the state to provide employment for the needy sections of the society (Mayawati, 2007). As far as industrial development was concerned Mayawati emphasised that it would be equally distributed and not saturated in the private sector. Here, she was true to the basic principle of the Dalit Movement pursued by Ambedkar that economic exploitation was the result of the dominance of the upper castes over resources and wealth. She gave infrastructure development top priority to enhance industrial development (Mayawati, 2007). These priorities were not different from the BSP ideology in its initial stages. However, the nature and scope of the beneficiaries were different earlier compared to what is being pursued at present. Chief Minister and BSP chief Mayawati has expressed that the priorities of the present government (2007) would be to focus on the poor people from the upper caste (Outlook, 2007).

## Sarvajan Agenda: Practice and Discontent

The BSP's new move towards the Sarvajan agenda compelled it to shed its garb as a Dalit political party. As a consequence, the political priorities of the BSP changed. The BSP put forth three most preferred political goals. First was to establish party rule at the Centre. This ambition was further modified to winning prime minister-ship for Mayawati. The modification that followed was more potent than the former in describing the trends of BSP politics in UP. The *Brahmins*-Dalit coalition was presented as a social coalition rather a political coalition for long term stability. This coalition, in the view of the local BSP leaders, was seen as a project to take Mayawati to the post of Prime Minister of India, now or later. The failure of the BSP in Lok Sabha elections in 2009 where *Brahmins* were supposed to vote for the BSP did not bring substantial changes in the view point of BSP towards *Brahmins*. Political assessments speculated that *Brahmins* did not vote for Mayawati but for the *Brahmins* candidates of BSP. The BSP's continued emphasis on Dalit-Brahmin coalition is the very need of BSP to maintain its rule in UP even if party is unable to grab power at the Centre. This was the BSP's second most preferred political priority.

Thirdly, despite of all the political changes within the party structure and processes, the BSP was very careful not to lose its basic social base, i.e., the Dalits. For that BSP continued with the politics of symbolisation of Dalit culture which was very effective in constructing and maintaining Dalit vote base in past. Presently, the BSP is following this cultural policy very closely; therefore it has become even more important than the economic and social development of the state. The main agenda of the BSP government was to set up statues of Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati in parks. In the implementation of this policy the party leadership is trying to use the history of Dalit legends to make aware people of their valuable contributions to society that have been abandoned by the other parties, specially the Congress and the BJP during their rule in the state. According to one district level BSP leader of Auraiya district, *"Setting up statues is a mission. Ambedkar failed in framing the direction of the Dalit Movement. He could not sketch the avenues through which mission of establishing Dalit's pride was to move. Therefore, Mayawati wants to do the same which Ambedkar left in between. Now the mission will spread from Kanyakumari to Kashmir"*

The developmental priorities of this government are still evolving around its old agenda of development, i.e., Ambedkar Development Programme. The present BSP government, however, has decided to extend this programme to all villages irrespective of the proportion of the social groups in the population of the villages. Earlier only those villages that had 50 per cent or more SC/St population were selected as Ambedkar Villages. This has been seen as a shift in the policy of AVP because of the party's *Sarvajan* agenda under which party has to look after every section of society. The expansion in the scope of this programme has significantly reduced the attention of the government and the party in the effective implementation of the programme. So much so that, Dalits feel that the BSP is not very enthusiastic about the implementation of this programme. There is also a serious dilemma in identifying villages that need to be monitored effectively - those villages that are Dalit-dominated or those where the upper caste population is in excess. This dilemma has dimmed the focus on infrastructure development in the villages. The waning interests of the BSP government in the implementation of this programme has also given the bureaucracy a free hand which was comparatively active in the earlier

tenures of the BSP government in UP. Earlier Chief Minister Mayawati herself used to come to inspect the progress of projects of rural and infrastructural development but now she never visits the villages and for the common people, including Dalits, it seems that she had abandoned her dream project.

There is a feeling among the middle level party leaders that lack of interest in the party in rural developmental programmes has shifted the focus of government from the very important social sectors like health and education. Earlier (prior the Dalit-*Brahmin* coalition) party functionaries used to receive information about the government's prominent social welfare programmes but now they are not receiving any message from the high command regarding health and education or other welfare programmes. The reason for this, in the opinion of BSP leaders at the district level, is due to the domination of political priorities over developmental priorities. In earlier tenures development was fast, effective and focused, at least in Ambedkar Villages, but it is lacking now. The pace of development is slow. The perceptions of the local leaders of the BSP are quite different from the premier leadership of the BSP. The local leadership is still fond of the basic ideological perspective established by Ambedkar and further strengthened by Kanshi Ram. The political project of the BSP is reluctant to bring about ultimate changes at the cost of avoiding its own people who raised the party to this level. Party functionaries at the district level are directionless as to how they should present the party in public forums and before the local level party cadre. Dalit leaders are confused because of '*Sarva Samaj*' (or *Sarvajan*) policy. Many Dalit leaders assert that if Dalits are still with the BSP it is because of the ideology developed by Kanshi Ram and not by Mayawati. However, because of unavailability of the other political options the Dalits are compelled to share their own benefits and political gains with the *Brahmins* and other upper castes that still have intention not of sharing anything with the Dalits.

## **Analysis and Conclusion**

The Dalit Movement has not been merely an exhibition of the agitation of the Dalits for social change. It has been cemented with well thought out developmental and political premises. Ambedkar was the chief architect for the foundation of the movement. He left the movement with a mission to be continued to fulfill its goal, even though leadership changes over the time. Ambedkar chalked out a consolidated economic development plan without being influenced by the socialist approach of the radical Marxist thinking that he once found suitable to describe the depressed classes in India. Ambedkar was very concerned about the economics of the deprivation of oppressed classes in India. In *State and Minorities* Ambedkar laid down the strategy of India's economic development without closing every avenue of private enterprise and also providing for the equal distribution of the wealth. He advocated an economic framework aimed at providing protection to the vulnerable sections of society against economic exploitation (Jadhav, 1993).

The BSP has shown an obsolete separation from Ambedkar's thinking on economic development. Ambedkar had dealt with economic planning very broadly where he was concerned that the depressed classes should not be excluded from the developmental processes. The BSP has translated Ambedkar's economic thinking into short term social policies exclusively for the Scheduled Castes. The focus during the first three tenures of the BSP government in UP was on major social policies for Scheduled Castes. These policies were short-term and hardly had anything to do with



sustaining the economic and social advancement of the Scheduled Castes. The BSP did not respond to the economic development of the state, though it had a greater responsibility to put the process of development on track after the 40-year-long negligence of the Congress in the development of the state. The BSP has been remarkable in fulfilling the political priorities of the Dalit Movement. Capturing state power was a prime objective of the Dalit Movement to improve the social and economic conditions of the Dalits. This objective got favorable attention from Ambedkar as is clear in his address to the first Round Table Conference, London, 1930:

*"We are often reminded that the problem of depressed classes is a sociological problem and than its solution lies elsewhere than in politics. We take strong exception to this view. We hold that the problems of the depressed classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their hands. If this is true, then the problem of the depressed classes is, I submit, eminently a political problem and must be treated as such".* (Quoted in Jaffrelot, 2005)

But, in keeping the political project as a top priority, the BSP has diluted the identity of the Dalit Movement which Ambedkar maintained successfully, even though he had put all his efforts in making many political parties like the Indian Labour Party (ILP), Schedule Caste Federation (SCF) and the Republican Party of India (RPI). The dilemma now faced by the BSP is whether it should be considered as a part of the Dalit Movement or be restricted to being only a political party which has secured the loyalty of the Dalits like the Congress has for long. This dilemma may turn into reality because of the growing rift between the BAMCEF, a paternal body and the strategic organisation of the post-Ambedkar Dalit Movement in India, and the BSP. The relationship between the BSP and BAMCEF has become more informal. Earlier, the selection of the BSP candidates for Assembly and Lok Sabha elections was on the basis of recommendations made by the BAMCEF. Since the BAMCEF is not a public organisation, it used to work as secret service organisation for the BSP. It used to recommend to the party only those candidates who had the potential to win elections. The major political agendas and policies were discussed within the BAMCEF.

Now, the role of the BAMCEF in deciding the BSP's political agenda and strategies has become minimal. The party does not seek any suggestion or recommendation from the BAMCEF in deciding the candidates for the elections or in the organisational structure at the state, district and local level nor in formulating policies and political strategies. The common feeling among the leaders of the BAMCEF is that the BSP is no more a part of Dalit Movement. Growing suspicion about the nature of the 'Dalitness' of the BSP is accelerating this feeling. The recent political moves of the BSP in terms of its coalition with the upper castes lacked among the local Dalit leadership and community. It is very hard for them to accept that the agenda of social change that Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram had dreamed of would come true by association with the upper castes. As a result of being friend with the upper castes, concepts like 'relative deprivation' and 'social mobility' remained undefined. To define these concepts, one must know in relation to whom (opposition or defined enemies) Dalit are deprived, or their social mobility restricted.

Though, the voting behavior of Dalits may not be disturbed and they can continue to vote for the party as it is the only available political platform for the Dalits in UP, the BSP has failed in mobilising the society and awakening the social consciousness to bring more social equilibrium for the Dalits.

Social mobility remains at the bottom as Dalits themselves are showing signs of disagreement with the BSP's political stance. Therefore the Dalit Movement seems to have lost its momentum. At the local level the BSP has a tough job to pursue its old political base which has continuously been voting for it. Giving the upper castes equal importance with the Dalits leaves lots of questions unanswered. What is the premise for the existence of the BSP? How could there be a Dalit struggle without the definition of its friends and foes (Telumbde, 2007)? The answers to these questions will give a new direction to the Dalit Movement in UP.

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