

# Impact of Dalit Movement in Bellary district- A Sociological Study

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## Abstract

The Dalit movement in India is yet to be fully formed with a sizeable consensus. It lives in various forms, sizes and shapes. It has not yet formulated a cogent programme to take in politically conservative Dalits by bringing them into the wider Indian democratic experience. Dalit scholars and politicians alike can be seen struggling to formulate a workable theory of Ambedkarism or Dalitism that would be a manifesto for common liberation. By exclusively relying on constitutionalism as a means of emancipation, this class of intellectuals argues for a utopian dream. The methods of attaining Dalit emancipation, however, remain unknown. The sooner India's oppressed realise this, the better. One cannot depend on the limited conceptions of constitutionalism for deliverance. Owing to the limited control of this institution, the Constitution has become synonymous to a grievance cell offering no immediate solutions.

The linguistic accessibility of the Constitution and its reach to the oppressed is extremely limited. Few peasants would consider the Constitution as a written word that would guarantee them protection from the landlord's real and financial whipcord. Similarly, beggars who are living on the mercy of donors' charity would think that this dossier guarantees them equality and access to freedom. The idea of the Constitution is romantic. No one really knows its limitations but lauds its profundity without testing it out. Many Dalits are repeating the state's narrative of constitutionalism as being the ultimate virtue — a god-sent panacea. It does nothing more than apply a lotion to massage one's shattered ego. But when it comes to exercising the enshrined codes in the Constitution, Dalits seem to be harming their self-worth. This is because not everybody feels this document is close to their hearts as much as Dalits. Not everyone has similar expectations from the Constitution. Thus, it creates genuine gaps while considering constitutional morality as a common virtue. Hence, in such a situation of one-sided applicability, mutual cohabitation is a long shot. One has to pierce through the devious agenda of casteist rogues by injecting a radical antidote to set a tone of mutuality and respectability. Unless this is settled, no further conversation can be foreseen that will yield real results.

As much as Dalits feel empowered in a constitutionally mandated democratic republic, any hope of their issues being redressed withers away when reality comes knocking. After every gruesome atrocity or everyday humiliation they undergo at the workplace or in their shared housing, the promise of constitutionalism shatters into pieces. Dalits are often accorded second-class citizenship.

**Keywords:** *Dalit movement, Bellary district, sociologic, critic, literary movement.*

## Introduction

The leaders of the non-Brahmin Movement along with the untouchables were appreciative of Dr. Ambedkar's efforts. Siddappa Kamble of Hubli who was then the education minister of Bombay Presidency and a first rank leader of the non-Brahmin movement in Bombay-Karnataka is reported to have helped Ambedkar in many ways. Ambedkar's Movement

created tremendous social and political awareness among the Marathi-speaking untouchables living in the border areas of Belgaum district. The emergence of powerful untouchable leaders like Barrister Mane, Dr. Warale and Datta Katti can be attributed to this awareness engendered by Ambedkar.

They in turn strengthened Ambedkar's Movement.<sup>237</sup> Thus Dalits were brought to the centre by both Gandhi and Ambedkar differently to achieve a common goal. Gandhi took the cause of untouchables by persuading Lingayats and Brahmins who were the dominant communities in the area of Bombay-Karnataka. To achieve this task Gandhi used the National Congress and the programme for the Harijans as one of the programmes of his National Movement. The method that Ambedkar employed was mainly to persuade Dalits and the non-Brahmins. He used the means of Dalit association and urged for a political platform to eradicate untouchability.

The Maharaja agreed to provide food, clothes, shelter, education, health and opportunities of employment for the Panchamas. This attempt gave the untouchables a moral boost as the assistance directly came from the royal house. Prior to 1900, the Mysore province witnessed several progressive programmes for the uplift of the untouchables. This was possible only due to the social-reform zeal of the Ramakrishna Mission, Theosophical Society, Brahma Samaj and so on.<sup>212</sup> Under the banner of these societies and associates like "Dhanalaxmi Co-operative Society" of 1902, "The Civil and Social Progress" of 1916, "Mythic society" and "Civic Association" Maharaja and his team of social reformers established schools, hostels, charitable institutions, Bajan Mandalies, credit societies etc; for the overall development of panchamas. All these activities together helped the Dalits realize the importance of coming together and of adapting to modern ways. In December 1914, the Prince, in his speech, announced in public that he would chalkout a programme to eradicate untouchability and inequality in the province. This was one of the bold steps taken to reform social practices. Along with this, the attempts of Yuvaraja Narasimha Raja Wodeyar in exposing the problems of the untouchables to the British officers resulted in forming a "social service league" which was followed by the establishment of the Depressed Class Mission in 1917. These two major steps, measures which were unique to Karnataka, worked in favour of the untouchables. The social service extended by the reformer Gopal Swamy Iyer positively brought about significant changes especially a partial eradication of untouchability in the Mysore province during the Wodeyar rule.<sup>213</sup> The decade of 1920s in Mysore witnessed Brahmin and NonBrahmin conflict, diverse activities in support of the national movement, and the emergence of a number of social service organizations especially the Praja Mitra Mandal which ultimately merged with the Congress in 1937. However, during 1930s, the emergence of a non-Brahmin Movement in Mysore was not really a non-Brahmin Movement but a lobbying effort by the upper castes.<sup>214</sup> The only non-Brahmins who played a crucial role in helping the untouchables were C.R. Reddy and Murugesh Pillai, both of whom were non-Kannadigas.

### **Objective:**

This paper seeks to explore the Dalit movement in the Bellary district. Also it explores social repercussions of the Dalit movement.

### **Social context of Dalit movement in Hyderabad-Karnataka/Bellary**

Attempts to eradicate untouchability were initiated by the Congress for its political benefit, with an aim to take them into the Congress fold. Besides, two prominent Dalit organizations - AdiDravida Abivruddhi Sangam and Adi-Jambhava Sangha - worked for admissions to untouchable students in educational institutions, access to tank water, and issues relating to temple entry. Surprisingly, from 1920s onwards Dalits were also asking for government wastelands and other lands for cultivation.

They asked for land at concessional rates in the newly irrigated tracts of the Irwin canal, but this was refused. In October 1931, the Diwan made a major speech claiming that the government's programme of settling Adi-Karnatakas on land and giving them a proprietary interest "is making very satisfactory progress", with 9,763 acres distributed in that year.<sup>215</sup> In this case, Murugesh Pillai also appears as a spokesman for getting such benefits as rights and not 'grants' for the 'uplift' of Dalits.<sup>216</sup> But such language of 'rights' was rare. Even in the Assembly debates, Dalits spoke out very little themselves on social issues; they were more vocal on economic issues such as land, education and traditional caste-duties, while the social issues were presented in a conservative and Hinduizing fashion with Brahmans as the dominant spokesmen and non-Brahmans (with the exception of a few individuals) silent or opposing. The administration under the Wodeyars in the Mysore Province was said to be one of the pioneer administrations for the kind of official activities taken to eradicate major social evils, especially the practice of untouchability. It is a significant development because the initiative to transform social practices came from a responsible administration rather than from the platforms of the untouchable themselves. The remarkable thing that took place in the Mysore region during this time was the opening of schools, the first ever initiative in India. This attempt at opening schools for untouchables conveyed a message that the Dalits have to be educated before thinking of any constructive activities. This trend, however, was not the rule in the other states, especially in Tamil Nadu where an initiative to reform Hindu social practices came from the mobilization of the untouchables.

### **Role of soci-religious institutions in Dalit movements**

The message of the Arya Samaj - India for Indians; except Hindus, all are foreigners on the soil of Hindustan - was meant to instil courage in Hindus to oust the rule of Nizam and face the atrocities of Razaakars.<sup>223</sup> The autocracy of the Nizam undoubtedly had a pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu aspect to it. The Nizam's administration was largely Muslim, Urdu was imposed on his subjects, and the Razaakars' actions were targeted against Hindus. The Arya Samaj which took up cudgels for the 'Hindu masses' against Muslim oppressors, took over the leadership of the anti-Nizam Movement partly owing to the late arrival of the Congress.

Until 1940, the National Congress did not take up people's struggle in the princely states. The role of the Arya Samaj was mainly visible with the antiNizam activities but not mainly with the task of emancipation of untouchables. We must also look at the general realities as the Hindu Deshmukhs and Jagirdars formed part of the support base of the Nizam. A section of the Dalits also joined the Razaakars' forces and a number of Hindu religious maths lent support to the Nizam's regime thinking that they had their sectional interests bound with it.<sup>224</sup> Through various Dalit activities, especially P.R. Venkata Swamy's influence, the untouchables were made to realize that they were exploited. As a result, they rejected the Panchama identity and claimed that they were the real aborigines of the Deccan. They also argued that the Depressed classes are, as a community, entirely different and distinct from the followers of the Vedic religion, called Hinduism. They

also stressed internal social reforms and sought a ban on alcohol drinking and meat-eating at social functions, and the abolition of Devadasi system.<sup>225</sup> Indeed, the trends in the Hyderabad region were unique and the Dalit Movement took a distinctive orientation in this region.

### **Dalit movements: Post independence**

It was only in 1948 that the Government of Mysore passed a law permitting all the Scheduled Castes to enter the temples in the state. Dalits in Mysore also fought against discrimination. In the multi-dimensional social discrimination, Dalits were not allowed to enter Hotels, Saloons, Laundries, Shops, Temples and to join religious processions.

Public wells, house entry and dining (still prevailing in various parts of rural Karnataka) were excluded to them.

As a result, Dalits in the Mysore state often came into clash with the dominant castes. Major conflicts broke out in Mysore, Bangalore, (Solur) between Dalits and caste-Hindus such as Lingayats, Vokkaligas and even Muslims during 1948, 1959 and 1969.<sup>253</sup> On December 26, 1939, Ambedkar was welcomed by the municipality workers' federation in Belgaum. Addressing the workers on the occasion Ambedkar said that caste-Hindus and none else were responsible for the sin of untouchability which he was trying to remove by working for the uplift of Dalits. He also said that the question of tackling the problem of Dalits was more urgent than even that of winning swaraj.

Again in December 16, 1952 addressing a rally under the auspices of the Belgaum District branch of Scheduled Caste Federation, Ambedkar said that the misery, starvation, and squalor of the Backward Classes would bring dreadful results and recalled the French and Russian revolutions. He warned that the ruling party (Congress) must improve the conditions of the Backward Classes, or else the ruling party would be met with stern actions of retaliation. He demanded a new deal for Dalits towards eradicating their poverty and misery.

The visit of Ambedkar to Bijapur on February 12, 1939 marks a different story in the context of the Dalit Movement in Karnataka. Though he came to Bijapur to open the branch of the Independent labour party his presence sent a message to all the Dalits with regard to the significance of political unity. By criticizing the Congress policy, Ambedkar gave a new start to his party in Karnataka. As a result of it trends in Karnataka not merely tended to mobilize Dalits but also warned the general public, especially casteHindus, about the possible challenges from the Dalit community as a whole. Ambedkar's visit to Hyderabad - Karnataka not only provided him support but also gave a moral boost to his idea of launching his political party.

### **Role of Dalit Literature**

They also demanded abolition of the Devadasi system, equal wages for women and financial assistance to start home industries.

Indeed, their demand to make Dalit women economically independent was something that was appreciated widely. Dalit Employees Federation (DEF): Unlike any other organizations of DSS, the DEF has a special role to play in two major areas. First, the DEF has been the anchor for the development of Dalit movement in Karnataka as the educated and employed Dalits took the leadership of the Dalit Movement. It is this group that took the Dalit movement to the villages in its initial stages. Secondly, the DEF extends intellectual, moral and financial support to the main organisation. It took

up the issues related to the employees belonging to Dalit categories and brought to the fore opportunities available for Dalit employees. It opposed harassments and discrimination at the work place.

The Dalit Employees of H.M.T, Canara Bank, Syndicate Bank, Reserve Bank, Hindustan Aeronautical Limited, and Teachers of schools, colleges and universities are the active members of DEF. It is estimated that over 10,000 employees are actively involved in this organisation Dalit Writers and Artists Federation (DWAF):<sup>275</sup> This wing is considered as the think tank of DSS. In the early 1970s it had a close link with DSS. In 1975 Dalit writers and youth association came into existence. This association held a conference in 1976 at Bhadravathi. Several thoughtful Dalit writers gathered at the venue. They also actively participated in various literary conferences, community jatas, and farmers' bare-foot marches. Progressive non-Dalits like Prof. Nanjundappa, Poornachandra Thejaswi and U.R. Ananthamurthy also extended support to DWAF. Dalit Sahitya or literature created a path breaking and new literary tradition in Karnataka, became highly creative and began to demonstrate that there was a distinct Dalit pattern in literature as an alternative to the established way of writing. Later it came to be identified as 'Dalit literature'.

### **Dalit Stalwarts**

Dalit writers Siddalingaiah, Devanoor Mahadev, Aravind Malagatti and a host of others came to be identified with this genre of writing Dalit Municipal Corporation Workers' Federation (DMCWF): In spite of all the modern developments Indian society has not changed much in its division of labour and fixing of social roles. They reproduce the caste system and untouchability in their characteristic ways. A large number of Dalit employees are found in the corporations and municipalities not as clerks but as manual workers confined to socially despised jobs. Such a division of labour conveys the message that socially disrespected jobs are reserved to Dalits. It is estimated that about 22,782 workers are employed in different municipalities in Karnataka. Of these 90% belong to the untouchables castes.

DMCWF fights for better working conditions, better wages, total development of the workers and proper educational facilities for their children.<sup>277</sup> The founding fathers of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti in Karnataka, like Late B. Krishnappa, Devanoor Mahadev, Siddalingaiah, Devayya Harave, Chandra Prasad Tyagi, M.D. Gangaiah, Kolar Venkatesh, Muni Yellappa, Mangalore Vijay, Muni Venkata Swamy and a host of others who were working in the state guided the district and taluk branches in the process of initial organisation and agitations. It was a rare combination of writers, scholars, poets, dramatists and singers who came forward to give Dalits voice, vigour and strength.

If B. Krishnappa was the Commander-in-chief in the organisation, Siddalingaiah was its poet and Devanoor Mahadev, its thinker. Each one contributed in his own unique way to the growth and development of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS). The following were some of its major activities in Karnataka which explain the strength and weakness of this movement. While expressing a painful flood of anguish against the sources of exploitation, Dalit writers in Karnataka not only used a new rhetoric with wild idioms, phrases and verbs, but also created a new rhythm of hope, courage and confidence among the Dalits. Siddalingaiah, one of the prominent Dalit writers used his skill to build up the momentum of Dalit literary universe. The tune and substance of his poetry, was almost in line with that of Namdev Dhasal of Maharashtra. Siddalingaiah's poems became the source of spirit to Dalit activists and Dalit masses, who engaged themselves in struggle.

It is with this revolutionary zeal that Dalit literature in Karnataka grew and spread beyond certain traditional boundaries. Siddalingaiah's poems produced strange vibrations in the veins of Dalit activists. Whether a conference or a symposium,

a conclave or a protest movement, they all began and concluded with the songs of Siddalingaiah. So were Devanoor Mahadev's novels, which served as food for thought. The fictions he narrated depicted different facets of Dalit life.<sup>279</sup> They were sharply outspoken and penetrative with insights. Most of them were dramatized and were successfully staged in all the important cities of the state.

### **Dalit Movements Social empowerment and its future**

Though the Dalit Movement came through different stages facing diverse problems, it sustained the spirit of the Movement till 1976. Due to increasing dissatisfaction and differences of opinion between the leaders of various sub-castes within the Dalit category, the much acclaimed movement resulted in a major split. It must be made very clear that the Dalit Movement got its institutional shape after calling itself Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, popularly called DSS. The first split in DSS, indeed in the Dalit Movement, took place in 1976 over the issue of leadership. It was during this time that in Karnataka the Dalit Movement had reached its peak. Besides, the Dalit Movement kept its agenda going without interrupting its activities inspite of the split. The sub-caste question became the most important challenge to the Dalit Movement resulting in splits.

In 1985 with differences of opinion over the organizational pattern of the Dalit Movement a large number of incidents took place leading to questions about the integrity of the leaders. In 1987 a new faction within the Dalit Movement came up under the leadership of Venkataswamy and his friends who argued that the office bearers of the movement have misused the fund to the tune of Rs. 6,000. The first organized splinter group of the Dalit Movement came up in the name of Bhim March led by Venkataswamy. With four years of experience in the state the Bhim March was christened as Samatha Sainik Dal on 13-5-1991. The Samatha Sainik Dal (SSD) has been operating in Karnataka with a great deal of popularity comparable to the DSS. The Praja Vimochana Chaluvalli (PVC) that came up during 1996 was another group within the larger Dalit movement but soon got itself split into a splinter group calling itself Karnataka Janandolana Samiti (KJS).

### **Conclusion**

Dalit Movement. It had the potential to grow stronger than any other socio-political force in Karnataka. From then onwards different groups headed by different Dalit leaders came to support one or the other party including the Congress. In the 1994 Vidhan Sabha Assembly elections, N. Murthy's DSS wing supported the Congress party headed by S. Bangarappa.<sup>282</sup> N. Murthy himself contested the election from Nelamangala reserved constituency and was defeated in the election. Again in the 1998 and 1999 Loksabha elections DSS headed by N. Murthy supported the Congress party against the BJP. As every political party in India has its own Dalit wing, in Karnataka too, political parties like Congress, BJP, Janatha Dal (U), Janatha Dal (S), BJP etc have their Dalit band of supporters. Political positions regarding support to political parties widely vary. Shivarama Kadana Kuppe, one of the prominent DSS leaders from Mysore, says that there are only three options in front of Dalits in terms of political party affiliation. They are Congress, BJP and Janatha Dal. He would also like to include the upcoming BSP in this fold.<sup>283</sup> Such an assessment is based upon the presence of political parties on the ground. On the other hand, Shridhar Kaliveer, one of the founders of the DSS from Bangalore, curses political party leaders like Ramakrishna Hegde<sup>284</sup>, Devegowda<sup>285</sup>, S.M. Krishna and Yedeurappa.

He thinks that they caused the weakening of the integrity and strength of DSS in Karnataka for their political purposes. He feels that all the members of the DSS irrespective of caste or ideological affiliations should join together and support

the BSP in Karnataka. He believes that the party has the ideology of "by the Bahujan, of the Bahujan and for the Bahujan". He also says that this party has a capacity to offer a strong challenge to the higher caste/class oriented political parties. Some DSS leaders believe that unless and until DSS participates in active politics, Dalits will not gain social justice and economic equality. These leaders are of the opinion that there is an urgent need for the political mobilization of SCs/STs, backward castes and minorities who constitute the Bahujan Samaj - a majority in the society.

Dalit leaders like Janardhan, Dr. L. Hanumanthaiah, Maleyur Guruswami, Dalit sympathizer Prof. Ramprasad, Prof. Aravind Malagatti and others, however, are of the opinion that DSS should remain only as a 'pressure group' and not become the rubber stamp of any other political party. They believe that all political parties in India and self-appointed Dalit leaders and politicians are corrupt and dishonest and have no concern for the welfare of the poor in society. The fear of DSS activists is that political parties in Maharashtra have destroyed the Dalit Panther' Movement and the same fate might befall them in Karnataka. Lack of leadership quality, mutual suspicion, ideological differences, self-centred egoism, absence of discipline, corruption, caste differences, sub-caste consciousness, immature political decisions, craze for political power etc., were to cost the Dalit movement very heavily and it eventually destroyed the movement's strength and vision. At first, the process of fragmentation was witnessed within the organization since the 70s.

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