

Contribution of B. Krishnappa towards Dalit Movements – A Sociological Study

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Abstract

Karnataka occupies the 9th position in the scheduled caste population compared to other states in India. As mentioned earlier, the distribution of Dalit population across the all districts in Karnataka is not the same. They are scattered all over without giving a clue why they do not live together inspite of the nature of exploitation on caste lines. The concentration of Dalit population is closely connected to the work opportunities that are available under traditional division of labour. But the possibility cannot be ruled out that there is a close relationship between the urban area and the concentration of Dalits. Since they remained wage labourers they settled in places where~their labour was recognized or where they had enough work to do to earn their livelihood. When we look at the districtwise data, nearly two thirds of the total Dalit population in the state is found in 11 districts i.e; Bangalore-rural, Bellary, Bidar, Chikmagalur, Chitradurga, Gulbarga, Kolar, Mysore, Raichur, Shimoga and Tumkur. Kolar district accounts The demographic shift of SC population from rural to urban areas has been periodically caused due to a number of reasons.

It must not be forgotten that a majority of Dalits have had their association with land either as tenants or as labourers. In either capacity, they were under fear of insecurity. Due to the recent interventions by the government there is some change taking place in the world of Dalits who aspire to become citizens with equal rights. The quantity of land held by Dalits has been recorded periodically. Any small change in such holdings is recorded and highlighted. When the government distributed land, especially dryland, it became an issue, especially among non-Dalits who have violently reacted to such government activities. One of the prominent studies on Dalits highlights the prevailing land-holding pattern in Karnataka. While doing so the same study has referred to different types of lands like Dryland, Wetland and Gardenland.

Prof. B. Krishnappa (1938–1997) was born in Madiga Community, in Harihara, Davangere District. His father's name is Dasappala Basappa and mother's is Chowdamma. He is a pioneer of the Dalit literary movement in Kannada and the founder president of Dalit Sangarsha Samiti, the radical Dalit advocacy group. He taught at the Sir M. Vishweshwariah College in Bhadravathi for thirty years before retiring as principal. He is acknowledged as an important literary critic. A social revolutionary Krishnappa's presence is felt in most of the landmark Dalit struggles of Karnataka, especially those aimed at getting land for Dalits and fighting for Dalit women's self-respect.

Keywords: B. Krishnappa, Dalit movement, sociology, contribution, Kannada Dalit literature, literary critic.

Introduction

Literature produced by the satiated and the flabby, who consume antacids to digest their food, who live in multi-storied buildings and commute only by car and airplane, has no appeal for me. For such people, literature is an aesthetic luxury, written to kill time. Protest literature is not written for this Tata-Birla five percent who lead a lavish life. Our engagement today is with the starving, the helpless, those who eat from the wastebins outside hotels, the homeless who live in railway stations, bus stands,

those who steal food and clothing and die without a history. Aesthetics is not primary for us. When over 60 per cent of our population live below the poverty line, shedding their blood in fields and factories and rotting in ignorance, anyone who says that he writes for aesthetic pleasure, or for literary values, can only be called irresponsible.

In the early 1970s Karnataka, DSS emerged as one of the first most organised forms of Dalit movement for the empowerment of Dalits. One notable reason for the formation of DSS at this time was an incident that took place in a function that was arranged by Dr. Ambedkar Vichara Vedike and Backward Classes Student Forum — all students from caste-oppressed backgrounds, at the University of Mysore. During the event, B. Basavalingappa, a dynamic Dalit state minister at that time, made a public remark saying that all Kannada literature was just ‘boosa’ (cattle fodder). By this, he was making critical reference to the fact that mainstream Kannada literature was so dominated by savarna voices and savarna ideologies that it culminated in nothing but unimaginative works that sustained all the inequities of society.

Indeed the works of these literary figures gave the much-needed energy to the activists in the movement in Karnataka. In the process of its growth, DSS not only attempted to organize Dalits but also gave them required moral support in a variety of ways. It was with them in the most dreadful of circumstances. Any confrontation, which arose out of land, religion and caste concerns, ultimately resulted in loot, rapes and massacres of Dalits.²⁸⁰ Such incidents were addressed with a vigorous challenge. Given this background, Dalit activists seriously engaged themselves in responding to the incidents that resulted sometimes, even in the loss of life of Dalits. However one can mention many cases of Dalits deciding things for themselves, based on their understanding of the reality. A departure from priestly temple rituals has helped the DSS to define Dalit identity in secular terms away from the mythical, superstitious and dogmatic ways of Brahmanism. They are no more asking for cultural space but defining their own space in terms of life and celebrations. When they were asking for or defining their own space in terms of life and celebrations within the Hindu framework, Dalits were punished cruelly and were socially boycotted. Dalit Sangharsha Samiti acted upon these incidents valiantly and succeeded in punishing the culprits. Strikes, dharnas and awakening programmes in the case of the Dalit society at large were organised every now and then by Dalit Sangharsha Samiti, both at the state and the local levels. With the vision of social transformation and justice the DSS engaged itself in grass-root level activities, organising as well as educating Dalits on certain social issues simultaneously. Its growth over the years discloses the fact that it began to address various problems of Dalits as and when they occurred. Besides its agenda of social justice, the DSS was engaged in agitational politics in a big way. It protested against all kinds of excesses caused against the Dalits by non-Dalits on the one hand and by state agencies, especially the police, on the other. It took up issues like hostel facilities for SC/ST students, problems related to land, issues related to atrocities; promotional and grading concerns of Dalit employees, the bonded labour issue, issues related to unemployment and protests against the failure in implementing constitutional provisions wherever and whenever that was necessary.

Objective:

This paper studies the work of B. Krishnappa and his contribution of sociological side of his work.

Dalits in the social milieu

Karnataka, one of the prominent states of India has excelled in many areas including information technology in recent years. Sociologically, it has blended modernity with tradition. Caste based attitudes have continued to persist in Karnataka. As a result the most backward segments of society in the state had to face diverse challenges. The Dalits are one of the prominent

disadvantaged groups in the state. The status of the Dalit Movement, therefore, is closely related to these problems in Karnataka. They have imparted militancy and direction to the movement. Indeed the socio-political and economic lives in Karnataka have much qualified the Dalit movement.

The conditions of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Karnataka is closely connected and interwoven on a large number of issues. Many economic, social, political, cultural and psychological influences have shaped their life in common over the years. It must be made clear in the beginning, that except for certain advancements in certain respects, SC/STs remain oppressed, suppressed, humiliated and exploited even today. Further, their condition can not be ascribed to a single reason. However, factors like demography, education, sub-caste issues, residential pattern, landholding pattern and religious background have considerably fixed them in a position different from others. Indeed, relative to the socio-economic progress made by others, the condition of Dalits in general and the Dalits in rural areas in particular has not registered any appreciable change.

The position of the scheduled caste population, as per the 1991 census, at All India level is 138, 223, 277 forming 16.4 percent of the population as against 104.26 million enumerated in 1981 forming 15.81 percent of the population then. In Karnataka it is 7,369,279 forming 16.4 percent of the state population (56,45,186 rural and 17,24,093 urban). The size of the holdings has been classified into seven major categories: They are, 0-1; 1-2; 1-3; 1-4; 1-5; 1-6; and 6 and above. However, according to a report in the same study, a majority of Dalits own dry land and therefore, their uneconomic size of holding is linked with the dry land they possess. As a result of this, their economic status even after possessing land not only remained the same but also deteriorated over the years against the progress achieved in other sectors. Today it is an issue of major debate among Dalits whether they are Hindus or not. The fundamental question is what is it to be a Hindu and who is a Hindu? The legacy of their exploitation wherein they were placed among the lowest of the low and subjected to all kinds of hardships in every walk of life makes them scarcely a part of Hindus. In the name of religion untouchables were treated as slaves by every one of their masters in turn.

The question whether Dalits were Hindus came up as they were treated differently and unequally. But, their religious and cultural practices are akin to those of the Hindus. Some of the educated and enlightened Dalits influenced by the Dalit movement began to claim that they did not have any religion but that they were simply human beings. In a way it was the reaction to the treatment extended to them by caste-Hindus over the years.

Due to the influence of the movement started by Ambedkar, the Dalit legend, many Dalits responded by converting themselves either to Christianity, Buddhism, Islam or to other religious sects in India. The fact that Dalits have chosen to convert themselves clearly shows the persistence of belief in religion among them and the possibility of changing from one religion to another. Further, they believe that changing religion means changing the socio-cultural practices as well which have hitherto held them in subjection. It is history today that Ambedkar along with a large number of his followers embraced Buddhism to demonstrate that Dalits have no place in Hinduism. Having been influenced by such a stance Dalit leaders have played the conversion card to respond and react to the caste-Hindus who have resorted to even the burning of Dalits in broad daylight. In the course of our study in Dakshina Kannada as well as Mysore districts, we found that Dalits are religious enough to the extent that all the ritualistic practices of Hinduism have been faithfully carried out by them. The early exposure to the Bhajan Mandali, a form of socialization introduced by the social reformers in Dakshina Kannada still lives with them.

DSS the Brainchild in B.Krishnappa

DSS was called the progressive movement that aimed at establishing a just society. Indeed, the DSS activities came into prominence in Karnataka on the basis of its AGITATIONAL agenda.

The active involvement of the educated Dalits made the Dalit movement feel that protesting or opposing the excesses committed on Dalits by the non-Dalits was not only opposing the incident itself but also opposing and rejecting the entire social practices based on the discriminations of the superior and inferior in the caste system. Some of the important issues that occurred in Karnataka not only helped Dalits mobilize themselves but also became reference points to others to fight for their causes. It is very important and interesting to note here that the DSS when it emerged during the 1970s began to avow a society based not on caste but on human values. It almost used a language akin to that of Marx with the caption 'Casteless Society'.

It gave a call for all kinds of activities to destabilize the caste system and extended support to intercaste marriages.

Today the voice of DSS remains greatly fragmented and it often tends to be a pressure group rather than the vanguard of a radical alternative. It is always said that Dalits are targeted by the ruling upper castes quite deliberately in India.

They seem to anticipate the weakness of the Dalit leaders. By using the divide and rule policy on the one hand and extending political patronage on the other they have successfully emasculated Dalit groups and their power in the decision making bodies at the centre and the states. As a result the exploitation of Dalits continues, although, with a modern touch. By understanding the strength and consequences of the Dalit Movements various parties began to extend help to Dalits, especially to their leaders. Initially the DSS did not support any political party. It made the civil society the primary platform of its activity. But as days passed the prominent leaders of the DSS felt that their social agitation was in need of a strong political support.

Using Ambedkar

Guarding the elitism of the Constitution and selling it under Ambedkar's name has come at the cost of Dalit radicalism. Ambedkar is now centralised as a sanctimonious figurehead. And in a country like India, to worship someone is to kill any critical thoughts about the person. Various ideological and semi-social and political circles play football with Ambedkar and enjoy the show put on by Dalits around his portraits. Ambedkar's image is used to silence Dalit rage around any issue, to the benefit of the oppressor, who is more than happy to co-opt Ambedkar into their vicious programme of hatred and violence. At the time of writing, every Dalit leader in the 2019 election campaign has spoken of protecting the Constitution. They found it a more appealing idea to attract the common mass towards 'Samvidhaan', as opposed to other traditional issues at hand, such as social justice, welfare programmes, education, health, taxation and the protection of the working class. The affection of Dalits towards constitutionalism is a curious subject of inquiry. No mainstream Dalit leader has dared to critically engage with the debate around the Constitution and its encouragement of Dalit passivism.

Krishnappa Critique Poverty, unemployment and dependence

Severe poverty, unemployment and increasing dependence has caused Dalits in the Mysore district to think of alternatives to ensure some protection. There has been an increasing trend of conversion to Christianity there which has helped them secure food, shelter and clothing. In Dakshina Kannada the extent of conversion is little. This study identified 8 families in Dakshina Kannada - Alangar, Moodbidri Hobli of Mangalore Taluk - who have converted themselves to Christianity who claimed that the

new religion provided them every thing which was denied to them when they were Hindus. Such facts of conversion are highly kept a secret. Nobody readily disclosed whether they were converted or not, and whether there was a record of their conversion.

Even if such a record existed it was kept away from everybody since news of conversion causes hatred, violence and loss of property and life. We came across 26 farmer Dalit households in Mysore district (the conversion of the Dalits of Nooral Koppe of H.D. Kote taluk is visible) converted to Christianity and they felt that it was inevitable for them to do so. It was the sense of gratitude for the help extended by Christians when they were in a critical position and faith in the religious values of treating everybody as equal, they said, that made them voluntarily to choose Christianity.

However, the issue of conversion has been kept so secret that hardly a few know about it in the village. Since there is no exact statistical data on Dalit conversion, it is difficult to say whether the rate of conversion is either high or low. As per the response gathered from the head of the converted Dalit families it is a matter related to their personal life. Therefore, they reserve the right to reveal or not to reveal as to why and how they were converted. Indeed, the call for conversion as a reaction to Hinduism is one of the turns that the Dalit Movement has taken. In fact, all the families that we interviewed have expressed their inability to subscribe to the mainstream values of Hinduism. An option to Christianity often provided them material resources to live and protect their families.

There have been scanty reports about mass conversions of Dalits to Buddhism expressing their affiliation as well as continued adherence to the movement started by Ambedkar. Many Dalit leaders today argue that conversion cannot be a solution as the Dalits should fight for resources from the state rather than creating hurdles in the distribution of resources. The torture on Dalits is seen as the combination of anger and outburst resulting from a superior attitude of the upper castes who never tolerated the progress of Dalits. Wearing sandals, covering the upper parts of the body of the Dalit female, admitting Dalit children to schools rather than sending them to the fields for work, walking on the streets as equals to the upper castes, drawing water from a public tank, appearing in public places like hotels can easily provoke the ire of the upper castes and they may become the primary causes for the physical torture of Dalits. There are other reasons like land issues which have often been the bone of contention between Dalits and non-Dalits. Torture, insults, different kinds of violence and deprivations perpetrated by non-Dalits on the Dalits can be called Atrocities. The word 'Atrocity' cannot be used merely in legal terms. According to the instructions issued by the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, the term implies only offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) committed against the members of the Scheduled Castes by any Non-Scheduled Caste persons.

Conclusion

Prof. B. Krishnappa is a pioneer of the Dalit literary movement in Kannada and the founder president of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti. He organised Bahujans to fight for the land rights exclusively. He fought for a complete ban on 'Nude worship'. He encouraged hundreds of Inter - Caste Marriage and Inter-Religious Marriages to reduce the barriers of caste and religion. He joined Bahujan Samaj Party in 1994 under the leadership of Manyawar Kanshiram Ji.

Dalit activists and writers decided enough was enough and that they needed to fight back. It is in this background that Dalit writers and intellectuals gained prominence and led to the formation of DSS. In addition to this incident, DSS was also found to counter the increasing number of atrocities against Dalits at that time.

One of the main founding members, Prof. B. Krishnappa provided the robust theoretical and ideological foundation to the DSS. As an organisation, they pledged to promote and work with Ambedkarite ideology they also drew from and supported all political leaders who stood for empowerment of Dalit communities using Marxist, Leninist and other socially progressive ideologies.

Devanoor Mahadev, Prof. Siddhalingaiah, Devaiah Harave, K, Ramaiah, Indudara Honnapura, Govindaiah, and other prominent activists all joined and played leading roles in establishing DSS into an unshakeable socio-political force of that era

In the initial phase, land disputes and social problems faced by Dalits were taken as a priority. Other prominent issues taken up by DSS were protests against 'bettale seve' (ritual involving the naked public procession of Dalit women devotees), intentional police negligence, caste atrocities, education for Dalits, effective implementation of reservation and land reforms. In 1985, DSS started a weekly called the 'Panchama' (the fifth in the order, untouchable). Soon, a commercial weekly named Sangati (organisation) followed. One famous DSS slogan that still resonates through Karnataka is "Jati bidi, Mata bidi, Manavathege jeva kodi!" (Reject caste, Reject sect, Give life to humanity!)

The stated goal of D.S.S was to "emancipate and free the Dalits from socio-economic and cultural exploitation through non-violent means." To this end, they aimed at nationalizing all the private land, industry, wealth of the nation with the ultimate intention to build a casteless and classless society. Because of the tireless work of the DSS, over the next few decades, there emerged strong Dalit political leadership in Karnataka. The activities adopted by DSS across the state resulted in the formation of various sub-organisations focused on students, workers, and women.

Most impactful perhaps was DSS's strong support and vision for tens of thousands of Dalit students across the state enabling them to spearhead the struggles for reservation, for hostels, for amenities, and for employment opportunities. This work singularly led to the never before seen emergence of a new class of educated Dalits in Karnataka.

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