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# Dalit Movement and Contribution of Dalit Associations in United Provinces.

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**Received:** 20 December 2021

**Accepted:** 04 March 2022

**Published:** 05 April 2022

**Abstract:** *This article attempts to document the history of dalit associations in United Provinces. The main objective of this article is to provide a historical trajectory of evolution of dalit movement and contribution of dalit associations to it in United Provinces. The main argument put forwarded is that dalit associations played an important role in mobilization and organization of multiple dalit castes which prepared ground work for emergence of Dalit movement in United Provinces.*

*Dalit movement in United Provincial atmosphere for mobilization of Dalits for achieving socio-political rights of Dalits.es attracted the attention of several scholars on account of its success in the form of the Bahujan Samajwadi Party. It has been perceived as a symbol of new trend in Indian politics from below. Studies of Sudha Pai, Chrisstrofar Jafferlot Badri Narayan and Ramnarayan Rawat, look at Dalit assertion from the perspective of politics of people for power. These studies did a commendable job by reflecting upon the historical dynamics of Dalit movement in United Provinces. But the fact is that the role of caste associations established by Dalits and their impact upon the politics of Dalits received insignificant coverage. Consequently, the valuable contribution of Dalit caste associations remained unexplored. This article tries to document the ideas and activities of Dalit caste associations and their impact upon Dalits movement of United Provinces.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Status of Dalits in United Provinces

United Province generally treated as cradle for Aryan civilization. Caste based inequalities and discrimination are part of socio-cultural ethics of upper strata of population. At the same time Utter Pradesh is also birth place of Sant Kabir, Sant Ravidas, and others who revolted against inequalities in human society. These saints had opposed to Varna and caste system, gave the message equality of human society. The teaching of these great persons had significant impact upon Dalit society.

Establishment of colonial rule and its economic process crated congenial atmosphere for Dalits in India in general, of United Provinces in particular, to achieve upward mobility.



Particular places like Agra, Kanpur and Meerut wherein sizable portion of Dalit population exists brought under colonial economic process on account of thriving leather trade. These towns were known for leather related works which colonial state was interested. As most of Dalits in these towns engaged in leather related professions they acquired work mobility and in fact acquired wealth. It was this dynamic situation that created fertile ground for mobilization of Dalits by others and by themselves to achieve rights and concessions. This situation was further augmented by the colonial form of representational politics in which representative form of native opinion was encouraged. It was this context that compelled Dalits to mobilize for achieving political rights.

### **Dalit Consciousness and Associations in United Provinces**

Being land of Aryan civilization, rigid form of caste distinctions were observed in north India. However, begging of British rule is an important factor in the history of Dalit movement. From 1880s onwards one would see mobilization of Dalit castes for civil rights over the issue of identity. Studies on Dalit movement in United Provinces mainly focused on manifested versions of Dalit movement especially in the form of Adi Dharm movement. But this chapter shows the fact that Dalit politics propagated and nourished by in the form of mobilization for dignity and civil rights by Dalit caste associations. Much before Adi Hindu movement, Dalit had begun to be organized on the basis of caste associations established by different Dalit castes. Dalit movement of United Provinces thus had strong roots in Dalit associations.

The political process of colonial Indian in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were determined by associational politics as a means to interact with colonial modernity. These associations were established for social reforms, cultural assertions, to safeguard the interests of certain groups (caste and religion), and finally to fight for political rights. This paradigmatic change had reflections in the political process of Dalits of United Provinces. As a means to put forward united voice, several lower castes established Associations to steer overall development of lower castes. Some of the lower caste associations as follows: Chamar caste established Chamar Mahasabha, Ravidas Mahasabha, Jatav Maha Sabha by Jatavs in western parts of United Provinces: Passi Mahasabha by Passis in Lucknow: Dhobi Mahasabha by Dhobi and Balmiki Mahasabha by Balmikis. These associations acted as reformist, political and other requirements to particular castes. Besides this caste associations also engaged in improving their cultural and opposed to child marriage, drinking wine and advocated for education as a means for development.

The associations of lower caste can be classified based the factors such as establishment, nature of representation, representation of demands and nature work they undertook. On the basis of these factors associations worked for Dalit in United Provinces can be divided in the following way: associations established by non Dalits however for development of Dalits: political associations established for representation of Dalits and finally caste associations by different Dalit castes.

### **Arya Samaj**

This association established by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 to revive the Aryan glory in India. This society also tried to stop the Dalits religious conversion to other religion as a means to make Hinduism as a strong religion. By redefining Hinduism as religion which gives priority to worth not the birth Arya Samaj provided certain space to Dalits. Particularly in United Province, Arya Samaj played commendable job in organizing Dalits by the way of imparting



education, reforms, spiritual space and Hindu identity. Aryan Samaj indeed exercised significant impact upon the associational activity of Dalits in north India in general and United Provinces in particular. Further discussion is not required as the second chapter of this thesis mentions various activities of the Samaj in detailed way.

### **Harijan Sewak Sangh**

After 1930, precisely after the Poona pact of 1932, M.K. Gandhi seriously engaged in Dalit upliftment. He established Harijan Sewak Sangh in 1933. He opened many branches of Harijan Sewak Sangh in Uttar Pradesh as well as national level and published a news paper named as “Harijan”. This association undertook diversified activities for upliftment of Dalits such as campaigning against untouchability, access to water in villages, temple entry etc.

### **Political Associations**

These associations were established by Dalit leaders mainly for political and cultural development of Dalits in different parts of India. These associations frequently interacted with each other and operated with a vision of emancipation of Dalits from backwardness and fight for legitimate rights. Even though these associations concentrated on political activism, focus on cultural and social aspects also became part of their struggle for progress of Dalits. This section shows the functions and strategies of political associations by Dalits in United Provinces.

### **Adi Hindu Mahasabha**

This association was established by Smai Achhutanand in United Provinces. Initially he was associated with Arya Samaj. Having developed differences he moved out of the Samaj and established Adi Hindu Mahasabha to represent the demands of Dalits. He was into active politics from 1912. In Agra he established Achhut School in Jatav area. He was also instrumental in establishing Jatav Sabha in Agra which consistently fought for self respect of Jatav caste. In Delhi he established “Akhil Bhartiya Achhut Mahasabha” with the help of untouchable leader Veer Ratan Devidas Jatiya and Shri Jagat Ram Jatiya in 1917. He also established “Adi Hindu Mahasabha” in Delhi in 1918. Due to his hard work this movement gradually spread to entire north India. After 1925 Swamiji settled in Kanpur which became center of his movement subsequently. He published monthly news paper entitled ‘Adi Hindu’ and open many branches in other parts of India. In 1928 he organized the conference on ‘Adi Hindu Mahasabha in Mumbai and where Swami ji meet to Dr. Ambedkar then both leaders decided to develop the Dalit movements further.

In December 1927 the leaders of Adi Hindu Maha Sabha in United Provinces made a claim for a more inclusive achhut or untouchable identity to unite Dalit castes. The Maha Sabha laid out its agenda in the conference held on 27 and 28 December 1927 in Allahabad and this was widely reported and discussed in contemporary newspapers. The conference was proclaimed as the All-India Adi Hindu conference and was attended by 25,000 Dalit from United Provinces and another 350 delegates participated from Punjab, Bihar, Delhi, and the central provinces, Poona, Bengal, Madras and Hyderabad.

The Adi Hindu Maha Sabha was described as a movement of all untouchables and Swami Achhutanand was declared their true leader. The struggle against social injustice was described an ‘achhut nationalism’, social uplift as their religion, self-respect as their home rule, and the audience were advised to ignore Hindus who treat Dalits as untouchables. By emphasizing their achhut identity, the leaders of the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha were hoping to build a new politics that would bring all Dalit castes such as Doms, Mehtars, Passis, Lal Begis,



Dhanuks, Koris, and Chamars to a common platform for political fight. Simultaneously, the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha raised these issues in a petition submitted to the Simon commission during its tour of India in 1928. The Simon commission received similar petition from Dalit Associations in different parts of United Provinces. They also supplied useful material to understand the various facts of the Dalit agenda that were being assembled around this time. What is striking is that most of Dalit Associations which submitted petitions to Simon commission was unanimous in claiming a separate achhut identity, making this a marked feature of Dalit politics of the time. Ideas of the Adi-Hindu movement were widely shared by other Dalit groups across United Provinces including the Adi-Dharmis from Dehradun, the Kumaun Shilpakar Sabha of Almosra, the Jatav Mahasabha of Agra, the Dom Sudhar Sabha of Garhwal, the Chamar Sabha, the Kureel Mahasabha of Kanpur, the Raidass Mahasabha of Allahabad, and Passi Mahasabha of Allahabad. Further, evidence from CID weekly reports of these years 1926-30 indicates a good deal of activism conducted by Adi-Hindu Association. The activities and strategies of Adi Hindu Mahasabha aimed at overall development of Dalits in India. It has undertaken activities in different domains.

#### **Scheduled Caste Federation**

Dr. Ambedkar established this Federation in Mumbai 1942 in order to create a national level political platform for Dalits to articulate their demands. After Maharashtra the branches of this association were opened in Utter Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Punjab, Gujarat and Karnataka. This association gradually emerged as an umbrella association for Dalits and their political activism. In 1944 it celebrated very big conference of Scheduled Caste Federation in Kanpur in which Dr. Ambedkar also attended. Tilak Chand Kureel, a Dalit activist was made the president of this federation and branches were opened in all districts of United Provinces. The following leaders also played active role: Shyam Lal Bardha, Heera Lal Jaiswar, Kalyan Chand Balmiki, Babulal Vaisya in Allahabad, Gaya Prasad Prasant, Babu Ram Charan Mallah in Lucknow, Bahgat Nepal Das, Ram Autar Passi in Jaunpur, Dr. Manikchand in Agra, Dr. Dharma Prakash in Barielly, Kanaujialal in Farukhabad and other leaders Sangh Priya Gautam, B.P. Maurya, Mahashaya Bhikhu Lal kureel Swami Mangl Prasad, Swami Ayadhyananand Dandi, Swami Chhamanand etc. were played an important role to build up Dalit movement.

#### **Dalit Mahasabhas or Associations**

While Adi Hindu movement, Scheduled Caste Federation and Adi Hindu Depressed Caste Association worked for development of Dalits mainly from political point of view, the gross root level socio-political activism was carried out by lower caste associations in several parts of United Provinces. Attempt has been made to mobilize and reform their castes by the way of collective voice and action. After 1920 Dalits began to make thier Caste Panchayats (Sabhsa/ Assembly/Associations) in deferent areas in Utter Pradesh to articulate demands. This fascinating process has not received the serious attention of neither mainstream academic history nor writings on Dalit history. The political modernity among lower castes mainly penetrated in the form of establishment of caste associations and various reformist activities that were undertaken. The following section narrates the history of dalit associations in United Provinces.

#### **Tamta Sudharak Sabha**

In 1905, Tamta Sudhark Sabha was established in Almora. In the beginning, this federation mainly confined its activity in Almora area and the Tamta caste. Krishan Chand Tamta appointed as president and Hari Prasad Tamat secretary of Tamta Sudhork Sabha. The main



objective this association is to strive for reforming Tamta caste and demanding rights to ensure progress of the community. Indeed it is a new dimension in Dalit politics as caste at individual level became aware of need for collective action for achieving requirements.

### **Chamar Mahasabha**

Chamar caste constitutes numerically biggest scheduled caste not only in Utter Pradesh but also in several north Indian states. Traditionally Chamars are treated as lowest caste and expected to do menial jobs in villages. Surge of leather industry at one level and commercialization of agriculture at another level initiated transformation in the socio-economic conditions of Chamar society. Improvement in material conditions inspired them to claim higher status in traditional Hindu social order. Chamar histories borrowed inspiration from the Hindu Puranic tradition to claim kshatriya status equal to that of the dominant Hindu caste. Chamar politics in early 20<sup>th</sup> century aimed at carving respectable social status within the Hindu socio-religious structure. Chamar's questioned the traditional forms untouchability and exploitation. Particularly the tradition of begari (unpaid labour) in the form of agriculture work, leather work and personnel service of Zamidar's and Government officials has emerged as domain of resistance. Two assumptions have characterized Indian Historiography on the Dalit movement. First almost all liberal and radical historians assume that Dalit histories must begin by critiquing Hindu religion and claiming the status of original inhabitance. Second also assumed that Hindu organization like the Arya samaj wanted to Hinduize Dalits in order to make them part of the Hindu community. Both of these assumptions ignore discourse of chamar writings and fail to take seriously the agendas laid out by chamar's in their own histories and politics. The 1930's chamar activists had raised a new set of issues and constituted an effective Dalit political force.

### **Jatav Mahasabha**

Dalit movement of Agra region was very important part of Dalit movement in India. This movement consistently fought for social and civil rights of Dalits. Starting from caste movement to caste identity, it became very strong in this region. In this region Jatava community which is a sub-set of Chamar caste actively engaged in Dalit assertion. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century Jatavs of this region started their movement for their social assertion. This assertion was actively driven by the economic prosperity of some Jatavas on account of thriving leather trade in Agra region. Elite People of Jatav community followed the upper caste Hindu traditions due to influence of Arya Samaj. They emphasized on following sanskritisation process in the form of wearing of Yagyopavita (Ganeu) and abolition on flesh eating. Elites of Jatav community started sending their children to missionary schools, Arya Samaj schools and Government schools. In 1917, they established *Jatav Veer Mahasabha (Jatav Men's Associations)* and Jatav Pracharak Mandal came into existence in 1924. Its main aim was to change the educational status and to give the new identity as well as consciousness to Jatav caste. First, Jatav conference was organized by Pt. Sundarlal Sagar on 28 October 1917 in Agra. In this conference, they frame the "*Akhil Bhartiya Jatav Sabha*", Boharey Khemchand (MLC) became its President and Seth Banwari Lal was elected as minister. In 1939, Jatav Jan Shiksha Sansthan was established and objectives of this Sansthan were to increase the educational status among Jatav society. Jatav Yuvak Parishad (Jatav youth league) was established in 1930. In April 1930, Ram Swaroop Thekedar forms the Bharat Varshiya Jatav Yuvak Parishad. It was renamed in 1935-1937 as *Akhil Bharatiya Yuvak Parishad (All Indian Jatav Youth League)*. They emphasizes on the development of Jatav society. The associational activities of Jatavs not



only confined to Agra region but also expanded all over north India such as Rajasthan, Punjab, Madhya Bharat (Central provinces) etc. In 1930's, during Round Table Conference, Jatav Youth League accepted Dr. Ambedkar their true leader and they rejected the M K Gandh as leader of lower caste. They supported Dr Ambedkar on the issue of separate electorates for depressed castes.

Intellectuals belong to Jatav caste demanded for "*Jatav*" term by state and Central Government as official authorization. They demanded for inclusion of this term in the population census and presented petitions to Census Commissioner and Viceroy. When, they were not included in government schedule in 1935, then they started a movement for their demands. They asked for separate caste identity and denied their inclusion with Chamar castes; Jatavs were mentioned as separate caste in census reports and United Province government ask central Government to include Jatav's in Scheduled caste.

#### **All India Razak Dhobi Mahasabha Association**

Traditionally Dhobis (washer men) were also known Razaks. They were treated as untouchable on account of their occupation. However, Razaks demanded for more dignified identity by claiming Kshatriya status. The fact is that they recognized the importance of collective voice and established as association to articulate demands. With the objective of representing the demands of Razaks the All India Razak (Dhobi) Association was established in Lucknow. It had members of leading men of the community from Calcutta, Banaras, Samstipur, Allahabad, Gonda, Almora, Quetta Lucknow Secunderabad (Deccan) Ajmere, Mhow, Kanpur, Indore, Jatusana (Punjab) Poona etc.

The Dhobi's were not originally included in the list of the scheduled caste in the United Provinces. The Dhobi's submitted several representations to this Government for their inclusion among the scheduled castes. This representation did not find any support from the Government and were forwarded to the Government of India April 15, 1933.

#### **Akhil Bharat Barshiye Nishad Sabha (Mallah)**

That Mallah Community was included in Depressed Class in Central Provinces. Mallah community is connected with Luniya group. They were organized by provincial Sabha known as the "Nishada Sabha". It was founded by Rai Saheb Babu Ram Charanji in 1920s at Lucknow. He was General Secretary of the Sabha. The main objective of the Sabha was to organize the Mallah community for demanding civil rights. He started *Nishad Samachar*, a journal to bring a new consciousness among the Depressed Classes. The following resolutions were passed at a meeting held under the president ship of Chaudhari Baichan Ram.

#### **Balmik Achhut Mandal (Sabha) Association**

People belong to this caste were appointed as sweepers and manual scavengers in municipal corporations and urban centers during British rule. Traditionally upper strata of Hindu society treat them as untouchable community. On account of access to new emancipatory and progressive ideas in urban centers they started their movement for their identity construction and consciousness. Bhangi, Lalbegi, Hela and Mehtar castes together generally known as Valmiki in U.P. They do work of cleaning and identify themselves with Valmiki dynasty. They celebrate his birth day with a lot of joy. The intellectuals of this community started their meeting to improve their society at regional levels. They tried to eradicate the social evils of their society. They established "*Valmiki Mahasabha*" as a reform committee among them.

#### **Koli (Kori) Mahasabha**



In 1910, *Bhart Varshiya Koli Sudhar Sabha* was established by some Army officers, Rail employees under the influence Arya Samaj. It was organized under the guidance of Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore. Gradually this association established branches in Syalkot, Ludhiyana, Jalandhar, Karachi, Shimala and Delhi. This sabha focuses on education and social reforms of Dalits. It strived to stop of child-marriage, dowry, wine-drinking and flesh-eat and other habits that were perceived as obstacles for development of Dalit society. They use sir name Arya, Verma, Chaudhoury for higher social status. Social wakefulness became an important objective of this association. It was perceived as necessary condition for development Dalit society. In 1935, this Association converted into “*Kori Maha Sabha*” of Lucknow. This Association passed resolutions on free education to children and controlling the exploitations of landlord.

In 1935, *Kori Maha Panchayat* was established in Kanpur. This Mahasabha was converted into Kori Mahasabha in 1940. This association demanded for education, creation of unity among Kori sub-castes and demanded for representation in Panchayat Nikaya and Assembly elections. This Association established the branches in all state. Interestingly this community does not want its inclusion in the list of Depressed Castes.

#### **The Passi Mahasabha**

This caste principally found in the Eastern Districts of United Province and in Oudh region. Their original occupation appears to have been tapping various kinds of the date tree for its sap, which is fermented into tari. In the beginning of twentieth century, reformers of Passi Samaj organized a Bhajan-Mandali in Allahabad. The main function of this Bhajan Mandali was to enquire people by its speeches on the occasions of marriages and other social ceremonies. Inspired by the result of Bhajan-Mandali’s work, in 1915 ‘*Passi Mahasabha*’ was established under the leadership of Vishweshwar Das a member of Bhajan Mandali and inhabitant of village Naya Purwa, of Allahabad. Gradually people thought of development of society beyond religious boundary as resultant by reformers of Passi Samaj of Allahabad, established its All India Passi Mahasabha in 1933. Gradually this organization established its branches in Allahabad, Raibareilly, Lucknow, Barabanki etc. This Mahasabha still exists in Allahabad area. Another important step for development of Pasi caste was establishment *All India Passi Mahasabha*’ in Faizabad district under the presidentship of Narayan Das, social reformer of Faizabad in 1948.

This article shows the complexity of modernity in Dalit life world of United Provinces. In the context of colonial modernity, Dalit castes tired to transform their socio-economic, cultural and political status. This task was executed by the associations established by various caste and intellectuals of Dalit society. The entire effort of these associations is to engage with the changes that have come about during the British colonial rule. Serious attempt has been made to evolve a networking politics within the provinces at one level and all India level at another level. By all mean this article shows that Dalit associations played a crucial role in transformation of Dalit society from meek people to politically vibrant force. The ideological package that governed the ideas and strategies of Dalit associations is quest for progress. Consequently, did evolved a pragmatic emancipatory ideology by barrowing ideas from western egalitarian ideas, cultural and religious practices from Aryan Samaj and importantly situational response. These three factors played major role in framing the content and action of Dalit politics and Dalit associations. Interesting trend of Dalit associations is that besides progress of Dalit society, consistent attempt has been made to evolve new identity for Dalits.