



ANTI-CASTE PHILOSOPHY IN INDIA: UNDERSTANDING THE BAHUJAN MOVEMENT

Dr. Sudhakara Karakoti

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations (PSIR),
Gimbi Campus, Wollega University, Ethiopia.

Abstract

The paper, *Understanding Bahujan Samaj Movement in the light of various anti-caste Movements in India* delineates various anti-caste movements such as Charvakas or Lokayatas, Gautama Buddha (Buddhism), Bhakti movement, the empowerment struggles of Sree Narayana Guru, Periyar E.V.Ramasamy Naicker, Mahatma Phule, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, B.R.Ambedkar to the Bahujan movement. These historical social movements replete with iconoclastic ideological moorings have contributed immensely in carving out a progressive and democratic space within the rigid hierarchical structure of Indian society. It was these socio-cultural movements of the day which have instilled a unique sense of social identity and consciousness among the oppressed sections and also served as a great source of inspiration to the modern day Bahujan leadership, i.e., Ambedkarism and Kanshi Ram led independent Bahujan political leadership, i.e., the emergence of BSP as a formidable political force to reckon with in the Indian political space. Thus, the birth of BSP as a socio-political movement should be understood in the larger context of these historical social movements. Indisputably, BSP as a socio-political force is the modern-day inheritor of this historical anti-caste legacy. In a way, the umbilical cord of BSP with the shared legacy of these historical movements is still being maintained very intact.

Keywords: *Anti-Caste Movement, Charvaka Darshan, Buddhism, Ambedkarism and Self-Respect Movement.*

Introduction

Many social revolutionaries hailing from the oppressed sections of Indian society had waged numerous struggles and made untold sacrifices to emancipate the impoverished and oppressed communities in India from the chains of atrocious and uncivilized Brahmanical social order since time immemorial. By the way, numerous reform movements have contributed towards the empowerment of the oppressed communities as much as socio-economic, political, cultural and religious milieu of India society is concerned. The emphasis of the social reformers was to generate, propagate and establish a democratic method of thought as a substitution to Brahmanism with a view to empower marginalized groups. There has been sequence of social movements against Brahmanism (the doctrine of iniquitous social order) in the history of India. The struggles of prominent social revolutionaries such as Charvakas or Lokayatas, Gautama Buddha (Buddhism), Kabir and Nanak (Bhakti movement), Mahatma Jotirao Phule (*Satya Shodak Samaj*), Shahuji Maharaj, Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker (Self-respect movement), Sree Narayana Guru (SNDP movement), B.R.Ambedkar (Ambedkarism), Kanshi Ram and Mayawati have played a monumental role in liberating, emancipating and empowering the oppressed sections of Indian society. In this backdrop, these movements provide insightful analysis with regard to the course of combating social exclusion and discrimination in India.

The Ancient Indian Anti-Caste Philosophy (The Lokayata Darshan or Charvaka Darshan): The Lokayata or Charvaka school of thought was the first and leading philosophy which vehemently opposed and rejected the doctrine of Brahmanism. The Lokayatas or Charvakas were the rationalists cum materialists. And, the materialist world has been the pivot of their rationalist and materialist thought. And, they considered all human beings as one entity. As far as Lokayata or Charvaka school of thought is measured, Kancha Ilaiah opines that Lokayatas have been the original philosophers who fit into the oppressed sections of the society and struggled against the Aryan invaders. According to him, the Aryan intruders set up and continued Brahminical socio-political and economic system in India. They powerfully held that the birth, growth and death are part of a cyclical procedure.¹ The Lokakayatas theorized and campaigned that all human beings are equal and discredited not only the Varna system (*Varnashram Dharma*) but also the notions of *Karma* and *Moksha*. According to



Jaiswal, the *Lokayatas* addressed and spread the non-existence of God, *Moksha*, hell and heaven etc. This materialist and rationalist school of thought had apprehended the popular imagination with its emphasis on corporeal world. In those days, the masses were overwhelmed and followed the theoretical foundations of *Lokayuktas* whose philosophy has been founded on reason, materialism and rationalism rather than the Brahminical beliefs. Before the advent of Buddhism, this thought opposed the philosophical outlines of Brahmanism (the doctrine of inequality).ⁱⁱ By the way, Katti Padma Rao argues that the Brahminical scholars of the day had orally denounced the Charvaka philosophy. However, it was a deliberate strategy on their part not to mention the criticism of the same in the form of written texts so that they could avoid the very existence of this materialistic philosophy.ⁱⁱⁱ It was these changing philosophical and ideological contours of the day which paved the way for the birth of Buddhism as a counter product to the Vedic rigidities of the Brahmanism and Brahminical social system.

A Social Revolution in Ancient India: Buddhism

With the decay of Jainism and its school of thought, the philosophy of Buddhism had gained prominence as a revolutionary philosophical thought striving for humanism and human enlightenment. It was regarded not only as an alternative to Brahmanism but also as an emancipatory way of life to beleaguered masses. Subsequently, Buddhism had influenced the socio-economic, political, cultural, spiritual and religious sphere of Indian society by condemning the inhuman, atrocious caste Hindu system and in turn advocated peace and non-violence. The conversion of Emperor Ashoka into Buddhism was a historic event with far reaching implications in the annals of Indian history. According to S.M. Michael, Buddhism had challenged the philosophical undercurrents of dominant caste Hindu Brahminical system. Buddhism had also left its indelible mark not only on Indian society (the land of its birth) but also in other countries of the world by attracting both the ruling as well as servile classes equally.^{iv}

By denouncing unequal caste system, Buddha propagated the noble ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity among all the sections of society and welcomed the underprivileged masses as *Bhikkus* into the *Sangha*. According to Gautama Buddha, human beings should attain their ends by their own efforts and advocated four important principles of human life. The life is full of sorrows due to the unlimited desires of human beings and the sorrows and suffering can be reduced by controlling the unlimited desires through the observance of noble eight principles (Noble Eight-Fold Path) or *Astangamarga*. Buddha advocated *Dhamma* in order to maintain a humane social order and encouraged and inculcated the reading habit and rational thinking among the disciples in *Sanghas* which played an important role as far as spread of *Dhamma* philosophy was concerned. There was no place for practicing caste system in *Sanghas*. And, as per the philosophy of *Dhamma*, all bhikkus were treated on equal footing in the life style of *Sanghas* on the basis of universal brotherhood without any prejudices of caste and class.^v Buddha educated his disciples that the *Dhamma* should be preached in all the lands that all the poor and rich, privileged and under-privileged and all the castes would be unified in the *Dhamma* like rivers uniting with the ocean.^{vi} The Buddhist philosophy confronted the dominance of the Brahmanism. According to Buddha, no one is considered as inferior (out caste) and superior (Brahman) merely on the basis of birth or lineage but on the basis of actions. According to Kanch Ilaiah, the philosophy of *Dhamma* has been revolutionary in India against the doctrines of Brahmanism (Inequality).^{vii} Even though the philosophy of Buddhism changed the dynamics of caste relations, the caste system has been invigorated with the advent of early medieval period.

Bhakti Movement

The medieval period in Indian history had witnessed various social and religious reform movements by the reformers of the oppressed communities. The prominent among them during this period were Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Namdev, Meerabai, Potuluri Veerabrahmam and Vemana. Their thought and struggles changed the socio, economic, religious, cultural dynamics of Brahmanism along with the caste system. The Bhakti movement had played a crucial role as far as the reformation of Brahmanism was concerned under the direction of Kabir. He supported that all human beings are equal and pray the God by disapproving the differences of *gothras*, caste and religion. According to Guru Nanak, it is not a religion which treats human



beings as low and high and the real devotee of God treats all human beings as one and equal. Chaitanya advocates the masses about the human goodness by disapproving and condemning Vedas. Namdev preaches that all human beings are equal and rejected the idol worship and rituals whereas Meerabai accentuates the equality of men and women before the God to become his devotees.^{viii}

Potuluri Veerabrahmam and Vemana were the vanguards of the social reform movement in Southern India. They challenged the Brahmanism and struggled against the caste system. In this connection, Vemana was the first philosopher cum poet who supported that the character was more important than the caste. The philosophy of Vemana with its constructive, rationalistic, productive and materialistic discourse had articulated anti-Hindu and anti-Brahminical literary texts to counter the canons and creeds of Brahmanism.^{ix} The Bhakti movement had been influential in raising the levels of consciousness which educated the oppressed communities about the tenets of Brahmanism. And, it struggled to reform in order to set up an egalitarian social order. Though these social movements have created some kind of consciousness among the people, they have not brought about any desired changes for the liberation of oppressed in Indian society. The failures of these social movements can be explained in the words of Babasaheb Ambedkar:^x

“Saints have never carried on a campaign against caste system and Untouchability. They were not concerned with the struggle between men rather they were concerned with the relation between man and God. They did not preach that all men were equal. They preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God.”

Similarly, Neera Desai argues in the following arguments

“The Bhakti movement failed precisely because, it could not offer any new alternative programme, social and economic reorganization of Indian society and the movement never built-up organizations which could carry out any positive social programme. Therefore, the Dalits after years of social struggle changed their tactics and started attacking the Hindu society from secular fronts like politics and education. It was a natural consequence of failure of social movements to change the status of Dalits that they resorted to political mobilization.”^{xi}

Sree Narayana Guru: SNDP Movement:

Narayana Guru confronted the discriminatory nature of caste Hindu social order and struggled for the cause of temple entry for the socially under privileged castes and reformed temple entry system in Kerala by advising the oppressed communities to get rid of superstitions. Since, he was born and brought up in *Ezhava* caste, he largely worked to reform his community. He set up Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDPY) to authorize the oppressed sections to the extent that the upliftment of their social, economic, educational and cultural conditions was possible to ensure social justice and equality. And, he organized inter-caste marriages by refusing the orthodox traditions particularly in Southern India.^{xii}

Narayana Guru's slogan was one caste, one religion and one God. Accordingly, he set up schools for the marginalized groups and the *Shiva* temples have been built up under the leadership of *Ezhava* community through which they have been highly benefited and the rituals have been simplified in these temples to the extent that birth, marriage and death ceremonies are concerned. The Brahmin priests have been replaced by non-Brahmins in these temples and the income of these temples was spent on the construction of schools, libraries and community halls especially for the welfare of oppressed communities. Consequently, remarkable changes had taken place in the lives of marginalized groups particularly *Ezhavas* concerning their socio-economic, religious and cultural status. And, the *Shanar Ezhavas* and *Thiyyas* are very much influenced by the social reform movement of Narayana Guru particularly in Kerala and Tamil Nādu. In this connection, Dr.Palpu and many of his associates set up many organizations for the welfare of oppressed sections of Indian society to set up an egalitarian social order.^{xiii} However, S. Omana points out the SNDP movement after the demise of Guru in the following words:



“In the course of time, the SNDP movement has undergone on a tangent that is now considered by many people as an unfortunate deviation to exclusive communalism, the very rancor that the Guru wanted to cure the people from the social maladies.”^{xiv}

The Relentless Crusader & the Socrates of South East Asia: Periyar E.V. Ramasamy

The ideas of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy have been revolutionary to build up an egalitarian and humane social order by disapproving Brahmanism and caste system. His struggles had marvelous influence on the oppressed communities in India. He educated, struggled and mobilized the oppressed sections for five decades against injustice, inequality, exploitation, oppression, social evils and superstitious Hindu beliefs. The self-respect movement was led by him. It had attempted to bring awareness in the minds of oppressed communities by advocating the noble ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. And, he highlighted the significance of self-esteem and self-confidence in the lives of socially under-privileged communities. He maintained and convinced that if a man has self-respect and self-esteem, he will empower his personality.^{xv} The self-respect movement of Periyar fervently denied five elements in the Tamil society, i.e. God, religion, Congress party, Gandhi and Brahmins. According to him, the element of God had made the oppressed sections as slaves and demolished their creativity. And, he opines that the Hindu religion (the doctrine of inequality) has been one of the obstacles for the empowerment of marginalized groups. And, he regarded the Congress party as nothing but a Brahmin Sangham because the Congress party was not at all concerned about the problems and grievances of marginalized groups. He considered Gandhi and Brahmins as the enemies of oppressed sections and his opposition to Congress, Brahmins and Gandhi was well known to the world. According to him, Hinduism has been used as a mask to cheat the innocent oppressed sections of the society. Periyar had condemned the divine origin theory of caste system and Hindu religious scriptures (Vedas and Dharma Shastras). As an atheist, Periyar contends that God is a reason for all the prevailing social inequalities and consequently, he opposed the existence of God for the same.^{xvi}

Periyar opines that Brahminical minority had monopolized the key societal resources, i.e., wealth, power, and prestige to enslave the majority non-Brahmins forever through the designs of irrational and illogical social stratification. He therefore educated the oppressed and marginalized groups rationally through the slogan of self-respect in order to get rid of the menace of caste system. In this regard, he exposed the deceitfulness of Brahmins through his writings and speeches. Many a times, Periyar quoted that no man was inferior and superior to him, all human beings were/are free and equal. And, he powerfully claimed for the annihilation of caste as it is vital for the establishment of an egalitarian social order.^{xvii} In the course of time, the ideas, struggles and movements of Periyar have led to the formation of Justice Party and Dravidian movement. The greatness of Periyar can be briefed by citation of UNESCO on 27th June, 1970 in the following words:

“Periyar, The Prophet of New Age; The Socrates of South East Asia; Father of the Social Reform Movement; And Arch Enemy of Ignorance, Superstitions, Meaningless customs and Base Manners.”^{xviii}

Furthermore, the book entitled, *India 1000 to 2000: Makers of the Millennium*, positions the contribution of Periyar in the following words:

“The enormous privileges given to Brahmins by the Vedas were sacrosanct only as long as they went unchallenged. The challenge rose in Tamil country like a whirlwind, spearheaded by an iconoclast who questioned the Vedas and the gods as well. He took apparently extremist positions on some issues, but the fundamental of the social revolution he brought was clear even to its victims. The political perspective of Tamil Nadu, and with it much of India, were altered with a seeming finality by Ramasamy Naicker, 1879-1973.”^{xix}

Mahatma Jotirao Phule: The Ideology of Social Revolution in India

Mahatma Jotirao Phule has been regarded as the father of social reformation movement in India. The life experiences of Mahatma Phule forced him to launch ideological movement against Brahmanism and caste system with a view to establish an egalitarian social order. He struggled against exploitation, caste domination,



injustice, inequality and oppression.^{xx} He too struggled for the empowerment of *Shudras* (Backward Classes) and *Ati-Shudras* (Scheduled Castes) and especially for women to reconstruct a humane and egalitarian social order on the foundations of freedom, equality, justice and reason. The theory of caste exploitation of Phule was grounded on cultural and ethnic factors instead of economic or political factors. He condemned Brahminical scriptures and *puranas* and challenged the domination of Brahmins. He launched social movement for the empowerment, liberation and emancipation of *Shudras*, *Ati-Shudras* and women. He strongly argued that the scriptures of Hinduism, *puranas* and caste system were designed to humiliate and demoralize the *Shudras*, *Ati-Shudras* and women. In the words of G. P. Deshpande, Phule rejected this pseudo-religion along with the texts that held it. This rejection was total. He argued for its complete rejection and destruction.^{xxi} In the words of Gail Omvedt, Phule's theory of caste exploitation highlighted on cultural and ethnic factors rather than economic and political. Mahatma Phule set up *Satya Shodak Samaj* (Truth Seeking Society) in 1873 completely for the welfare of oppressed communities. And, he set up schools for marginalized groups especially for girls and depressed classes and he was also instrumental in organizing inter-caste marriages and widow re-marriages without the presence of Brahmin priests.^{xxii}

Further, Phule stressed that the history of the oppressed communities is the real history of India. He encouraged that people should not respect the Hindu scriptures, traditions and customs based on caste system. And, he supported education for marginalized groups for their empowerment. In his scholarly work, *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), he theorized Brahmins as aliens and *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* as indigenous to the land and so, he completely rejected the sacredness of Hindu scriptures. And, he powerfully supported towards the annihilation of the Hindu caste system.^{xxiii} Gail Omvedt summarizes the ideology of social revolution of Jotirao Phule in the following words.

“Dalits along with the Shudras, were part of an original ‘non-Aryan’ community conquered by invading Aryans from whom derived the Brahmans; their unique feature was that they had been the bravest warriors in defense of the subjugated peasant community and so were the ones most discriminated against by the arrogant conquerors. Violence and ideology were the driving forces of history; ‘Hinduism’ was nothing but the religious deception of Bhats to maintain their hold on the masses; peasants were exploited by Brahmans through the state machinery (consolidation of violence) and religious trickery. A future Indian society would be constructed not from the false ‘nationalism’ of a Brahmanic elite but from the energy of the Shudra-Atishudra masses, and its construction should begin from the villages (Phule’s writings also included important sections on the development of agriculture and what environmentalists today would call ‘watershed development’). A necessary feature was the replacement of Hindu superstitions by a universalistic, equalitarian (including the important stress on women’s rights) and rationalistic religion which Phule called the ‘Sarvajanic Satya Dharma’ or ‘true religion of the community.’”^{xxiv}

Similarly, Omvedt maintains the following observation with regard to the ideology of social revolution of Mahatma Phule:

“Phule failed to provide economic analysis or political organization, appropriate for this struggle, but he had a clear vision of the need for and the basis of a liberation movement. It remains to his modern followers to take up the challenge.”^{xxv}

Chhatrapati Sahuji Maharaj: The Pillar of Social Democracy

Chhatrapati Sahuji Maharaj is remembered as one of the greatest, progressive, humane and visionary rulers in the annals of Indian history because of his reign from 1894 to 1922 ushered a new era of comprehensive social, cultural and economic reforms which are revolutionary in his times.^{xxvi} In order to ensure democratic participation, representation and social justice in the governance of his princely state of Kolhapur, he enacted a



law which guarantees the provision of fifty percent reservation in government services for backward classes (present SCs and OBCs) which is a historic and revolutionary step. He laid the foundation of social democracy based on social equality not only among men but also among women.^{xxvii} He set up educational institutions and boarding facilities for the backward classes in order to democratize the education and knowledge. Further, the *Satya Shodak Samaj*, a socio-religious movement which was started by Phule was rejuvenated by Shahuji Maharaj in 1873. He thoughtfully launched and directed various public welfare projects and social reforms eventually generated a social awakening and urge for social change in general and welfare of oppressed sections of Indian society in particular.^{xxviii} He presided over various social and educational conferences of Backward classes across India and directed their deliberations with a view to educate them to fight for social justice and basic human rights in the caste society and very much impressed upon them the importance of self-respect, self-help and faith in their leaders. He is considered as the champion of social democracy and voice of political democracy due to his invaluable and multidimensional reforms in the society.^{xxix} It was a visionary step by adopting a courageous policy to ensure primary education as free and compulsory in his state. Further, he had closed the separate schools meant for the students of 'outcastes' so as to see that all schools were made accessible to students of all communities of people.^{xxx} The non-Brahmin movement of Mahatma Phule was successfully carried forward by Shahuji Maharaj for a common cause especially towards the upliftment of oppressed sections of the society.^{xxxi} After him, the movement was spear-headed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar towards building a democratic India.

Ambedkarism: The theory of Bahujan liberation

Dr.B.R. Ambedkar –India's towering intellectual and also an indefatigable crusader of human rights played a pivotal role in shaping the socio, political and civic contours of modern India. Having deeply influenced by the philosophy and struggles of Gautama Buddha, Kabir and Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar through his insightful erudition and profound scholarship had tried to forge India's moral and social foundations anew and strove for a political order of constitutional democracy.^{xxxii}

In the social realm, he ascribed most of the evils of Hinduism to the predestined dogmas of the caste system and accordingly called for its annihilation. In order to emancipate the depressed classes of India from the clutches of inhuman caste Hindu system and also to build an egalitarian social order, he embraced Buddhism and also converted lakhs of his followers into it. Further, he dreamt of making India as an enlightened India. In his annihilation of caste, Ambedkar argues that the backbone of Hinduism is caste system and the Hindu scriptures justify the sanctity of caste system and untouchability. Since the caste system and untouchability are based on Hindu religious scriptures, it is difficult to annihilate caste system unless and until the faith in the sanctity of these Hindu religious scriptures is debunked.^{xxxiii}

He stressed that caste destroyed and demoralized the Indian race and Hindu society. In this connection, he advocated that all the oppressed communities should strive towards annihilation of caste by bringing about equality and social justice. He asserted that "lost rights are never regained by begging and by appeals to the conscience of the usurpers, but by relentless struggles. Goats are used for sacrificial offerings and not lions." The symbolic act of mass conversion by Ambedkar is considered as one of the death blows to Hinduism and a major step in the journey of annihilation of caste because of liberating philosophy of Buddhism, its *Dhamma* (social morality) are based on the principles of equality, compassion and wisdom.^{xxxiv} He strongly argued that Buddhism is an antidote to Hinduism.

In this context, Gail Omvedt rightly opines that the Phule, Periyar and Ambedkarite legacy represents an effort to construct an alternative identity of the people, based on non-Aryan and Bahujan perspectives. These perspectives are critical in nature not only against oppressive Hindu tradition (caste society) but also against its claims as a dominant Indian tradition. These new conceptual and theoretical perspectives and formulations are aimed at searching for alternative roots of the Indian tradition.^{xxxv} Gail Omvedt summarizes the theory of liberation of the oppressed sections of the Indian society, i.e., Ambedkarism in the following words:



“First, an uncompromising dedication to the needs of his people, the Dalits (as he said once in response to a legislative council claim that he should think as ‘part of whole’- I am not of a whole; I am part apart’) which required the total annihilation of the caste system and the Brahmanic superiority it embodied; Second, an almost equally strong dedication to the reality of India-but an India whose historical-cultural interpretation he sought to wrest from the imposition of a ‘Hindu’ identity to understand it in its massive, popular identity; Third, a conviction that the eradication of caste required a repudiation of ‘Hinduism’ as a religion, and adoption of an alternative religion, which he found in Buddhism, a choice which he saw as not only necessary for the masses of Dalits who followed him but for the masses in India generally; Fourth, a broad economic radicalism interpreted as ‘socialism’ (‘state socialism’ in some versions; ‘democratic socialism’ in others) mixed with and growing out of his democratic liberalism and liberal dedication to individual rights; Fifth, a fierce rationalism which burned through his attacks on Hindu superstitions to interpret even the Buddhism he came to in rationalistic, ‘liberation theology’ forms; And finally, a political orientation which linked a firmly autonomous Dalit movement with a constantly attempted alliance of socially and economically exploited (Dalits and Shudras, ‘workers’ and ‘peasants’ in class terms) projected as an alternative political front to the Congress party he saw as the unique platform of ‘Brahmanism’ and ‘Capitalism.’”^{xxxvi}

In a nutshell, Ambedkar introduced a gigantic emancipatory project envisaging an alternative socio, cultural and political identity to the hither to impoverished masses of Indian society.

The Crusader of Democratic Revolution: Kanshi Ram

In India, the genesis of democratic struggles towards the socio, economic and cultural empowerment of oppressed sections of Indian society for the establishment of humane and egalitarian social order can be traced back to the pre-Buddha times. In this historical backdrop of these democratic struggles, Kanshi Ram, the founder of Bahujan Samaj Party, had successfully carried forward the struggles and inherited the legacy of Mahatma Phule, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, Periyar, Narayana Guru and B.R.Ambedkar for the empowerment of oppressed communities with the aim of establishing an egalitarian social order.^{xxxvii} Kanshi Ram strongly believed in the dictum of Ambedkar, i.e., ‘political power is the master key to unlock all the doors of the empowerment of the oppressed masses’ and felt that Bahujans should capture political power to solve their problems and emphasized that rulers alone can create casteless society which is the solution of annihilation of caste.^{xxxviii}

His message to the Bahujan samaj was that the ultimate aim of the Bahujan samaj is to rule India. He strongly believed that so long as the beneficiaries are allowed to use caste, victims are continued to suffer from it and if Bahujans will not become the rulers, their problems will remain forever. Further, he cautioned that the atrocities are committed against slaves and not against rulers. If the oppressed sections of Indian society want to put an end to atrocities, they should become the rulers. He succeeded in changing the political map of India and rules of politics through democratic means for the social transformation and economic emancipation of Bahujan samaj with a view to fulfill the dreams of Bahujan revolutionaries. In this connection, his aim was to transform India as an enlightened India (*Prabuddha Bharat*) towards establishment of social democracy in India.^{xxxix}

In a nutshell, Kanshi Ram waged relentless struggles to give a political expression to the hidden aspirations of the marginalized social groups in this country. Through popular slogans and fiery speeches, Kanshi Ram awakened the oppressed masses and also instilled a sense of consciousness in the minds of downtrodden. Further, he also exposed the diabolical ‘Manuwadi’ mentality of communists and their hypocritical role of safeguarding the vested interests of the socially dominant castes in the cloak of communism. He also successfully tackled the pernicious influence of money, mafia and the media of the ‘Manuwadi’ forces. Thus, he became a living legend during his own lifetime.^{xl}

These historical movements replete with iconoclastic ideological moorings have made immense contribution in carving out a progressive and democratic space within the rigid hierarchical structure of Indian society. It was these socio-cultural movements of the day which have instilled a unique sense of social identity and



consciousness among the oppressed sections of the society and also served as a great source of inspiration to the modern day 'Bahujan' leadership, i.e., Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Ambedkarism), Kanshi Ram (Kansi Ram phenomenon) and Mayawati led independent Bahujan political leadership, i.e., the emergence of BSP as a socio political movement must be understood in the context of these historical struggles and movements to combat social exclusion and discrimination in India. These progressive social movements and struggles initiated by great historical icons i.e., Gautama Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, Narayana Guru and Periyar E. V. Ramasamy at various phases of history have made immense contribution towards the transformation of Indian society. Though these movements have left an indelible imprint on the society, certain gaps were discernible in addressing the ills of Indian society in its totality. It was modern 'Bahujan' icons like Dr.B.R. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram who had bridged these gaps and had carried forward the historical caravan of progressive social movements of their precursors. It was progressivism which has formed the common thread weaving these democratic struggles. Thus, there has been a historical continuum linking the struggles of the past and the present. The struggles of Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram have been unique in terms of adoption of modern means/instruments, i.e., democratic constitutionalism and achievement of political power through political mobilization respectively. It was these modern instruments which have been bringing the historical social movements to their logical end. Indisputably, BSP as a socio-political force is the modern-day inheritor of this historical anti-caste legacy. In a way, the umbilical cord of BSP with the shared legacy of these historical movements is still being maintained intact. However, there is still a long way to go to fulfill the cherished dreams of these democratic struggles and movements. The success of unfulfilled aspirations of this unfinished Bahujan revolution is to a large extent depends upon the commitment and dedication of the succeeding generations of the Bahujan leadership. The efforts of BSP regime are to strengthen the processes of empowerment of oppressed sections of the society in terms of addressing structural discrimination, enhancing capacity building and combating social exclusion through various policies and programmes.

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