CHAPTER – II

ORIGIN OF DALIT ORGANIZATIONS AND THE BSP

Caste as a category has played an important role in the analysis of Indian politics. It has remained for long a very crucial source of collective identity and an important dimension of political mobilization, particularly so in the domain of electoral politics. In the post-colonial period, caste has not only assumed an active role but also become topic for intense debates.

This chapter highlights the factors which were responsible for the emergence of Dalit Organizations and the BSP and their role in the eradication of untouchability in India.

The caste system is the most peculiar feature of the Indian sub-continent. It is perhaps the most complex phenomenon. It has been existence exists in India since 5000 years. Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda divides the entire society of Aryans and non Aryans into four classes known as varnas- The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudars, created from Prajapati’s mouth, arms, thighs and feet respectively.51

The political culture of caste has grown in tandem with the spread of Hindu nationalism. During the colonial period and under Nehru’s government after 1947; the emancipation of the lower castes was promoted through a system of positive
discrimination that the British had devised. The untouchables benefited from quotas in the assemblies, the civil services, and in education, spawning a new elite, designated by a novel term. In place of administrative euphemisms such as “Scheduled Castes” and Gandhi’s condescending label, “Harijan”, the untouchables chose for themselves a name, for its shock value, expressing their militant social identity: “Dalit”.52

The word ‘Dalit’ in Sanskrit means “broken” and downtrodden. The dalits in the annals of Indian history were addressed with different nomenclatures like- Chandalas, Adharmis , Achhutes, Parihas, Adi-Dravida, Depressed classes, oppressed Hindus, Harijans etc. at different points in time. But especially after the emergence of the Dalit Panthers movement in the 1970s in Maharastra they preferred to be called Dalits. The definition of Dalits as propounded by Dalit Panthers was a class definition as they included members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, the landless and poor peasants, woman and all those who were exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion.53

The Dalit consciousness had been brought about by various factors existing in the society which institutionalized and formed into a mass-based movement, reckoned with as a force. It was however, necessary to form organizations for upward
mobility of the group as a whole. In the caste based society of India, the individual qualifications and achievements have little significance. The Dalits had to survive to elevate their collective status by forming organizations and raising the moral and material status of their brethren.\textsuperscript{54}

The history of political movement of the backward classes in India is a history of struggle for representation in political bodies, in government machinery and for removing the age-old disabilities through social legislation. It has its roots in social reform movements initiated in mid-nineteenth century. The political mobilization of the backward classes was basically against Brahminism and with the larger objective of transforming the Indian hierarchical society into a society based on equality. It is generally understood that social movements aim at change in the existing social order releasing its weakness and pitfalls. Sometimes movements were national in character, sometimes they were regional in nature and at some other times the movements were initiated by a people of particular sections or community. The Backward caste movements in India have been of this later variety. Since the eighteenth century several movements have been initiated by the people of Backward Communities in different regions of India. These movements have aimed at different goals, but getting rights and protecting
dignity has always been a common goal of most of them though there might be variations in the modes and means to achieve the goals. Of all the protest movements launched by the Dalits in India most effective movements have been those led by Phooley, Ambedkar, and Kanshi Ram.

Jyotirao Phooley was the first Indian to proclaim in modern India the dawn of a new age for the common man, the downtrodden, the underdog and for the Indian woman. It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason.

To fulfill his life’s ambition to establish a casteless society, Phooley founded the Satya Shodak Samaj (truth seeking society) on September 24, 1873. The samaj set up the first school for girls and untouchables. Phooley also organized marriages without Brahmin priests, widow remarriages, etc. The Satya Shodhak Samaj assumed a vital role as the ideological conscience for all those who identified themselves with the lower castes, whether they belonged to the samaj or to one of the numerous other groups working for lower castes uplift.

After Phooley, B.R. Ambedkar emerged to continue the crusade against Brahminism and Brahmin domination in the spheres of knowledge production/education, politics and government administration. He launched the struggle for
touching/drinking water and temple entry which created a consciousness in the minds of ex-untouchables that the caste Hindus treated them degraded than animals. Ambedkar’s struggle was for the eradication of caste, untouchability and casteism through the destruction of Brahminism with the alternative of Buddhism, a religion of reason and equality. He gave more importance to honour, self respect than the material gains. He saw democratic revolution, another means, with value of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity borrowed from Buddhism through which the liberation of depressed classes be achieved.58

Punjab which has the highest percentage of Dalits (28.85 percent as per census of India 2001) played an unforgettable role in the series of Dalit movements. Apart from the competition among Chiristians, Arya Samaj, Hindus and Sikhs during the colonial period, Punjab also witnessed autonomous mobilizations by local Dalits. The most important of these was the Ad Dharam movement. The Arya Samaj was probably a significant factor in the founding of Ad-Dharam Movement, for once the young Scheduled Caste Members had tasted equality and power through the Arya Samaj, they wanted it for their own. There were already societies for untouchables upliftment within the Samaj, but they were in fact controlled by upper caste leaders. Prior to
the founding of Ad-Dharm, a scheduled Caste member of the Arya Samaj, Sant Ram B.A., a Megh from the outskirts of Hoshiarpur city, had begun a new movement for scheduled caste equality from the Arya Samaj. Sant Ram’s organization, Jat Path Thorak Mandal (Society for the abolition of caste), was founded in 1922, and by 1924, it was involved in a major conflict with the Arya Samaj Organization, eventually leaving it. The Jat Path Thorak Mandal was not a model for the Ad Dharm, since its urban reformed Hindu, inter-caste composition was quite different from that of the Ad Dharam. Nonetheless, the fact of previous scheduled caste rebellion within the Arya Samaj was no doubt an encouragement for those scheduled caste Arya samajis who wanted to create an organization of their own.59

In 1920 a handful of educated young untouchable activists who had been meeting together in Jalandhar began serious discussions about development of a circle of communication and political strength. The three key leaders were Vasant Rai, Thakar Chand, and a person who called himself Swami Shudranand. They shared several characteristics in common aside from their youth and their education: their caste was chamar, they were financially secure, many had been associated with the Arya Samaj, and they came from same geographical area. All of them came from the rural areas of central Punjab-districts –
Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur, and the princely state of Kapurthala, This area is characterized by fairly small land holdings, a large number of untouchables, and almost even sectioning of the pre partition population among Muslims, Sikhs, Upper Caste Hindus and number of lower castes.  

The Ad dharma movement took off with the arrival of Mangoo Ram on the scene. He was born at Mugowal a village in the district in Hoshiarpur on June 14, 1886. Though he was the son of a rich chamar, his family had to bear the stigma of untouchability. He spent much of his early life in the United States where he got involved with the Gadar movement. On his return to Punjab in 1925, he set up a school for lower caste children with the help of Arya Samaj, but soon distanced himself from the Samaj and took over the Ad Dharam movement.

Mangoo Ram set a clear agenda for Ad Dharam movement, namely to create a new religion for the lower castes. He also made an appeal to the “Acchuts” to come together to chalk out a programme for their liberation and upliftment. The Ad-Dharam movement made a substantial contribution to the social and political life of Dalits in Punjab. Although the Ad Dharam organization ceased to exist, Mangoo Ram felt that it played an important role in the development of scheduled caste identity and political power in Punjab. He summed up its contributions
to the scheduled caste community this way: “We gave them a better life and made them into a quam. We gave them gurus to believe in something to hope for.”

However, in 1929 the Ad Dharam organization split into two factions, the Ad Dharam Mandal with its office in Jalandhar headed by Mangoo Ram; and all India Ad Dharam Mandal with its headquarters in Layalpur, headed by Vasant Rai. In fact the Vasant Rai group was lured back by the Arya Samaj in 1929, while the Mangoo Ram group played an active role/part in politics of Punjab for a period of more than two decades from 1926-1952.

In 1935, the government of India Act was passed under which elections were to be held in February 1937. The Congress party was representing capitalists, landlords, and upper castes. Ambedkar, therefore, founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP), a non caste party, on August 15 1936. He used the word ‘Labour’ because the labourers mostly belonged to the Depressed Classes, he explained. A number of progressive political figures joined it, including many of his followers who were not Dalits. The programme of the ILP naturally highlighted the demands of the Dalits. But it also supported the demands of the trade union movement and called for the abolition of landlordism and the distribution of land to the landless.
In the elections of 1937, the party won ten of the fifteen reserved seats for the Scheduled Caste and three general seats in Bombay Legislative Assembly. During its short lifetime from 1937 until 1939, when the Congress ministries resigned, the ILP functioned with vigor but without much effect in the Congress-dominated Bombay legislature. Ambedkar protested at the minimum salary proposed for ministers, which he felt was impractical idealism. The ILP members also protested against the use of the word Harijan, which the untouchables felt was patronizing, in a proposed Local Boards Act, the wardha scheme of education, and against increased powers of the city police in matters other than riots. The education of SC students, the problems of SC teachers and the talk of adequate water supplies for untouchables were raised at various times. The Harijan Temple entry bill passed evidently without comment by the ILP members although orthodox Hindus protested outside the Council House.\(^{65}\)

In spite of the encouraging election results the experiment of the ILP lasted for not more than five years. It did not create much political impact. Among many other reasons its failure seems to be mainly due to the dominance of one caste (Mahar) which alienated other Scheduled Caste and non Scheduled Caste belonging to the labouring masses. Zelliot points out “their
political movement over road efforts to claim religious rights, failed in its attempts to represent class of labour and took on much of the nature of a caste association functioning in the political arena.\textsuperscript{66}

Ambedkar read the lesson of the ILP with a cold eye, and the Scheduled Castes Federation formed upon the dissolution of the ILP in 1942 was an organization for more modest ambitions. A new distrust of caste Hindus was evident in the call for formation of entirely separate villages of untouchables, and the renewed demand for separate electorates.\textsuperscript{67}

The main demands of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation that its leaders had been raising since 1942, under the leadership of Ambedkar, were separate representation for the Scheduled Castes, reservations in educational institutions and in government jobs. By gaining representation in the Assemblies, ministries and the bureaucracy, the party hoped to acquire a share in political power and thereby influence public policy in independent India. This was necessary because it was felt that after the withdrawal of the British, the Congress, a Hindu party would takeover the reins of power. For this reason the AISCF wanted to take part in the political deliberations that were taking place during the transitional phase to independence.\textsuperscript{68}
The SCF made a poor show in the first general elections in 1952. Out of 550 seats legislatures that it contested, it won only 16 seats distributed over six State Legislatures. Ambedkar himself was defeated by a congress Harijan candidate. But in the second general elections in 1957, SCF got 8 seats in the Lok Sabha and 20 seats in the state assemblies and 13 of them got into the Bombay State Assembly because the SCF was a part of the united Maharastra Committee. In the Parliament, those MPs asked for the extension of facilities to the convert Buddhists from the SC’s, the distribution of uncultivated and surplus lands to the SC families, filling up the reserved posts, granting facilities for doing business to ex-untouchables, adivasis and other backward classes as those of the refugees, making provisions in the Five Year Plan for self employment etc.69

In 1956 Ambedkar made an attempt to transform the Scheduled Castes Federation into a party which would speak for all the “Dispossessed” Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes. The move to create the Republican Party came about the same time as Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism in Nagapur on 14-15 October 1956. Both were efforts to take the scheduled castes out of untouchability and into a larger group, one religious and the other political. 70
The Republican Party of India was formally organized on October 3, 1957. The need was felt because the Scheduled Caste Federation did not attract other persons for becoming members as well as for casting their votes. Here it is important to mention what the first president of the RPI, N.Shivraj had said in the public meeting held in Mumbai on October 15, 1957 that: we don’t want to remain in minority. The door of our party is open to all. We will try to take especially, adivasis, backwards and minorities with us and try to solve their problems.71

In the 1960s, RPI described itself as an “Ambedkarite” party and used a combination of caste and class mobilization in order to win votes. It used the former to unite the entire SC community and the latter for demanding distribution of land to landless labourers, adequate distribution of foodgrains control over rising prices, full implementation of the wages act 1948 and reservations in the services for SCs and STs.72

RPI, which was established with a great moral commitment and ideology to work for the socially and economically disadvantaged sections, including the Buddhists, in a very short period of time was grasped by the self interested Mahar leadership. They failed to capitalize on the cultural capital created by the vibrant Dalit movement and mostly worked against its ethos. The RPI is divided into as many as 11 different
factions today and the Mahar leadership dominates ardently most of these factions. The RPI has not only failed in mobilizing the backward castes and Muslims against the ruling Congress but also failed in convincing the non Mahar Dalits.73

The conditions of inactivism of RPI leaders and the growing atrocities on ex-untouchables gave rise to the birth of the Dalith Panther (on July 9, 1972), an organization of the militant youths mostly the Buddhists in Maharashtra. The formation of the Dalit Panthers in 1972 took place against a background of such oppressive developments—namely, the repeated failure of the RPI to fulfil any of the hopes of the Dalits, of rising tensions in the countryside, and of the revolutionary inspiration provided by the Naxalbary insurrection which was crushed by the state. In spite of their proclamation of the goal of power in the manifesto, however, the Dalit Panthers did not really have a political strategy. Instead, they fought battles on two fronts and against two enemies: at the symbolic level, against Brahminism, and at the concrete level, against the caste Hindu peasants and artisans who were directly responsible for numerous atrocities committed against Ati-Shudras. 74

The ideological orientations of the Dalit Panthers, were derived from the Marxist philosophy. They regarded landlords, capitalists, moneylenders, and Right Communists as their
inborn enemies. They considered all true leftists and the economic and politically oppressed groups like factory workers, farm labourers, landless tenants, poor peasants, etc, as their friends. They neither believed in conversion to other religions nor reform movement as a solution to their problems. They believed in revolutionary action.75

The Dalit Panthers in an attempt similar to what Ambedkar tried in the 30s, welded together disparate issues of land reform, untouchability and communalism. Like Ambedkar, the Panthers also stood as a critique of the Congress Government and the facile, sold-out left and tried to bring together the most diverse groups as a viable political alternative.76 The group was active through the 70s but by the 1980s, it was rife with internal splits that rendered it ineffective. During the popularity of the movement a confrontation broke between the two most dynamic leaders of Dalit Panthers, Namdeo Dhasal and Raja Dhale over the primacy of Buddhism in the movement of social transformation. The movement split into two distinct campus one group (Dhasal) adopting the Marxist class perspective and the other (Dhale) adopting the Ambedkarite Buddhist model for bringing change. The movement also faced problems of unavailability of infrastructural assets, sound political vision and a direct onslaught of militant Hindutva forces. Due to the
divergent ideals of the leadership and other related problems, the Dalit Panthers died after a half won battle leaving behind a great legacy of vast-revolutionary literature and culture.\textsuperscript{77}

In the series of Dalit Movements after the Dalit Panther Movement, Kanshi Ram’s various organisations like BAMCEF, DS-4 and BSP played a crucial role to create the consciousness among the depressed sections of the society.

Kanshi Ram who died on October 9, 2006 after a long spell of illness has been a vertical enigma in contemporary Indian politics. He emerged as the biggest and most creative leader in the post–Ambedkar Dalit movement. Born on March 15, 1934 in a humble Raidasi Sikh (Dalit) family in Khawaspur village of Ropar district in Punjab, Kanshi Ram earned his Bsc degree and took a job in a munitions factory in Pune.\textsuperscript{78}

Kanshi Ram’s introduction to the political ideas of Ambedkar was through his Mahar Buddhist colleague and friend at the munitions factory, D.K Khaparde. Together the two of them began formulating ideas for an organization to be built by educated employees from the Scheduled and Backward Castes. Such an organization would work against harassment and oppression by high caste officers, and also enable the often inward-looking occupants of reserved positions to give something back to their own communities. So Kanshi Ram and Khaparde
began to contact likely recruits in Poona. At about this time Kanshi Ram abandoned any thought of marriage, largely because it did not fit into a life he now wanted to dedicate to public concerns. He had also lost interest in his career, though he continued in the job until 1971. He finally left after a severe conflict over the non-appointment of an apparently qualified Scheduled Caste young woman. During this conflict he had gone so far as to strike a senior official, and he did not even bother attending most of the ensuing disciplinary proceedings. He had already made up his mind to become a full-time activist, and the movement was by then strong enough to meet his needs.79

In 1971, Kanshi Ram and his colleagues established the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other Backward Classes and Minorities Employees Welfare Association, which was duly registered under the Poona charity commissioner. Within a year of its establishment there were more than one thousand members and it was able to open an office in Poona. Kanshi Ram’s next organizational step was to create the basis of a national association of Scheduled Caste government servants. As early as 1973 he and his colleagues established the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation, and a functioning office was established in Delhi in 1976. BAMCEF was relaunched with greater fanfare on December 6, 1978, the anniversary of Ambedkar’s death.80
Kanshi Ram made the ‘BAMCEF’ a pool of brains, talents and funds. Although it was originally conceived as an association of employees belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Castes, yet it did not work exclusively for their interests and soon transformed itself into an organization for all the lower communities and castes. The BAMCEF, consisting of government employees, did not launch rallies but only held seminars disseminated information and prepared the youth for the would be political party of Kanshi Ram. Kanshi Ram believed that one should first consolidate one’s non political base to succeed in politics. He himself did not aspire to any political post but was engaged in the work of the Ambedkar education society which, in his considered opinion, could have been the foundation head of his non political base in ever burgeoning Dalit bureaucracy. In the same manner, he started work among SC and ST government employees.81

BAMCEF’s motto “Educate, Organise and Agitate” was adopted from Ambedkar, and its activities were formally divided into a number of welfare and proselytizing projects. But increasingly Kanshi Ram’s agitational activities were leading him into politics. By the late 70s he was no longer content with being the leader of reserved office holders, a class for whom he had less than complete respect. Kanshi Ram’s first attempt to create
a radical political vehical capable of mobilizing the larger body of Dalits was the Dalit Shoshit Sangarsh Samiti (DS-4) formed in 1981. This was conceived as a political organization parallel to BAMCEF: it shared the same president in Kanshi Ram, the same office and many of the same members. DS-4 was a quasi- rather than full fledged political party, partly because government servants were forbidden to take part in electoral politics.82

The DS-4 consisted mostly of students, unemployed youth and professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, etc, who provided the local leadership. Youth being the major constituent element in the DS-4, it proved to be a militant organization and its role was visualized as an ‘agitational weapon’ for the execution of Kanshi Ram’s political objectives. The mobilizational methods adopted by the DS-4 were aimed at awaking the oppressed sections of the people and make them realize their strength through ‘jagrans’, people’s parliaments, programmes, such as the Poona Pact Denunciation Programme, anti liquor agitations, and prachar yatras. A major cycle march was under taken with the message of the DS-4 miracle of two Feet and two Wheels; launched between 15 March and 17 April 1983. In it, hundreds of cyclists, under the leadership of Kanshi Ram, set out to travel a distance of 3000 kilometers, covering 35 important places in seven states of northern India. The rally was to reach Delhi on April 17, 1983.83
During the time of origin DS-4 was a non political organisation but it soon became the first of Kanshi Ram’s organizations to contest the elections. The DS-4 first tested the political waters by fielding 46 candidates in the elections to the Haryana Assembly in 1982. All of them lost their deposits. The defeat in the Haryana elections did not discourage the DS-4 from contesting elections for the Delhi metropolitan council and corporation in 1982. The DS-4 also contested Kashmir assembly elections in 1983. Although none of the DS-4 candidates won, the percentage of votes began to rise with each successive election. Like BAMCEF, the DS-4 has also politically faded away with the passage of time. In their place has emerged a regular political party.\(^8^4\)

BAMCEF and DS-4 helped building the network of Phooly-Amebdkarite movement for founding the BSP. Kanshi Ram transformed the DS-4 into a full fledged political party, the Bahujan Samaj Party, launched on Ambedkar’s birthday on April 14, 1984 with a slogan “Vote Hamara, Raj Tumhara ; Nahi Chalega , Nahi Chalega”.\(^8^5\) This means the party very clearly realized that earlier the Dalits were considered only the vote banks of other political parties. But now they were not ready to be only the “vote banks” of parties. Hence the slogan meant that no longer the rule of other parties (particularly Congress) on the basis of Dalit votes will be there.
The flag adopted by the party consists of a rectangular blue cloth with length and breadth in the proportion of 3 and 2 and party emblem in white colour in the centre. The symbol of the party is Elephant.

Thus it is evident from the above details that the Bahujan Samaj Party was established after foundation had been prepared by Kanshi Ram by forming first the non-political BAMCEF and then the political DS-4 organization. Very cleverly the party’s name was to be Bahujan Samaj Party and not any Dalit or Scheduled Caste Party.

The term Bahujan was used by Budha for the first time. About 2500 years back Lord Budha exhorted the Bhikku Sangaha to work and strive for Bahujan Hitai, Bahujan Sukhai. During our times Dr Ambedkar conducted a life long crusade to put the concept of ‘Bahujan Hitai Bahujan Sukhai’ on proper and lofty pedestal. This shows the impact of Budhism on Kanshi Ram and his party. Using the term Kanshi Ram launched BSP. The Bahujan Samaj according to him consisted of SCs, STs, OBCs and Minorities who together constituted about 85 percent of population and 6000 castes group.86

Kanshi Ram visualized two stages by which the position of Dalits/Bahujans in society would undergo a transformation. The first is capturing of political power through mobilization from
Brahmins who comprise only 10-12 percent of the population. He consistently tried to make the lower and backward castes realize that the ‘first past the post ballot’ voting system makes it possible for them to seize power by working within the system. In the later phases of the movement, the revolution would penetrate deeper into society and transform it, through how this would be done is not explained. Thus, caste becomes a double edged knife, though it is an instrument of oppression at present, it is to be used as a tool to upset the existing social order. This amounts to the ‘ideologisation’ of caste, i.e., using caste as ideology.

The BSP sees no difference between the philosophy of Ambedkar, the emancipation of untouchable and the ideals enshrined in the constitution. It believes that socialism can transform Indian Society, the major obstacle being caste and plurality of languages, religions, races, and customs, which have divided the working class. Kanshi Ram felt that reservation is not the only way to eradicate inequality and was against permanent job reservations. He argued: I will never approve of a system in which people are made to walk on crutches. What we need is a socio economic environment in which we can eat, talk, walk, and compete on an equal footing- our aim is to create a Bahujan Samaj.\(^{87}\)
The BSP also has certain specific characteristics that distinguish it from broad-based mainstream political parties, such as the Congress. A central characteristics is its exclusivism, i.e., its ideology and goals appeal to win only a segment of the population – the Dalits and the sections of the backwards in caste, and not to the poorer sections in class terms. In fact, its appeal was even narrower because initially its base was mainly among the chamars and other Dalit sub castes such as Balmikis and Khatiks.  

A central tenet of BSP’s ideology is the concept of ‘Social Justice’ which it is argued, will provide Dalits their rightful socio economic and political position in Indian society. It is exclusive, i.e. meant only for Dalits as they have been the most oppressed section of society and retributive because it seeks to rectify ‘historical wrongs’ perpetuated upon them by the upper castes, and it strives to establish a new social and political order. For achieving these goals, the BSP leadership argues that capturing of state power is essential.

The BSP is not anti systemic party or movement, which has challenged and sought to transform the basic structure of the Indian social system, replacing caste and the accompanying social oppression, economic exploitation and political domination by an egalitarian society. Rather it is a party that wants to work
within the system reforming it in the light of its own ideology and philosophy.

According to the Harish. S. Wankhede “in the post Ambedkar era, Kanshi Ram became the true torch bearer of Amberkarite struggle in the political arena of India”. 90 The most significant contribution of Kanshi Ram is his conception of Bahujan as a viable political constituency and a political strategy controlling the balance of power. Bahujanwad was meant to enlarge the potential constituency to claim 85 percent of the population. The idea of Bahujan may be traced to Mahatma Phooley and even Ambedkar’s strategy of making use of contradictions among the ruling classes. But their effective fusion and ‘operationalisation’ is to be credited to Kanshi Ram. His creative genius is reflected in the coinage of names he gave to his organizations, such as BAMCEF, and DS-4 or the catchy slogans with which he mobilized people. By declaring “Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Bhagedari”, he re-emphasized the rights of the people to share political power and revived the strong Ambedkarite sense of dignity and self respect in the masses who were mostly reduced to a vote bank of the upper caste leadership of the ruling class parties. He set an example of selflessness, sacrifice, simplicity and devotion in public life. 91
The Bahujan Samaj Party first made headway in Punjab, Kanshi Ram’s home state, but his primary political task was to wean the Chamars of the Uttar Pradesh from Congress. The BSP contested elections for the first time in UP in the 1984 Parliamentary Elections and the following 1985 Assembly Elections. Between 1984 and 1989, the BSP could win no seat, but its base among Dalits, especially government employees grew.

In the 1989 elections, Kanshi Ram decided to oppose Rajiv Gandhi in the Amethi constituency, but withdrew at the last moment. Thus, by 1989, the BSP emerged as the second most important and well known party in UP. It profited from the decline of the Congress and made inroads into its traditional vote banks, consisting of the Dalits, a section of the BCs and the minorities. As Kanshi Ram asserted, “we may not win even a single seat, but we are going to demonstrate our strength”. Aware that the Dalits alone could not bring it to power, the BSP has been making conscious attempts to expand its share of influence by winning over upper castes.92

Within a short span of time BSP became a national political party on November 25, 1997. No doubt that BSP has created aspirations among Dalits at the grassroots level for capturing political power. Before the formation of BSP two decades back
Dalits were satisfied with their suppressed position. After that they were offered political offices at the mercy of political bosses of the parties led and dominated by the upper strata. But, with the formation of their own political party they started aspiring to become MLAs, MPs, MLCs, and Rajya Sabha and even the Chief Minister of a state on their own without patronage and all this has happened within two decades and during this period BSP has shared political power in the largest state (UP) of the country four times (1993, 1995, 1997, 2002) and Mayawati has become the CM thrice. In 2007 Mayawati became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh by winning an absolute majority in the State Legislative Assembly, without any alliance.

The BSP in the early 1990s attempted to spread from UP into northern states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Delhi. In Punjab during the February 1992 Punjab Assembly elections, the BSP emerged as the main opposition party as most of the Akali sections boycotted the polls. It won nine assembly and one Lok Sabha seat. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1996 it won three seats in Punjab. But since then its performance has been deteriorating in Punjab.

In the end it may be said that Dalit movements played a crucial role to create the consciousness among the weaker
sections of the society. Jyoti Rao Phooley, B.R. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram’s contribution is important in this series. Dalits which were facing the discrimination on the basis of caste now can aspire to share political power. The Bahujan Samaj Party has provided a platform to this section of the society through which they can compete in the parliamentary democracy. This has been possible because of the series of Dalit Movements launched by leaders like Phooley, Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram. The Bahujan Samaj Party has become a permanent and important player in the national politics in India. However as the Dalits are divided into many sub-caste and all the Dalits do not vote for BSP the party faces great challenges to create a support-base for itself in a state like Punjab where the Dalits ratio in population is the highest in the country.
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