ABSTRACT

In 20th century the Dalit emerged as a political subject and responded to the caste based discrimination with varied strategies with an explicit objective of annihilation of the caste system. The present study attempts to contribute to the understanding of the Dalit political subject in the backdrop of the process of globalisation in general and explore and analyze the phenomenon of political identity among the educated Dalits in Mumbai city in particular. Although the literature available on the linkages between Dalits and globalisation in India (Jogdand 2002, Patil 2003, Teltumbde 2001, Teltumbde 2007) highlighted the impact of later on the social and economical aspects, the arguments are implicitly based on the assumption that victimisation and exploitation being the least common denominator of the Dalit experience, brings them close to other victims of the globalisation.

In this context it is necessary and relevant to understand and analyse the paradox of political identity construction of those among the Dalits who have secured higher education. Forces of globalisation intersect their political identity, which was under tremendous pressure from its birth. The present study attempts to explore and analyse theoretically and empirically the political identity of the Dalits in Mumbai city pertaining to its nature, formation and impact. Framework of identity theory with formulations of Erickson along with Tajfel and Turner, has been employed with three offshoots; primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism.

Objectives

1. To ascertain social and demographic profile of the educated Dalits under the study and seek their views and opinions.
2. To explore into the historical process of construction of the political identity of the Dalits.
3. To identify and analyze the link between globalisation and political identity of the educated Dalits.
4. To ascertain and examine the impact of globalisation on political views and opinions and political participation of the Dalits.
5. To analyze the link between reservation policy and political identity of the Dalits.

Methodology

The present study is based on descriptive and exploratory design. Predominantly the study employed survey design. Primary source of data is 90 respondents from Scheduled Caste
category with minimum qualification of graduation, who were interviewed through survey method and identified by snow ball sampling from two electoral constituencies of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. The term Dalit is employed in limited sense to cover converted Buddhists and non converted Mahars. Variables of age, education, occupation and income were used to operationalise the term globalisation. The interview schedule of composite character including open ended and closed questions was used. Additional information reported by the interviewee was written down at the time of interview.

The broad findings of the study

- Educational and occupational disparities emerged decisive in determining level of the financial and social status among the respondents.
- Major elements of the political identity of Dalits (like anti-Hinduism, anti-Gandhi, loyalty to Ambedkar and Buddhism with emancipatory, rebellious meaning) that has been historically salient in their political engagement with others were evidently found to be retained by the significant majority of the respondents as vital attributes of self categorisation.
- Despite of the general opinion that caste has been wiped out of the social interaction in the urban areas, it was observed that the caste has a subtle presence in the practices of identification and differentiation.
- It was revealed that social networking organizations based in religion and native places that in the past worked as connecting device has lost prominence in urban milieu. It appears that changes in the work environment and conditions of employment affected collective identity formation of the Dalits and possibly alienated them from the community consciousness.
- Although a section of scholars proposed combined front of all the victimized classes to fight against globalisation that has been termed as neo-imperialism, it was revealed that significant majority of the respondents do not perceive globalisation as evil force. Their interpretation of the globalisation is optimistic and occasionally as a liberating force with opportunity to escape from casteism. Thus majority of the respondents do not identify themselves with the others who claimed to be victims of globalisation. Caste was highlighted by majority of them as an attribute of difference.
- The respondents from old generation, low income level were most likely to believe that Dalits are victims of globalisation. Opinion of majority that Dalits should not lead the anti
globalisation protests was countered by significantly high percentages of respondents from old aged, government employees and lower income groups.

- Majority believed that vulnerability of Dalits to globalisation is due to lack of proper education and scarcity of resources which they credited to the legacy of caste based discrimination that denied them equality of opportunity for self development. It emerges that higher education and self employment were top priorities of the majority of respondents to cope up with the demands of globalisation.

- The attitude towards the politics; especially Dalit politics is far from supportive. De-politicisation of the Dalit youths affected the effective bargaining power of the Dalit political parties. Political mobilisation among the respondents was found very low.

- Although employment pattern is changing from government jobs to private sector, reservation policy is still favoured by most of the respondents in order to ameliorate their conditions. It is still a major element of political identity of Dalits.

- Few respondents maintained that reservations are the temporary provision which should be subjected to the progress of the community as a whole. Young, self-employed, unemployed and lower income group of respondents were most likely to claim that reservations are their rights.

- Majority of the respondents do not think that reservation policy keeps them reminding of their identity as a Dalit. Respondents from private sector were most likely to believe that the policy reminds them their identity as Dalit.

- Political implications of the policy of reservation were evident from the finding that a significant majority stated that they will not support any political party which opposes reservations. Majority believed that reservations will not continue in the era of globalisation but significant majority felt that it should continue and they support reservations in private sector.

Thus within the limits of the empirical enquiry, the present study concludes that political identity of Dalits is a multifaceted phenomenon, the core of which lies in experiences of exploitation and discrimination. Disparities in educational, occupational background and economical outcomes among Dalits, warrants the assessment of the Dalit as political subject. The educated among the Dalits who have undergone the higher education denied possibility of coalescing with anti globalisation movement and perceived the Dalit experience as located in caste rather than class structure and thus different than what the anti globalisation movement projects.