CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Rationale of the Problem:

The Dalit movement has not received the attention it deserves from histories of modern India writers till a generation ago. The Dalits were treated either as marginal people without a history of their own or as objects, rather than subjects, of the history of the nation as a whole. Thompson and Garrett (1962: 623, 631, 650) did refer to the Dalit movement at several points but never described it. Perieval Spear, in his indentical revisions both of the modern section of Vincent Smith’s Oxford History of India (1961: 835) and of P.E. Robert’s History of British India Under the Company and the Crown (1958: 652-653) refers to Gandhi as the leader of a movement for the upliftment of the depressed classes but merely acknowledges Ambedkar as a “Harijan leader” of outstanding courage and ability.

Alone among these earlier British historians of modern India, L.S.S.O. Malley (1968: 374-381) devotes a section to the Dalit movement, but portrays it as a movement for the upliftment of the untouchables initiated and sustained by others. The latest British History of Modern India, that of Judith Brown (1994) does mention the condition of the Dalits at several points in their history, but makes no reference to any organized efforts by Dalits to improve their own lot. The Dalit movement has not fared much better in the histories of modern India by Indian historians, who generally relegate Dalits to chapters on social reform and portray them as passive victims, recipients and beneficiaries rather than as active participarnts in their struggles. The one paragraph that Majumdar (1956: 959-60) devotes
to Dalits describes them as objects of Philanthropic and social work conducted by others. R.R. Sethi refers to Dalits only in connection with the 1932 communal award and as objects of 'uplift' work (Dodwell 1958: 630-31, 685-86). In his later work Majumdar (1956: 32-37) refers to Ambedkar and the Dalits as participants in the political bargaining of the 1930s and 40s which ultimately led to independence. However, in his lengthier treatment of Dalits in the book Gandhi, social reformers and the congress are portrayed as the Prime movers, while Ambedkar is cast in the role of a perceptive critic (1969: 1000-1012, 523-525). Bipan Chandra confines his treatment of the Dalits to a three page section on 'the struggle against caste' in his text book though he gives them a more activist role than his predecessors. However, this cannot be said of his more recent work which describes only Gandhi's 'Harijan uplift Movement' (1989: 291-295). Finally, Sumit Sarkar (1983: 56, 243, 328-30) includes brief treatments of the Mahar movement but in the discussion of the 1930s decade only Gandhi's Harijan Campaign is highlighted.

This brief survey seems to suggest that there was no such thing as a modern Dalit movement at least prior to India's independence. To virtually all these historians, Dalits were not movers and, even if they were, they moved not on their own but in the wake of socially concerned members of the dominant castes. Such treatment of the Dalits has been elitist and at times patronizing. Beginning with the pioneering work of Eleanor Zelliott in 1969, a growing number of historical monography have recently offered a necessary corrective.
These provide ample evidence of a Dalit movement prior to the enactment of the 1919 constitution, growing in size and political significance through the 1920s and 1930s. Dalit may not have had a single organization parallel to the Muslim League or the Hindu Mahasabha, but they did have grassroot organisations, a recognized leadership, pre-eminent among whom was B.R. Ambedkar, and a common demand for political recognition, for their own political representation as well as for dignity, equality and justice. These demands found expression in the 1950 constitution, of which B.R. Ambedkar was the chief drafter. (Webster, 1996: 189, 90).

In India nearly 22 percent of the people are scheduled, by the government (15 percent Scheduled castes and 7 percent scheduled tribes) recognizing their traditional socio-cultural and economic disabilities. The continuation of economic exploitation and social cultural oppression have rendered them politically voiceless, although a handful of individuals from among them have recently experienced upward mobility. That is not withstanding the fact that the vast majority of India’s population is underprivileged, viewed against the background of the contemporary world situation levels of economic development political participation and socio-cultural involvement. There is a substratum of the Indian population which is subjected to cumulative domination by the rest of the population in the country. Although the scheduled castes in India are underprivileged both economically and politically, given their physical isolation they were not in constant social interaction with the dominant clean caste 'Hindus'. Though there is
an existence of an extremely small substratum of the economically well off and politically privileged (but not entirely emancipated from socio-cultural oppression) among the scheduled castes, yet it is not suffice to indicate that the scheduled castes have achieved a respectable place in Indian society despite practice of democracy during the period of last more than half a century. The democratic framework has provided the opportunities to become aware of their rights and opportunities to take off. Hitherto there have been several movements of the Dalits, initially socio-religious under the guidance of saints or preachers to leave low practices and make up in social leader under Ambedkar the awareness took a new turn based upon his ideology to educate, organize and protest.

In the recent times they have learnt to highlight and protest for their interests and opportunities provided for them under the constitution. This is a new dimension of the culture of social movements in general and of the scheduled castes in particular.

Although several authors have mentioned Dalit movements in their writings but very few (e.g. Gail Omvedt, 1994; Gopal Guru, 1997; Mathew, 1986) have paid attention to the issues and nature of the protest movements. When they have studied these issues the scenario was different. Thus the present study is to focus upon the recent protests of the scheduled castes. This study undertakes to examine the hitherto neglected but, nevertheless, important area of research, the Sociology of Harijan protests. This study seeks to throw light upon the sociological categories of protest and lack of protest
and the relationship between and the social structural variables such as status situation.

1.2. Statement of the Problem:

To study emerging protests of the social groups like the scheduled castes will have some relevance in understanding the emerging social reality of the participation of the lower social groups. In this background of existing situation and context the present study focuses upon the following specific questions.

Q.1 What is extent of the protests by scheduled castes?
Q.2 What are the issues on which scheduled caste protests are taking place?
Q.3 How for these issues of protests vary in rural and urban areas?
Q.4 Against whom, the scheduled caste protests are directed?
Q.5 What is the process of mobilization? What factors and conditions are conducive or otherwise to these protests?
Q.6 What are the consequences/achievements of these protests?

The first question pertains to the numbers, various types and forms of protests by scheduled castes being observed in the recent years.

In the second question various issues on which scheduled caste protests are observable have been identified and studied. It means the occasions which cause the protests, in a way feeling of the
deprivation on which the scheduled castes feel deprived or any other issues committed, against the scheduled castes and depriving them from their rights.

In the third question we find out the variations among protests events in rural and urban areas and understanding differences and variations of issues on which protests have taken place in these areas, have been studied.

The fourth question identifies the various parties against whom these protests have taken place. Such as police administration, state government development authorities, local leaders, other higher castes etc.

The fifth question refers to the process of mobilisation of scheduled caste people or types of change and study of those conditions and factors which are responsible for protests.

The sixth question aims at finding out the net impact or consequences/achievements of these protests.

1.3 Area of Study:

For the purpose of present study district Meerut of Uttar Pradesh has been selected as the area of study. The district Meerut is situated in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab and lies between latitude 28°32 and 29°18N and longitude 77°7 and 78°14E in shape. It is roughly rectangular, its length from east to west varies between 58 and 49 miles and its breadth from north to east south between 48 and 36 miles.
In the north it is bound by the district of Muzaffarnagar, on the south by that of Ghaziabad nearby Delhi State. The Ganga forms its natural boundary on the north east and separates it from the districts of Bijnor and Moradabad. Most of the its western boundary is made up by the Yamuna which separates the district from the Sonipat and Karnal districts of Haryan (now some of this adjoining area has been carved out as a separate district Baghpat) a. The total area of the district according to the records is 3911 square miles. The total population of Meerut district is 2417.51 which is distributed as 1329.04 (54.975%) in rural area and 1088.48 (45.024%) in urban area (Census of India, 2001).

The population of scheduled castes in rural area is 287108 (21.602%) and in urban area is 161.694 (14.855%) there by scheduled castes constitute 21.602% of the total population in rural area and 14.855% in urban area. Thus the scheduled castes constitute of the total population of district Meerut. (Census of India 2001).

Socially and economically scheduled castes have been active in politics, they are artisans, workers and there are several institutions and associations run by them. Our exploratory study (Yachana : 1999) also shows that there have been several protests on substantive issues of scheduled castes in the rural and urban areas. Therefore there is an existence of such protests, showing awareness and uprising of the scheduled castes in the district. Thus the existence of uprising, mobility and evidence of protests by scheduled castes in Meerut district justifies its selection as area of study.
1.4 Universe/Sample and Respondents:

The Meerut district is the universe of the area study. Our exploratory work suggests that more protests are found in rural areas. During the last few years some protests have been observed in the district. There are two newspapers which are published from Meerut and they have reported regularly all such protest events during the past few years. During 1995-2000 there have been 100 such events, reported in these newspapers. A period of 1995-2000 has been taken into account and these events would constitute the universe of study. All actors reported in these events would constitute the total number of possible respondents. Finally, we have taken 100 news items (events of protests) for the study.

1.5 Methods of Data Collection:

First of all a review of the two Hindi newspapers namely Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran have been done to collect the information regarding the events of protests by scheduled castes in Meerut district. A classification has been done to know the various dimensions of these protest events from the narration of the facts of the events such as land cases, reservation policy cases, rape cases, corruption in development schemes, crop cases, panchayat conflict, tortured against scheduled caste, conflict related to Ambedkar statues, physical violence against scheduled caste persons, killing/murder of scheduled castes. After that we have used content analysis technique which is relevant in the present study. All names of the participants published
in the news items of protests were listed. The identification of events and lists have been prepared for getting a source of responses.

Thus a content analysis of these items and detailed case studies were undertaken was conducted in Meerut region. 100 cases were found related to scheduled caste protests in Meerut district. Our fieldwork is conducted in three stages. We have identified 50 cases out of 100 protests cases. At the first stage I have located these 50 cases in all areas of Meerut District and all type of protests so that there is a complete representation of Scheduled caste protests. At the second stage we interviewed the selected 50 cases and find some general conclusion. At the third stage we have again selected 15 protest cases for intensive study. In this last stage we have get some important findings.

1.6 Methods of Data Analysis:

The important facts coming through the case studies have been analyzed qualitatively. Findings have been arrived at on the basis of the narratives of these case studies. The data of 100 protests have been presented in the form of tables on all variables and aspects related to all the objectives the data from 50 protests cases also presented in the form of tables. Simple statistics, percentage and proportion have been presented in the form of tables and findings have been arrived at on the basis of these simple classifications.