Socio-Political Mobilisation And Empowerment

Social mobilisation refers to a process of change affecting substantial chunk of population in the society, showing sign of shift from traditional to modern views. It brackets together a number of specific processes of change, including the need for new patterns of group affiliation and new images of personal identity (Deutch 1966:25-26). Karl Deutch argues that by this process, major cluster of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behaviour (Deutch 1970:453-514). But according to Weiner (1962), social mobilisation in India is not likely to lead homogeneity but it already seems to have aggregated some small groups into somewhat greater size. Social mobilization, therefore, does not necessarily freeze the traditional system at the pre-existing level of social cleavage. It may reinvigorate a social cleavage at a high level of interest aggregation. Further, Rudolph and Rudolph (1987:24-28) have conceptualised the process of socio-political mobilisation of the people in India through the basic institution of caste. They also explain that the process of mobilisation is found in the three forms: vertical, horizontal and differential.

Besides, Lelah Dushkin (1998) has analysed the functioning of these processes in the realm of Dalit politics. She explains, "If we apply these types or forms of mobilisation to the scheduled caste politics, the first would require the untouchable leaders to play the part of the loyal 'Harijan', analogous to the "Uncle Tom" of American parlance. Under this arrangement, locally powerful upper-caste notables mobilize the voters - both Dalits and non-Dalits to fill the reserved seats with their own Dalit men or women whom they manipulate and control in regard to performing the political roles by the latter. These men and women are
bound to the upper caste man through the traditional ties. But contrary to this, the legal model of the protective discrimination policy seems, in fact, to call for the second and third forms of political mobilisation of the voters". According to Dushkin, it suggests more or less a stage theory, as follows: Stage 1: the British created a category of the Scheduled Castes, which, through the horizontal mobilisation of its component groups, presses it for upward mobility en-bloc. The leadership skills called for here are those needed to turn the legal category into an organized bloc, no small task. The tactics would presumably include emphasis on the Scheduled Castes' communal loyalties, symbols and objectives overriding those of locality, party and birth in a particular caste. Stage 2: as the members move into new fields of endeavour and gain differentially economic prosperity, education including the higher one, and more favourable links with a larger society. Thus, develops an 'elongated' structure, and with it a tendency to mobilize on the basis of economic, ideological, and personal interests through political parties and factions that cut across caste affiliation (Dushkin 1998:209).

Rudolph and Rudolph's (1987:144-145) analysis of political mobilisation of the people in general and of the Dalits in particular are quite in time with that of Dushkin. They visualize the use of horizontal and differential process of mobilisation by the Dalits in politics. According to them, "The Scheduled Castes Federation, founded by Ambedkar in 1942, contested the general elections in 1952 and 1957. It expressed in its name and politics a sense of communal separateness, and it pursued, for the most part, a strategy of horizontal rather than differential mobilisation by appealing to and organizing Mahars (in Maharashtra). The more radical and ideological Republican Party of India, which Ambedkar established after the second general election of 1957, attempted to move toward differential mobilisation by combining appeals to the poor and dispossessed with efforts to broaden the party's
community base". Pai (2000:122) puts it differently and argues about the mobilisation pattern of the Bahujan Samaj Party, specially in U.P. In her words, "During an early phase between 1985 to 1989, the BSP attempted to be both a radical movement and party using all its three mobilisation strategies: socio-cultural, agitational and electoral. It was a phase of militant vertical mobilisation of the poor and exploited, ideologisation of caste as a tool to break the existing social order and strident criticism of mainstream parties".

It is, thus, clear that all the processes of mobilisation have been operating simultaneously in the Indian polity particularly at the time of general elections. But a fact may be mentioned have that the different processes of mobilisation have been used to mobilize the various socio-political groups in different geographical settings with several permutations and combinations. Yet, it is a fact that if one process of mobilisation is operative in a particular region, the other process or processes of mobilisation are also present though these may not be as effective as the first one. In the case of Dalits, for example, their mobilisation in rural areas has seen of all the three processes of mobilisation at work—somewhere differential, somewhere horizontal and still somewhere vertical. Still, Dalits are often terrorized and patronized by the upper castes to cast their votes in their favour or in the favour of candidates sponsored by them who contest elections especially from the reserved constituencies. But in urban areas differential mobilisation is the dominant trend.

Secondly, the process of political mobilisation of Dalits specially during the voting period wherein they are lured or intimidated by the upper castes to cast their votes in their favour or in the favour of candidate sponsored by them has not been put in any specific type of mobilisation. There is need of either stretching three to four types of
mobilisation or to find a new nomenclature for this process. I would prefer to call it 'contemptuous mobilization' because it snatches the democratic rights of a citizen to exercise his/her will to choose a representative. Thirdly, Pai's explanation that the BSP has used vertical mobilisation for the mobilisation of Dalit masses does not fit in basic definition of vertical mobilisation analysed by Rudolph and Rudolph, as stated above. They have defined it as a process of "marshalling of political support by traditional notables in local societies that are organized by rank, mutual dependence and the legitimacy of traditional authority" (Rudolph & Rudolph 1987:24). If we go by this logic then the BSP's mobilisation cannot be described as vertical mobilisation because the BSP leaders who were/are neither notables nor had they have legitimacy of traditional authority playing dominant role in mobilizing the masses. Moreover, they also mobilize the so-called superior castes to whom they cannot provide any protection or patronage which is also an essential part of vertical mobilisation.

Some authors may call the BSP's mobilisation as differential mobilisation because the BSP is a political party with an ideology of the economic and social emancipation of the 'Bahujans'. But that is only partially correct as at its core, the BSP has had organized all the Dalit castes horizontally. It is true that at the initial stage, the Chamars and a few other Dalit castes came to its fold. But today, it intends to distribute power according to the population percentage of each and every caste specially of the Dalits and the Most Backward Castes in the state as well as in the country as stated in the previous chapter. Hence, it has propagated the slogan: 

\[\text{Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Bhagedari}\]

(each caste has to share power according to its numbers). Therefore, we may put the BSP's mobilisation in both the categories of differential and horizontal mobilisations.
Mobilisation of Dalits in U.P:

It is distinctly clear that the Dalit leadership in the contemporary times has shifted its focus from bringing various types of social reform among Dalits to attainment of political power, as stated in the previous chapter, through mobilizing them for the latter. There have remained different issues on the basis of which Dalit and non-Dalit masses have been mobilized during the pre- and post-independence periods. As stated in the previous chapter, the Dalits after independence have gained the constitutional provisions and safeguards which have yet to be fully and effectively implemented. The Dalit leaders, as informed by many of our respondents, rally around this point to get these benefits delivered in favour of the Dalit masses. They mobilize the Dalit masses by informing them about the various socio-economic programmes launched by the Government for upliftment of the Dalits. In the process, they also take credit by saying that these programmes have been implemented because of their efforts. They further impress upon the Dalit masses that if the latter keep on supporting their leadership, more such benefits would be made available to them.

On the other hand, a sizeable number of our respondents have remained of the view that the Dalit leaders in U.P. also try to convince other political parties dominated by upper castes and classes that they have a following which can benefit their parties in terms of votes and supports; therefore, they should be given proper representation in their party organization, in the cabinet and in other important establishments. Our respondents specially from the BSP have informed us that the Dalit leaders from the BSP criticize, from their platform, the exploitative attitude of the upper castes and classes to influence their voters. The provocative speeches help the Dalit leaders to energise the Dalit masses. The atrocities, coercion and oppression of the Dalits are highlighted by
these leaders who ask and convince them (Dalits) that it is through the political power that they can overcome their subordinated social, economic, educational and political status in the society.

It is also a fact that the mobilisation of the Dalit masses on the basis of their gaining (or gaining in future) political power has increased political consciousness among them. They have realized by now the value of their votes and numbers. It has brought greater participation of the Dalits in the political arena. More and more of Dalits have come out and voted for the BSP (see Tables 6.1-6.2). More and more Dalit political leaders are seen contesting elections from the reserve constituencies. As stated in the previous chapter, every political party has been forced now to field, in the reserved constituencies, an effective, educated, socially and politically conscious Dalit leaders who can raise and speak with conviction on the Dalit issues.

| Table 6.1: The BSP's progress in the U.P. Assembly Elections |
|---|---|---|---|
| S.No. | Years | No. of seats contested | No. of seats won | % of votes polled |
| 1. | 1989 | 373 | 13 | 9.83 |
| 2. | 1991 | 386 | 12 | 9.2 |
| 3. | 1993 | 166 | 67 | 11.2 |
| 4. | 1996 | 299 | 67 | 20.06 |

Source: Chief Electoral Officer, U.P., Lucknow.

| Table 6.2: The BSP's progress in UP Lok Sabha Elections |
|---|---|
| S.No. | Years | % of votes polled |
| 1. | 1985 | 2.6 |
| 2. | 1989 | 9.5 |
| 3. | 1991 | 11.0 |
| 4. | 1996 | 20.6 |
| 5. | 1998 | 20.91 |
| 6. | 1999 | 22.08 |

Source: Chief Electoral Officer, U.P., Lucknow.
This is contrary to the pre-independence Dalit leadership and also Dalit leadership in first three decades after independence in the state as well as in the country when mute, dumb and uneducated Dalit leaders were given tickets to contest the general elections from the reserved constituencies as already mentioned in the previous chapter. “Most of the untouchable candidates for Congress in the thirties and forties were figures of no prominence and often of little education” (Mendelson & Vicziany 1998:110). This fact was also endorsed by the Dalit leader Acharya Moti Ram Shastri who in interview had narrated few names of the leaders with such credentials as mentioned in the previous chapter. No doubt, such Dalit leadership of the first three or four decades after independence had mobilised the Dalit masses on the whims and fancies of their political bosses. Ambedkar had highlighted this fact very early when the controversy for over separate versus joint electorate was on (Ambedkar 1991:44).

Usually, during the election times, the Dalit masses were bribed by the upper castes with gifts like liquor, blankets, food packets, some clothes, etc. and were asked to cast their votes in favour of both the Dalits and non-Dalit candidates of their respective parties. And if they wanted to cast their votes independently, the various types of coercion, harassment and violence were used against them. In fact, the upper castes in the rural areas kept full vigil on the Dalits’ exercising their votes in favour of a particular candidate. Gould found, for example, that in Faizabad constituency in U.P. the Scheduled Caste “landless menials are sill too economically dependent upon the Thakurs...” to vote independently. Many Scheduled Caste people were gathered together in little groups by their Thakur overlords and marched to the rolls under Thakur supervision in order to ensure that they voted for the Jan Sangh. They were able to impose their will, in this way, by threatening these
impoverished folk with such economic sanctions as the denial of opportunities for field labour, withdrawal of sharecropping privileges and the calling in of loans" (Gould 1965:175). Moreover, there was no evaluation of effectiveness and competence of the Dalit leadership of that era specially in absence of competition and opposition among the Dalit leaders. For more than three decades after independence, Jagjivan Ram dominated the Dalit leadership in north India and attracted Dalit masses towards the Congress Party, except for a brief period in 1969 when the Republican Party of India under the leadership of B.P.Maurya challenged him in some western districts like Agra and Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh.

The style of mobilisation of the Dalit leadership used to be persuasive in the early years of its inception and before independence, as stated in the previous chapter. We have also mentioned that the Dalit leaders used to even submit petitions and prayers to the rulers for granting social and political rights to the Dalits. They usually carried the reforms within the Dalit community and educated them in regard to the benefits of unity, education, cleanliness, and leaving the bad habits like carrion eating, consuming liquor, pursuing the traditional and hereditary occupation, etc. They petitioned the bureaucracy against the Dalits' doing begar (or forced labour) for the bureaucratic officials and upper castes especially in the rural areas. But we do not come across any authentic data or cases of direct action or confrontation of the Dalit leadership against the oppression and suppression of the Dalits by the upper castes and officials during this period. Anyway, it is interesting to note here a unique way of mobilisation of the Dalits for their freedom from the traditional shackles of caste system and economic exploitation. This can be seen in the revival of the Bhakti movement of the mediaeval period during the first decades of the twentieth century as mentioned in the preceding chapters. The Dalits organised themselves in different sects named after the different poet-saints like Kabir Das and Ravi Das.
or Raidas calling themselves as Kabir Panthis and Ravidasis, during the 1920s, in some parts of Uttar Pradesh specially in Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi and Lucknow. Only Ambedkar had launched the first mass action programme at Mahad in the year 1927 and at Kala Ram temple in 1930 in Maharashtra during this period.

But after independence, the Dalit leaders both in U.P. and in the country have changed their modus operandi of mobilisation of the Dalit masses and even others. Now, the direct mass actions and confrontations have been adopted to deal with the officials and the upper castes in the cases of high handedness by the latter. The Dharnas (sit-ups), gheraos, strikes, violent demonstrations, open criticism of government, etc. have increased tremendously now in the state. The Dalit leaders have formed their own organizations and raise their voices against the atrocities and un-fulfilment of reservation quota in the government jobs. They have also formed political parties to mobilize the Dalit masses in greater numbers. Since the 1980s till now, there is a qualitative change in the nature of Dalit leadership, as discussed in the previous chapter, which has also affected the nature and rate of their political mobilisation of the Dalit masses. Earlier, there used to be Dalit ministers from the various political parties in the governments. However, with the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Dalit leaders found in different political parties in the state have been overshadowed. Even though the sharing of power in different governments for a brief period, the speed of mobilisation of the Dalits by the BSP leadership in the state has increased all these years. This has been augmented all the more because of Mayawati’s (a Dalit woman leader) becoming the Chief Minister for the first time in the history of the state. Every conscious Dalit has now started identifying himself/herself directly with the Dalit leadership or that of the BSP which has an independent status unlike the other type of Dalit leadership dependent on their party bosses. The
phenomenon of Mayawati becoming Chief Minister and with a BSP Government having the Dalit agenda in the core of the governance gave the Dalits of the state new aspirations and hopes which has been rightly brought out by Jens Lerche. In the words of Lerche, "Chamars commonly said that they had acquired 'courage' and 'self-esteem', or that they were 'not afraid any longer', that they now dared to stand up for what they perceived as their rights. This change was encapsulated symbolically in the change that many Thakurs pointed to as central: that Chamars no longer showed them respect. Most Chamars would no longer participate in various festivals and rituals which, among other things, emphasised their inferiority, and they would answer the Thakurs back" (Lerche 1999:213).

Thus, the Dalits in the state have come out of their pre-conceived 'object' status and socialized themselves as the 'subject' status or as an active player. The notion that the Dalits cannot rule and manage their own the political affairs was dismantled for the first time and the construction of a new era began. The neo-rich and the middle class among the Dalits, who had benefited from the policy of the protective discrimination and the process of modernisation, contributed in a significant manner in the initial stages of mobilisation of the Dalit masses by the Dalit leadership of BAMCEF and DS4. As the time progressed, this mobilisation also covered the new terrain in the countryside. For the first time in the state politics, the Dalit leadership specially of the BSP went independently, so deep in the villages, with a programme of their own. Even mobilisation of the RPI was restricted to some western parts of the state and that of Dalit Panthers' in the central part of the state - Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Hardoi and other adjoining areas of the state, as stated in the earlier chapter. The rural presence of the BSP has been highlighted by Lerche who suggests that, "This study agrees that the emergence of the BSP on to the political
scene is important but for different reasons: namely because of its influence on rural class struggles. Although the BSP has not raised major class issues such as land reforms, it has, nevertheless, influenced local agrarian struggles and labour relations through changes in how the local state apparatuses relate to them" (ibid: 183).

We have already stated in the previous two chapters that during the pre-independence period, the Dalit leadership could not organize inter-regional or even intra-regional conferences for the purpose of the mobilizing the Dalit masses in the state. Only local level meetings or congregations were organised and that too with the help of the leadership of the traditional caste Panchayats. Yet, there were one or two successful conferences organised by the Dalit leaders in the state. One such conference was organised when Ambedkar came to Lucknow in 1948 to mobilize the Dalits for capturing political power (Gore 1993:213). Again in 1956, he came to Agra second time to mobilize and educate the Dalit masses about his plans for conversion to Buddhism (Lynch 1974:145). Contrary to this, the Dalit leadership of the Congress Party organised regional conference to stop the Dalits to follow the act of conversion to Buddhism led by Babasaheb Ambedkar. For instance, Jagjivan Ram organised a meeting in Subhas Park in Agra to stop the Dalits to covert to Buddhism (ibid:145). Before that Achhutanand, the leader of the Adi Hindu movement, had organised an inter-regional meeting in the 1920s of the Dalit leaders drawn from all over the country to unite the Dalit movements organised in the name of the Adi-Hindu, Ad-dharm, Adi-Andhra, Adi-Karnataka, etc. as mentioned in the previous chapters. This conference ended in a failure as the propagators of the different movements did not agree to unite their respective movements under one name (Juergensmeyer 1982:38). However, after independence the Dalit leadership has increased the frequency of organising local, regional and inter-regional conferences for the mobilisation of the Dalits. Even they
have gone to organise the inter-state conferences. For instance, the BSP organized the Ambedkar Mela in Lucknow in April 1995 in which the Dalits from different parts of the country had participated. Similarly, the Sahuji Maharaja Mela was organised in Kanpur in which again the Dalits from different states had participated and performed cultural activities. Now, big rallies with lakhs of people attending them have become part and partial of the strategy of mobilisation of the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, like in other states. The regional and state level conferences are regularly organized to assess progress of activities of the party workers.

Another strategy for mobilising the Dalits is to raise their vital issues in the Parliament and in the State Assembly. It has been revealed by the majority of our respondents that Dalit leaders raise socio-economic, educational and other types of issues related to Dalit masses in the Parliament and the State Assembly to mobilize them. But a chance to raise the questions depends on many factors. Since a political party is allotted limited time to raise a particular issue, the party bosses entrust responsibility to a particular member to raise the issue in the house. Our respondents have also argued that the impact of raising of question in Parliament and State Assembly depends on the extent it is advertised by both the electronic and print media, or by the party’s publicity machinery. But as has been seen time and again, the Dalit issues raised in the house by the Dalit leaders rarely become a news item. Hence, there is very remote chance that the raising of Dalit issues in different houses really helps mobilisation of the Dalits.

As far as the above mentioned style of mobilisation by the BSP leadership largely representing the Dalit leadership in U.P. is concerned, many respondents want change in it. For instance, they do not wish the caste provocative language to be used by the leaders because, in their opinion, it creates lot of animosity in the society. Moreover, they argue
that because the Dalit masses are fatalistic and vulnerable, they always want a charismatic personality to lead them and take out from their miserable conditions. They also do not want to wage their struggle or protest longer as it may prove to be counter-productive. A point may be mentioned here that their understanding of the charismatic leadership is somewhat different from that characterised by Max Weber (1958) where a charismatic leader be a traditional one. In fact, in their frame of reference a charismatic leader is the one who is well educated, articulate logical-rational, and has a full commitment and conviction for the Dalit cause. Another point is that due to their existential condition specially in the rural areas, they seem to be well aware of the fact that waging struggle or confrontation with the upper castes and classes means not only getting their subsistence sources blocked but also loosing their life and destruction of their meagre belongings including their houses or thatched shelters. Further, they do not want a particular caste to politically dominate the Dalit leadership in the state; hence, they demand that collective leadership should be developed. They also argue that single party cannot claim to represent the total Dalit community. Therefore, the Dalit leaders should remain in different political parties but on the issue of the Dalits' interests, they should come on one platform and unitedly press their demands. In their opinion, pressurising the government to implement the constitutional provisions would help the Dalit masses to gain the benefits, and would also facilitate the Dalit leadership in easily mobilizing the former.

The majority of our respondents have also expressed their opinion that while mobilizing the general masses in spreading their party base, the Dalit leadership should be cautious about their not sacrificing the Dalit cause. In other words, the leaders drawn from the upper castes and classes within the Dalit leadership should not be given important and significant portfolios in the government formed by it and also key
positions in the party organisation. Rather, they should be used as instruments for attracting votes from the masses of their community as other political parties do and use the Dalits for the electoral purposes only. Our respondents have further revealed that, "If the upper castes and others are given important position in the organizational set up, they can sabotage the movement of the Dalits as they are basically status quoits and want to perpetuate the existing social-order".

**Socio-cultural mobilization:**

Another strategy suggested by our respondents for mobilisation of the Dalit masses is to form a number of cultural and social organizations playing the role of shadow organizations. In their opinion, "If the Dalit leadership wants its political roots to be stronger and masses do not get alienated then they have to establish a strong cultural and other shadow organizations. Even if the Dalits come to power, these organizations can work at the grass-root level to educate the masses. The enlightened leaders should be accommodated in these shadow organizations so as they do not feel alienated. They will get some satisfaction that they are also being given some importance". To prepare the leadership at the grass-root level, more and more Dalits should be given some positions in these organizations to keep them involved with the Dalit agenda. This is extremely necessary, in their opinion, as the upper caste dominated political parties and other organizations attract the petty Dalit leaders by offering them insignificant post in them. This retards the rate of Dalit mobilisation, on the one hand, and hampers the growth and development of the independent Dalit leadership, on the other. The Dalit masses are also confused by the presence of these leaders in the parties dominated by the so-called upper castes and classes.
Our respondents have further opined that, "to emerge an effective and committed Dalit leadership, it is *sine qua non* for the Dalit leaders to leave their personal ambitions. They cannot afford to function like power brokers and agents of different socio-political forces. The disciplinary action against the erring Dalit leaders have to be sharper so as to bring them under control. This is necessary as the Dalit leaders, as evidences suggest, are often vulnerable to indiscipline in absence of a proper mechanism of control". But a sizeable number of respondents have also confessed that, "in the BSP because of strict disciplinary actions and extra-reglementation, a few fragmentations have taken place. Therefore, the BSP leadership has to be somewhat flexible and the top level leaders have to forego their personal ambitions".

Another interesting point to mention here is that the political leaders irrespective of their party affiliation generally take up the day-to-day problems of the people of their constituency and thereby mobilize their support in the electoral politics. Occasionally, they address the long-term agenda either in piloting some bills or supporting others and thus getting legislations enacted in the Parliament and the State Legislature, as may be the case. Only a few political parties like the communist parties-CPI, CPI (M) and CPI (ML), and the BJP have adopted the long-term agenda, besides addressing the short-term issues, which of course have got diluted over a period of time due to situational compulsions. The Dalit leadership in the state as well as in the country has also followed the same suit, except Dr. Ambedkar who had consistently pursued the long-term agenda of bringing transformation in the Indian society but at the same time not undermining the day-to-day problems of the Dalits. Hence, the Dalit leadership in the state has to chalk out its both the long and short term goals for the better mobilisation of the Dalits and other weaker sections. It has also to take cognisance of the ongoing processes like globalisation, privatisation, liberalisation and information revolution. Otherwise, Dalits would again be
left in lurch because they are still not equipped with the technical and managerial skills needed to get employment in the multinational companies or corporations operating and going to operate in big way in India as mentioned in the previous chapter. Our respondents are of the strong view that the Dalit leadership has to guide the masses to come out of the shadow of the traditional type of education, and go for the modern technical and managerial skills needed for getting employment in the contemporary job market. Moreover, the Dalit leadership has also to come out of their narrow perspective of the 'good of the Dalits only'. They have to add the national issues for mobilisation of the other sections of the society. To get more strength, they have to take every section of the society into their fold.

Further, the Dalit leadership in the state if wants to increase its mobilising capacity, it would have to pursue the social reforms within the Dalit community and in the country as well along with the goal of capturing political power. Some of our respondents have argued that, "Without a strong cultural and social movement, the political movement may lose its sight. It would be without any restrain and can easily be misguided". As far as cultural movement is considered, the "whole history of India is to be questioned and rewritten because the contributions of the Dalits have grossly been undermined by the historians. There has to be proper evaluation of the Dalit labour which produces food grains, industrial products, constructs roads, rails, houses for others, etc. Why their labour has been degraded and not considered worth mentioning with respect in the annals of academics? The whole literature, which is literature of the upper castes and classes, does not devote required space for the Dalits. Therefore, the respondents suggest that the Dalit literature should be produced which can narrate the sufferings of the Dalits and expose the true nature of the exploitative social order. This, in turn, would make the Dalits conscious of their exploitation also. It can have the same
effect as in Maharashtra where the leaders of the Dalit Panthers' wrote Dalit literature and instigated the violent Dalit struggle. For this, Dalit scholars should be awarded special scholarships, grants and awards to motivate them for more creative writing of the Dalits and for the Dalits as well as for others. The school curriculum which propagates superstition among the masses in general and Dalits in particular should be changed. More progressive curriculum has to be regulated in the schools.

Retrospectively, the Dalit leadership also mobilise Dalit masses in the state by distributing the literature related to the Dalit movements, their ideology and strategy. This is done with the view that the local level people like to know what is happening at the national level and how do their leaders react to that. This literature answers their queries and easily educates them in absence of their direct interaction with the higher level of their leadership. The literature of this type is all the more important because the media is dominated by the upper castes and classes, which mainly caters to their needs. The Dalit perspective seldom appears in the print media. The television is another strong electronic medium of putting across the views of Dalit leaders, but somehow very few Dalit leaders are seen on the television. Their absence is more astonishing when the television channels are multiplying. Hence, the majority of our respondents are of the view that, "Dalit leadership should give away its 'media shy' nature and face the challenges of the era of 'information revolution'. This would enhance their image and aura, as the reach of the television has gone deep into villages with increased hours of transmission, and also Dalits have gained access to watch the national channels, if not the cables".

The Dalit leadership irrespective of party affiliation has to be more democratic in nature. Most of our respondents have revealed that though the "BSP mostly represents the Dalit leadership in the state because it has
maximum percentage of Dalit votes, it has only two main leaders and there is no second line leadership. Also, there is no democracy within the party as most of local leaders are not allowed to speak freely. The organisational elections are not held democratically. The different party functionaries are nominated and chucked out on the whims and fancies of the two party leaders. In Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati has been the sole in-charge and others have only to follow her. In other political parties also, "the Dalit leaders once established become egoistic and self-aggrandizing. They never allow other stream of Dalit leadership to emerge so that they do not loose their dominant position in the party". In other words, our respondents cited the cases of late Jagjivan Ram of the Congress Party and Ramvilas Paswan of the Janata Dal, besides Kanshi Ram and Mayawati of the BSP. It is interesting to note that, except Jagjivan Ram who is no more alive, the other said leaders enjoy the maximum support of the Dlits in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh respectively.

Empowerment and Dalit leadership

The concept of empowerment in its current usage is very new as it does not find place in the Encyclopaedia, a number of dictionaries and glossaries of sociology textbooks. According to Beteille (1999:589), empowerment is related to certain context in Indian society. In his own words, "in a nutshell, that context is the contradiction between a hierarchical social order and a democratic political system". He opines further, "the idea of empowerment may be invoked in virtually any context: in speaking about human rights, about basic needs, about economic security, about capacity building, about skill formation or about the conditions of a dignified social existence" (ibid: 590). It is also seen as a way of addressing the problems of rights that remain un-enforced. In economic context, it is invoked in capacity building particularly of marginalized, unorganised and other disadvantaged
groups, classes and categories. Beteille elaborates by saying that, "Implicit in the idea of empowerment is certain theory of social change in particular of change from a hierarchical to an egalitarian type of society (Beteille 1983), or in a slightly different language, from an aristocratic to democratic type of it (Tocqueville 1956). The main point behind empowerment is that it seeks to change through a rearrangement of power" (Beteille 1999: 591). Beteille gives a concrete proposal of empowerment by suggesting a radical change in social composition of the strategic institutions of society, in particular the various organs of the state. He opines that the institutions of society with diverse social groups will be more open and more sensitive in its approach to the larger problems of society (ibid: 596). For achieving empowerment in the society, he suggests two paths: one, there is a laborious and unexciting process through expansion of the civic, political and social rights of citizenship. Second is by providing as extensively as possible quota to the un-empowered on the basis community, caste and gender. But in this case, we have to compromise with the ideals of our Constitution which assigns the rights and capacities to the citizens as individuals, and not to castes and communities or men and women separately (ibid: 597).

If we analyse the empowerment of Dalits in the sense described above, we find that the government has already provided both the paths for the purpose: one, through granting them civic, political and social rights which were denied to them earlier. Secondly, it has provided them special quota in different spheres of their life. Yet, Dalits are powerless and are unable to set their own agenda as stated in the preceding chapter. They have to largely look for the benefits of the policies and programmes adopted and implemented by the government of the day. The main hurdle in their empowerment, according to most of our respondents, is the "existing value system of the Indian society. The traditional hierarchy does not allow the Dalits to have their access to the
strategic positions of the authority in the public domain and to the decision making”. Therefore, the Dalit leaders want to capture power so that they can change the social composition of the state machinery. We have already mentioned in this as well as in the preceding chapters that this was done in Uttar Pradesh soon after Mayawati became the Chief Minister in June 1995 and again in April 1997. It was reported in the media that, “The Emancipatory campaigns and fierce of anti-upper caste rhetoric gain credibility and substance through BSP’s attempt to change the staffing of state by unprecedented transfers of government officials, placing Dalit cadres in key posts with the public administration (India Today, September, 1997:46–8; Frontline, 1 December, 1995:30–31; 18 April 1997:18). Our respondents also have stated that, “for the first time in the history of the state, the Chief Secretary is a Dalit and the Director General of Police is also a Dalit. Whether they do anything for us positively or not but they will not do anything negatively for us. Moreover, the entire upper caste bureaucracy in the state was afraid of the fact that a Dalit was their boss; and if anything went wrong, there would be no one to save them. Half of our problems were solved by their mere presence”.

The implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 is another testimony of the fact that how things change where Dalits themselves become the custodian of law. Anyway, under this Act, a person committing atrocities on the SCs/STs can be sent to jail, while cases are investigated. Similarly, the victim is awarded Rs.6,000 to enable him/her to fight the case in a court of law. During Mayawati’s Chief Ministership, these provisions of the Act were implemented with seriousness as revealed by many of our respondents. Not only that but the power of investigation in the cases of atrocities was delegated to police station in-charge/sub inspector, with posting of the SC/ST candidates as in-charge at 25 percent of the Thanas in all the
districts in the state. Besides, the BSP government also facilitated the Dalits to take possession of land already allotted to them, and, on its own, initiated only limited number of minor new allotments of government land to the Dalits (Department of Information and Public Relations, U.P.). Further, it provided tangible improvement to some Dalit groups through channelling of government funds to the programmes benefiting primarily to the Dalits. The focus of such programmes was implementation of the Ambedkar Village Development Scheme in the villages, with major concentration of the Dalit population. Under the Scheme, in all 37 programmes were to be implemented so that the Dalits with their economic development could be brought above the poverty line. The most important programmes under this Scheme included construction of link roads, rural electrification, construction of brick-paved roads, drains, rural sanitation programme, opening of primary schools/building construction, and free-boring, Integrated Rural Development Programme, Indira Housing Scheme, making clean drinking water available, Kisan Pension Scheme, Widow Pension Scheme, etc. There is a long list which can prove that the process of empowerment of Dalits in the state was initiated when the BSP leadership had ruled the state and the Dalits occupied key positions in the different institutions (Department of Information and Public Relations, U.P.)

In a nutshell, the empowerment of Dalits as reported by Lerche (1999:213) in his study in eastern U.P. brings the point home. According to him, “whereas generation before Thakurs could summon their Chamar workers for duty by yelling at them from the outskirts of the Thakur hamlet (a distance of 500 metres), this changed during the 1970s and 1980s when it became common for Thakurs to go to their labourers’ homesteads in the Chamar hamlet to call them when needed. However, since 1995-96 they have even stopped doing this as they might now suffer the humiliation that Chamar workers would not stand up straight
away when they arrived; the workers might ask the Thakur to sit down on the same charpoy (string-bed) as them, or even offer tea, thereby emphasising the egalitarian relationship between them. They might also claim not to be available for work, so that the landowners would have to go to several labourers’ households to procure workers. To avoid such humiliations, Thakurs now send their children to call the Chamars instead.

Thus, the conventional forms of political mobilisation of the people in the state in particular and in the country in general has undergone change in the recent decades. Instead, the money and muscle power plays more significant role in mobilising the people specially at the time of general elections. The Dalits also have been governed by such process of mobilisation. The repeated threats from the Elections Commissions to counter-manned elections through such practices and reprimand the persons violating the elections norms and considerable degree of assertion of the Dalits have, however, changed the political scenario during the recent years. We have already stated in this as well as in the earlier chapters that in spite of playing electoral politics, the BSP, in the opinion of its leadership, is an ongoing movement for the amelioration of Dalits in the state as well as in the country. It is true also as, apart from playing the electoral politics as mentioned above, it addresses the wider issues of empowering the Dalits in terms of bringing qualitative changes in their socio-economic status, educational level, power position, in their attitudes, behaviour, consciousness, etc. It is clear by now that it has been successful, to some extent, in its endeavour. But ironically, the Dalit leaders in other political parties still follow the conventional form of political mobilisation of the Dalit voters and are unable to play any significant role in empowering Dalits in the state.
References


