

Book Review

Bahujan Politics in India: Beyond Reservations

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The book under review is one of the most important contributions to the study of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Bahujan Politics. It has been associated with the issues and concerns of the marginalized communities like the SCs, STs, OBCs and religious minorities which were subjected to the violent forms of casteism in India. As the cover page itself shows that it was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his slogan of '*political power is the master key*', which had become the main inspiration for the rise of Bahujan Politics in India. That is why Bahujan Politics beyond the casteist politics gives scope for all castes and communities to play their due role in the political process. Here, bahujan politics is not about reservations, nor is it about politics any more. No doubt, it deals with politics of the majority society which is the most marginalized in India. When the author has interpreted the bahujan politics in India, an attempt was made to explore the issues and concerns of these groups, which became politically conscious for the past two decades or more than that.

On account of the role of caste in Indian politics, people belonging to various castes and communities were so politicized as much as their politics was subjected to casteist influences. For a long time, the upper strata of society which comprises of the three upper castes had participated in the political process only to monopolize it for themselves. Almost all democratic institutions of socio-political nature were converted into their private ones in which the entry of the marginalized was almost restricted. Even if some of the marginalized communities were there entrapped into the political system, it was more to legitimize the

manuwadi politics rather than to strengthen the bahujan samaj.

Besides, the marginalized groups such as SCs/STs were deprived of educational rights from times immemorial. Later on, they availed the constitutional facilities through reservation policy in the fields of education, employment and politics. Despite many obstacles, the marginalized communities had shown keen interest in educating their wards in order to get them employed in the public sector. Some of them had also occupied key positions in the existing political process, which ensured them certain representative

responsibilities. In a way, some of these castes and tribes have had the opportunity of serving their respective communities to a certain extent.

Because of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the father of Indian Constitution, the marginalized groups and communities had started utilizing the reservation facilities in terms of employment, economic and politics. In the meantime, the state and globalization had come in the way of implementing the schemes of reservation for the benefit of bahujan samaj. While the concept of reservation has always been associated with SCs/STs and their economic development, its scope and reach is enclosed because of the emerging challenges in the wake of globalization in the country. Hence, this book makes an attempt to examine all such issues and concerns of the marginalized which can help one to realize the significance of bahujan politics in India.

The book is arranged into five chapters. The introductory chapter provides the conceptual understanding of the casteist hierarchy, social exclusion, marginalized communities and historical background of the study, methodology and plan of the study. The second chapter “politics of reservations and beyond”, has dealt with the reservations for different marginalized groups and communities in the context of globalization. This chapter is also focused on the relevance or otherwise of reservations for the bahujansamaj. The third chapter “bahujansamaj movement and party”, is

an attempt to study the factors that led to the rise and growth of bahujansamaj movement and party after Independence. The fourth chapter “bahujan politics beyond reservations”, has focused on how the process of bahujanisation had offered a long term political alternative for the bahujansamaj within and without UP. The final chapter summarizes all other chapters which give an idea of the way forward for the bahujansamaj to traverse in a political, if not reservation, direction once for all.

The author of the book is an academician, teaching in the Department of political science as well as a proactive social activist. He has combined his knowledge of both the fields, experience of teaching and research well for doing this study. The main aim of the book is to analyze the major socio-political developments which dealt with the bahujansamaj movement and politics for over three decades in India. While the study is focused on the issue of reservations, relevance or otherwise of it, the bahujan politics that was centered in Uttar Pradesh has been given primacy. The bahujan politics has got a nation-wide appeal and scope, because of its political spread is confined to a very few states in North India. As part of the bahujan politics, the BahujanSamaj Movement (BSM) and its party, the BahujanSamaj Party (BSP) that largely represented the numerical majority, in terms of social base, has emerged as the third largest party, within a couple of decades of its foundation, in India.

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Unlike the other political movements and parties, the author has argued, the BSM/ BSP seeks to defend the marginalized communities in letter and spirit. It is clear that the book seeks to clarify and elucidate the conceptual understanding of the very language and vocabulary that the bahujan politics had been associated with this study. Based on the ideological ground of Phule-Ambedkar struggles and works, Kanshiram was instrumental in leading the bahujansamaj movement and party till it became the ruling regime in the largest state of Uttar Pradesh in India. Thereafter, Mayawati had inherited the political legacy of Kanshiram which continued to lead the movement and party, notwithstanding any sort of pressures from 'within and without' the bahujan politics.

The bahujan politics is primarily aimed at 'capturing politics power', as it was considered as the 'master key', the politics of reservations that had been played on in since independence by the 'manuwadi regimes', has thus been exposed. Obviously, the study examines the process of 'bahujanisation' that been undertaken within the purview of bahujan politics. Moreover, the book tries to give an insider view on the main concerns and contours of bahujan politics that received certain electoral setbacks in the recent polls in UP and elsewhere in India. Thus, the book is an objective appraisal of the prevalent developments in the context of bahujan politics in the country.

According to the author, the issue of sarvjansamaj which was popularized by

Mayawati, as part of her strategy of social engineering, on the eve of 2007 Assembly elections in the UP, albeit ensured landslide victory for the bahujansamaj, became a point of utter confusion among the marginalized communities. The issue was so blown out of proportions by its political adversaries that a section of the bahujansamaj was misled and thereby it became quite controversial. As usual the role of manuwadi media which was showing the rise of Brahmin Samaj in the bahujan politics in a big way whereby the vulnerable sections among the bahujansamaj got petrified and moved in a negative direction.

By the way, there was some impact on the deviation of a section of OBCs as well as the Muslims in the last assembly Lok Sabha elections in the state. Interestingly, this issue has upset the poll prospects of the BSP in two ways. One, it had alienated a small section of the bahujansamaj like the most backward castes as well as the Muslims from continuing with their support to the Mayawati regime. Second, on the same pretext, systematic media campaign was conducted whereby the emerging bond between the Brahmins and Dalits gone astray which has had its toll in defeating the bahujansamaj. Otherwise, there was hardly any scope for misapprehension between these communities, at a time when Mayawati was harping on the theme of sarvjansamaj day in and day out.

The theme of sarvjansamaj was not to be considered as just an electoral

strategy. Instead, as the author had argued it had tried to bridge the wide gap between the two poles, Dalits and Brahmins in the casteist social hierarchy in India. In the year 2007, there was certain amount of social harmony and political friendship that had been prevalent during the time when election campaigns were undertaken in the state. Besides fetching crucial electoral benefits, theme of sarvajansamaj had raised awareness level among both the contending castes. In a way, this was an unusual attempt to promoting goodwill and harmony among different communities within and without the state. There was a possibility of reading some long-term message on account of social engineering of diverse castes and communities in the state. In other words, bahujan politics was trying to take away the society towards the direction of social transformation and economic emancipation over a period of time.

Apart from that, the bahujan politics which was aimed at creating a favorable environment in the state and society, so that, a healthy political process was undertaken at all levels. As a part of deepening democracy and decentralizing the governance, bahujansamaj was encouraged to take active participation in the administration. After that only, the Constitutional objectives were realized and implemented in letter and spirit. In the name of ideology, manuwadi parties and status quoits regimes had always tried to undermine the social and legal objectives which were enshrined in the

Constitution of India. When we look into the many cases of reservation, it is very clearly revealed how those Constitutional objectives were implemented more in breach than in practice. Hence, the political regimes used to resort to the politics of reservations that had caused further humiliation to the marginalized groups and communities, rather than raising their dignity of life in the society. In view of this backdrop, the author has felt that the bahujan politics had to expose the hollow claims of such regimes and offer an alternative politics which could raise their standards of living as well as empowering them in all spheres of life over a long period of time.

Methodologically speaking, the study is based on limited secondary sources like books and articles etc. There is scarcity of relevant material on this particular subject in English. Thus, he has taken so many efforts to collect the primary sources such as the authors' interactive meetings with several scholars, leaders, activists and supporters of the bahujansamaj movement at various levels.

In conclusion, the book provides deep insights into the issues and problems of various marginalized groups and communities in India. The author has exposed his intimate association with both leaders and activists of such movements and politics, which enabled him to write extensively particularly on the subject of bahujan politics. The book is an attempt at refreshing his insightful thoughts on the very subject which was hardly

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documented in any serious way in the country. Even though, the book is focused on the state of Uttar Pradesh, as it is the stronghold of the bahujansamaj movement and politics, the author has tried to give an all India dimension of the bahujan politics to the extent possible. No doubt, this book is useful for those who are interested to study the Indian political process from the perspective of marginalized groups and communities and even in the country in recent times.

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