

Socio Political Mobility of Lower Castes in United Provinces a Study of the Chamar

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the temporal dimension of the cause-effect relationship of socio-political changes which have taken place during different successive periods during colonial rule. The main thrust areas of this study have been impact of western education and culture, laws and policies during British rule, social movements and the notions of various contemporary thinkers who have been associated with this change. The social mobility of the lower caste is an important area of investigation in itself. Fifteen percent of the Indian population consists of ex-untouchables who have known every kind of deprivation for centuries. However, the social mobility of the lower caste leads us to the larger issue of the caste system and social change. The caste system has been singularly successful in adapting itself to the changing vicissitudes of the sub-continent, so much so that Hinduism has been able to maintain a continuous tradition for 3,000 years. How did the caste system and Hinduism react to the more recent challenges in the subcontinent brought about by British rule? In the traditional, pre-British caste system, mobility was denied to the lower caste. What is the nature of mobility experienced by them in the present day? What are the implications of this mobility in terms of the adaptation of the caste system to the exigencies of modern times? We submit that the lower caste represents an important case in furthering our understanding of the nature of change in the Caste system in modern times.

STATUS OF LOWER CASTE IN UNITED PROVINCES

United Province generally treated as cradle for Aryan civilization. Caste based inequalities and discrimination are part of socio-cultural ethics of upper strata of population. At the same time Utter Pradesh is also birth place of Sant Kabir, Sant Ravidas, and others who revolted against inequalities in human society. These saints had opposed to Varna and caste system, gave the message equality of human society. The teaching of these great persons had significant impact upon Dalit society.

Establishment of colonial rule and its economic process created congenial atmosphere for Dalits in India in general, of United Provinces in particular [1] to achieve upward mobility. Particular places like Agra, Kanpur and Meerut wherein sizable portion of Dalit population exists brought under colonial economic process on account of thriving leather trade [2]. These towns were known for leather related works which colonial state was interested [3]. As most of Dalits in these towns engaged in leather related professions they acquired work mobility and in fact acquired wealth [4]. It was this dynamic situation that created fertile ground for mobilization of Dalits by others and by themselves to

achieve rights and concessions. This situation was further augmented by the colonial form of representational politics in which representative form of native opinion was encouraged. It was this context that compelled Dalits to mobilize for achieving political rights.

LOWER CASTE CONSCIOUSNESS IN UNITED PROVINCES

Being land of Aryan civilization, rigid form of caste distinctions was observed in north India. However, begging of British rule is an important factor in the history of Dalit movement. From 1880s onwards one would see mobilization of Dalit castes for civil rights over the issue of

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identity. Studies on Dalit movement in United Provinces mainly focused on manifested versions of Dalit movement especially in the form of Adi Dharm movement. But this chapter shows the fact that Dalit politics propagated and nourished by in the form of mobilization for dignity and civil rights by Dalit caste associations. Much before Adi Hindu movement, Dalit had begun to be organized on the basis of caste associations established by different Dalit castes. Dalit movement of United Provinces thus had strong roots in lower caste associations.

The political process of colonial Indian in the end of 19th and beginning of 20th centuries were determined by associational politics as a means to interact with colonial modernity. These associations were established for social reforms, cultural assertions, to safeguard the interests of certain groups (caste and religion), and finally to fight for political rights. This paradigmatic change had reflections in the political process of Dalits of United Provinces. As a means to put forward united voice, several lower castes established Associations to steer overall development of lower castes. Some of the lower caste associations as follows: Chamar caste established Chamar Mahasabha, Ravidas Mahasabha, Jatav Maha Sabha by Jatavs in western parts of United Provinces: Passi Mahasabha by Passis in Lucknow: Dhobi Mahasabha by Dhobi and Balmiki Mahasabha by Balmikis. These associations acted as reformist, political and other requirements to particular castes. Besides this caste associations also engaged in improving their cultural and opposed to child marriage, drinking wine and advocated for education as a means for development.

The associations of lower caste can be classified based the factors such as establishment, nature of representation, representation of demands and nature work they undertook. On the basis of these factors' associations worked for lower castes in United Provinces can be divided in the following way: associations established by non-Dalits however for development of Dalits: political associations established for representation of Dalits and finally caste associations by different Dalit castes.

In north India too, British rule had generated socio-political and economic context in which Dalit inspired to carve out respectable identity. Efforts were made in this direction but they did not bear the same fruits as in the South and in the West. While caste associations took shape at an early date, they did not join hands into federations and they operated within the logic Sanskritization. For instance, in 1928, the Indian Statutory Commission received an avalanche of petitions and memoranda from several Dalit caste associations which demanded larger quotas in the assembly.

It was difficult to locate a living respondent who was born before 1920 to respond to some of the questions relating to the issues addressed by the lower caste associations since the 1920 till date in the state. Hence, we had to rely exclusively on the written document about the issues raised by the lower

caste associations and methods of their functioning. As stated earlier, there were no economic, political and social rights accorded to the lower castes before 1920. In absence of the lower caste associations in modern sense of the term, the traditional caste Panchayat (Sabha/Association) organized and raised certain issues related to the Dalit community. In fact, the social status and socio-cultural practices within the Dalit community were the core issues. The caste leaders put bans on eating of carrion beef, boycott of meet and liquor, and motivated their followers to adopt Sanskritized way of life as a means to achieve respectable identity [5]. In the case of the eastern Utter Pradesh, transformative context of Dalit society can be captured from the following quite:

At least two generations ago Jaiswara Chamars in the vicinity of Madhopur (in Jaunpur District) began to outlaw the eating of beef and the carting of manure in what proved a futile attempt to gain greater respect for the caste...Thirty year ago in opposition to their Thakurs, some Chamars of Madhopur declared also that they would no longer carry manure to the Thakurs' fields. Chamars women in general took further step; they refused any longer to make dung cake for the Thakurs household. This act of self-purification was not limited in the eastern U.P. only but was also prevalent in central U.P. Thus at a Sabha held in October 1920, the Chamars of Bareilly(Central U.P) had decided to forsake meat as well as liquor and other intoxicant; but they were also very forthright in their refusal to do beggar(unpaid bonded labour) for the district officials on tour and submitted a petition to the Governor [6].

The same trend of status enhancement and self-development of the Dalit community could also be observed in the vicinity of western parts of United Provinces. For instance, the Jatav with the help of Swami Atama Ram began to assert in 1900, though unsuccessfully, a claim to the Kshatriya status [7]. Further, the Jatavs younger generation especially student started organizing their cast people for socio-economic mobility. In 1917, they banded together and formed the Jatav Men's Association (Jatav Veer Maha Sabha). It was followed by establishment of the Jatav propaganda circle (Jatav Pracharak Mandal). These societies were intended to motivate the Jatavs towards education, Sanskritization of their way of life and change of their identity from untouchable to respectable. Education was considered of primary mover of this process [8].

The aforesaid issues of self-purification and status enhancement raised by the Chamars and Jatav also spread among the other Dalit or untouchable castes during the second decade (1921-1937). As far as social issues among the untouchable castes other than Chamars and or Jatavs are concerned a correspondent from Naugarh in Basti district wrote in Sandesh (a Congress Party weekly) published from Gorakhpur mentions in 1921 about sanctions that were imposed upon lower castes by caste panchayats on doing

following things: eating meat, fish and drinking liquor. Identity for self-respect thus created a paradigm in which Dalits of United Provinces engaged. The following passage shows this quest: Chamars are not alone not trying to elevate their caste status. Fifteen years ago, representatives of most of the Bhar of Kerakat Tahsil (in Jaunpur district) met to plan ways to raise their status. Several Bbars who were Government officials addressed the meeting and told them that they were lowly and despised because they raise pigs. The Bbars gave up pig-raising, yet it is difficult to say they are held in better regard than the Khatiks and Passis of the area who still herd Swine[9].

Yet it is worth mentioning here that during this period, the self-assertion of Chamar community was becoming more frequent and very open in eastern, western and central part of United Provinces. By early 1922 indications of a growing restlessness among them (Chamars) arising out of the general spurt of revolt were reaching the police headquarters in the districts. The movement for self-reform now revealed a tendency to forsake hereditary callings as well. The eight resolutions passed in January 1922 at a large meeting of the Chamars at Azamgarh (in eastern U.P) followed the standard patterns of social reform about the prevalence among them of child marriage and co-habitation out of wedlock. They also imposed the taboos on taking toddy and liquor, and on animal scarification. What is perhaps equally significant is that they also pledged themselves not to trade in hides and skins, and to discourage their young boys from taking up their ancestral profession (Sandesh 8, January 1922, p.6). In the western and central U.P. also Chamars refused to skin carcasses and perform beggar for the landlord and even the government officials. The United Provinces police abstracts of intelligence (1 April 1922) also reported that the Chamars refused allowing their women the liberty of movement and euphemism for the withdrawal of female labour from the homes of the upper castes [10].

They usually carried the reforms within the Dalit community and educated them in regard to the benefits of unity, education, cleanliness, leaving the bad habits like eating meat, consuming liquor, pursuing the traditional and hereditary occupation, etc. But we did not come across any authentic data or cases of direct action or conformation of the Dalit leadership against the upper caste and officials during this period. Anyway, it is interesting to note here unique way of mobilization 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 Bakhati movement of the medieval period during the first decades of the twentieth century. The Dalits organized themselves into 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 especially in Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, and Lucknow.

Generally, Dalit history of modern India did not give much importance to the issue of women. We propose that the status of Dalit women also emerged as a means to assert new forms of identity by Dalits. It could be noticed that recasting of Dalit women and control over their movements and sexualities was also attempted by Dalit men as a means to follow the practices of upper strata of society. We do not have concrete evidence to prove this claim. However, we do have fragmentary evidence which reflect the changing attitude of Dalit men toward women. In fact, it was part of identity formation process. Chamars of Moradabad announced that they would allow their women less liberty of movement outside domestic sphere [11]. Chamars of Dehradun and Saharanpur started to advocate the wearing of dhotis by their women when cooking food and forbade them to visit bazaars to sell grass [12]. A Jatia Chamar Sabha at Meerut, attended by over 4000 Chamars, passed a resolution to have their females go into purdah [13]. Wealthy urban Chamars tried to put their wives under seclusion, proclaiming a new role for the women of their community [14]. At a meeting of Bhangis at Mathura, it was decided that their women should not be sent daily to bazaars [15]. A Pasi Panchayat in Meerut resolved that their women should not go out for daily labour. Bhangis of Bulandshahr passed resolutions in their Panchayats, forbidding the attendance of their womenfolk at melas (fairs) [16]. Khatiks of Lucknow resolved not to allow their women to peddle fruits on the street, and made them sell only in shops [17].

Scholars have seen such moves as ways of strengthening claims to upward mobility. Dalits here were also drawing on norms of bourgeois respectability and dominant manhood which emanated from the patriarchic system followed by upper castes, claiming their space not through heterogeneity but through mimicry. These measures show the complexity of modernity path adopted by Dalits for achieving upward mobility, assertion of patriarchal control, attempts to restore dignity to Dalit women, and to appropriate a language of 'modernity' and 'civilization'. Regulation of sexuality was an important axis for the politicization of caste identity. Dalit reformers' masculinity was predicated on the reform of gender within their community and the defense of community honor against the disdain of outsiders [18]. However, given that many Dalit women played a critical role in the work force outside the home, it was not always easy to 'seclude' them within domestic bounds or to practice reformist bourgeois notions of sexual purity and 'true' womanhood, which often remained at the level of rhetoric, and even if possible, effected a very small upwardly mobile section of Dalits [19]. These were also attempts to give self-respect to their work. A Panchayat of Chamars at Basti resolved that their women should accept not less than Rs. 1.40 a day when functioning as midwives [20]. In Benaras the Chamars of several parganas passed a resolution that less than Rs. 5 should not be charged for cutting a 'Nar' of a child at the time of delivery [21]. Thus, while didactic manuals

represented Dalit women overwhelmingly in singular molds, these representations were countered by Dalits their women, many of the Chamar midwives, recognizing that childbirth.

The reservation policy of the state played a crucial role in political mobilization of Dalits in United Provinces. The way the British classified castes was in itself a factor of mobilization. It was especially evident from the impact of the 1935 Government of India Act, in which there was a lot at stake since it enfranchised a larger number of Untouchables and granted quotas for the Scheduled Castes. In United Provinces some castes had strong objections on classifications of Scheduled Castes. The Bundelkhand Prantiya Kori Sabha, which was instrumental in passing a resolution in 1936 and demanded for inclusion of their caste into scheduled caste list [22].

However, most of the castes which submitted memoranda to the British asked them to classify their group in the category of the Scheduled Castes in order to benefit from the reservation policy. Paradoxically, this demand was not always incompatible with a Sanskritization discourse. The Jatavs are a case in point. Their name, in itself is very revealing. Jatavs are Chamars, untouchable leather workers, who claim descent from the Yadu race which, allegedly, entitled them to be known as Kshatriyas.

This Sanskritic leaning can be attributed to the influence of the Arya Samaj which started to be felt by 1910 among the Chamars at large. Briggs emphasizes that 'During 1911, preceding the Census enumeration, both the Arya Samaj and the Mohammedan communities made special efforts to enroll Chamars, especially those who were Christians' [23]. This competition was part of the politics of numbers. It only concerned a small minority since in 1911 there were only 1,551 Arya Samajist Chamars in the United Provinces, but most of the Jatav leaders were exposed to it. The Arya Samaj missions were especially successful through their schools among the sons of Agra Chamars who had become rich due to leather trade [24]. Manikchand Jatavaveer (1897-1956), one of the founders of the Jatav Mahasabha in 1917 was a teacher in a school of Agra run by the Arya Samaj [25]. Sunderlal Sagar (1886- 1952), a Dalit leader from Agra well versed in Sanskrit so much so that he was referred to as Pandit [26]. Swami Prabhutanand Vyas (1877-1950) was an Arya Samaj monk [27]. They all preached moral reform such as vegetarianism, teetotalism and temperance for achieving a cleaner status [28]. That was also the first inclination of Swami Achhutanand (1879-1933) who was to become the most important Scheduled Caste leader of the United Provinces in the 1920s-1930s

Born in Mainpuri district, Swami Achhutanand had been brought up at a military cantonment where his father worked and got educated in a christian missionary school [29]. He became a Sadhu at the young age of 14 and then joined the Arya Samaj in which he assumed a new name, Swami Hariharanand. However, he soon realized that this

organization was primarily concerned with salvaging Hinduism and was not prepared to really reform Dalit society. He made this point in a shastrarth (philosophical debate) on 22 October 1921 in Delhi and left the Arya Samaj. He then changed his name into Swami Acchutanand-which reflected his new claim of being an Untouchable and launched the Adi-Hindu movement. As evident from its very name, Acchutanand's movement, whose center was in his home place, Kanpur, asserted that Dalits were the original inhabitants of India [30]. He proposed that:

The untouchables, the so-called Harijans, are in fact Adi-Hindu, the original or autochthonous Nagas or Dasas of the north and the Dravidas of the south of the subcontinent, and they are the undisputed, heavenly owners of Bharat. All others are immigrants to the land, including the Aryans, who conquered the original populations not by valour but by deceit and manipulation by usurping others' rights, subjugating the peace-loving and rendering the self-sufficient people indigents and slaves. Those who ardently believed in equality were ranked lowest. The Hindus and untouchables have since always remained poles apart [31].

Nandini Gooptu convincingly argues that: 'the theory of a separate racial origin of the untouchables in the various simultaneous "Adi" movements were derived from British ethnographic classifications of Indians into ethnic groups, and from a related notion that the caste system originated through encounters between Dravidian and Aryan races [32]. However, the ethnicization process did not go so far as in the South. The Adi Hindu movement certainly argued that the Untouchables used to be the ruling race in India before the coming of the Aryans; that they had kingdoms, capital cities and that they had been converted the same way Hindus had been converted to Islam by Muslims invaders. Swami Acchutanand, here, used Arya Samajist arguments, but he looked at Untouchables as the first Hindus and considers that their original religion was Bhakti, a form of Hinduism. In fact, the Adi Hindu movement arose in the wake of the resurgence of Bhakti cults among the Untouchables in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Worshipping Kabir and Ravidas then became widespread among urban untouchables migrants in United Provinces, and ceased to be practiced only by insular religious orders [33]. New temples and statues were built, festivals and pilgrimages organized [34]. Gooptu while commenting upon the limitations of Adi Hindu movement proposed that:

The criticism of the caste system by the Adi Hindu leaders was rather limited and had a narrow focus on the lack of rights or opportunities for the untouchables. The leaders did jettison the notions of 'low' or 'impure', but concentrated on proving that such stigma and disabilities should not be attached to them due to caste status. Nor did they attempt to question the concept that work was inherited. Instead they claimed that 'low' work was not the true inheritance of the Untouchables. It was largely to buttress this claim that they

asserted their pre-Aryan ancestry as the original rulers of India, for it enabled them to argue that they should re-inherit the ancient rights of which they had been deprived [35].

Far from establishing a separate identity that would situate the Untouchables out of the caste system, the Adi Hindu movement used their so-called original inhabitant discourse as a means for promoting their status within the system. And correlatively, the Bhakti resurgence did not imply a radical questioning of their belonging to Hinduism. Certainly, they opposed Brahmanism by adhering to a rather popular tradition, but their practice of this religious cult recalls the *modus operandi* of the Hindu sects which precisely derived from Bhakti whose egalitarian impact has always been otherworldly. While in Punjab the Ad Dharm movement was projected as a *qaum*, or independent community, rather than a Panth, or religious path [36] in the Hindi belt the Adi Hindu movement could not achieve so much.

The movement also suffered from organizational weaknesses. While the 'informal nature of links between apex Adi Hindu organizations in the towns and local caste groups in neighborhoods contributed to the strength and breadth of the movement' [37]. By 1924 local Adi Hindu Sabhas had been set up in only four cities of U.P. (Kanpur, Lucknow, Benares and Allahabad). In fact, the Adi-Hindu movement remained chiefly confined to Agra and Kanpur. Out of the 23 main Dalit leaders of United Provinces in the first half of the century, almost 50% were from these two cities (eight from Agra and two from Kanpur) [38]. In both places, the social reform work had been prepared by sectarian movements such as the Radha Soami Satsang established by Radha Soami (1818-1878) in Agra and the Dev Samaj, founded in 1887 by Siva Narayan Agnihotri of Kanpur.

In addition to these limitations, the movement also failed to overcome the traditional cleavages opposing the untouchable caste groups. Its leaders tried to organize inter dining ceremonies but did not meet very enthusiastic responses [39]. All these shortcomings were precisely in evidence in the case of one of these individual castes, that of the Chamars and more especially of the Jatavs who got organized around the same time as the Adi Hindu movement.

In the late 1920s, the All India Shri Jatav Mahasabha submitted a very telling memorandum to the Simon Commission by claiming more active political representation to Dalits as a means to accelerate development:

Our Mahasabha is fully alive to the fact that there can be no advancement so long as there is no real improvement in the political status of a community. It is idle to attribute the depression of the lower castes to the religious and social system of the Hindus. If Government were to improve their political status by giving them honorary offices, adequate representation on local bodies and legislatures and in public

services commensurate with their numerical strength, their social position would automatically improve and social injustice would become a thing of the past [40].

However, interesting fact is that all the Jatavs did not share these views. For instance, a special meeting of the United Provinces Depressed Classes Conference was held on 14-15 April 1928 at Agra to protest against the participation of the Adi-Hindu movement to the work of the Simon Commission [41]. In fact, this movement was impeded by the activism of the Dalit leaders who stuck to the Sanskritization approach. It was especially affected by the competition of the Depressed Classes League that was founded at Lucknow in 1935 by R.L. Biswas with Jagjivan Ram as General Secretary and P.N. Rajbhoj as Secretary. The moving spirit behind this Association - at least one of its chief architects - Dharam Prakash, was a staunch Arya Samajist who opposed Ambedkar's moves in favor of conversion and was elected to the Constituent Assembly, and then to the Rajya Sabha, on a Congress ticket [42].

In the 1930s, a similar division opposed the proponents of joint electorates with reserved seats, such as Bohre Khem Chand the president of the All India Shri Jatava Mahasabha (and the vice president of the All India Depressed Classes Association) and those who supported Ambedkar's demand regarding separate electorates, such as the United Provinces Adi-Hindu (Depressed Classes) Association [43]. This cleavage more or less coincided with the one opposing the proponents of Sanskritization and those who were more favorably inclined towards an egalitarian, Ambedkarite strategy, the important point being here that the former tended to dominate the Jatav movement till the 1930s. After the publication of the White Paper which was to be the basis of the 1935 Government of India Act, the Agra based Jatav Conference sent a memorandum to the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India where it was said that:

The Jatavs are the descendants of Yadu, the founder of Jadav [sic] tribe, from which the great Hero of Maha Bharat, Lord Krishna, came. But this position of superiority could not remain intact. Our community fell down from that great height to this degraded status in the Hindu fold our present position is the outcome of the age-long inhumane oppressions of Brahminism or the Kshatriyas. We, Kshatriyas of the past, are labouring under various sorts of disabilities, restrictions and religious injunctions imposed on us by the Orthodox Hindus but we are at loss to understand the exclusion of our (Yadav) Jatav community from the list of the Scheduled Castes given in the White Paper. The result of this horrible negligence would, no doubt, be the sacrifice of the interests of our community [44]. Such a discourse suggests that the Jatav movement was still under the influence of Sanskritization in the mid-1930s. Owen Lynch points out that 'The Jatavs were not attempting to destroy the caste system; rather they were attempting to rise within it in a valid, though not licit, way' [45]. The influence of

Ambedkar made a strong impact on the Jatav movement in the 1940s. So much so that the Maharashtrian scenario in which Dalit acquired separate Buddhist identity was contemplated to be followed in United Provinces. Even those who did not convert themselves to Buddhism regarded the Untouchables as descending from the original Buddhists and, therefore, prided themselves of being the original Indians. Lynch could then conclude that 'Buddhist identity has replaced Sanskrit Kshatriya identity' [46]. The Jatav movement could therefore rely on the same solid ethnic ground as the Bahujan movement in Maharashtra and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. Also, for the Jatavs, political participation became a 'functional alternative' to Sanskritization [47] in the sense that they tried to achieve social mobility through access to power. This empowerment process was fostered by the British policies of positive discrimination and gradual democratization since they both incited the caste to transform itself into a pressure group and to assert itself as a collective body. However, such a change was rather exceptional in Northern India. It was almost confined to the Jatavs of Agra. Even though the president of the Scheduled Caste Federation of the United Provinces, Piarelall Kureel (1916-1984) was a Kureel from Unnao district, most of the supporters of Ambedkar were confined in the Agra Jatav movement.

Sanskritization -on the basis of Arya Samajist influences or not-continued to prevail in many other Untouchable castes. In the 1911 and 1921 censuses, some 26 low castes claimed the status of the twice-born castes [48]. Certainly, Sanskritization and social mobility were not mutually exclusive but the former reflected the domination of the value of the caste system anyway. In 1935, the All India Dhobi [washer men, launder] Association protested against the exclusion their caste from the Scheduled Castes which had been decided under pressures from other associations such as the Arya Samaj oriented United Provinces Razak Dhobi) Association which pursued the Sanskritization path. The President of the latter organization, for whom Dhobis were Kshatriyas, considered that giving his caste fellows the status of Untouchables would be 'a stigma on character and ability, an obstruction to self-advancement and improvement' [49]. Similar conflicts happened in the case of the Khatiks, an Untouchable caste of meat cutters [50]. The Dusadh Mahasabha also claimed that Dusadhs were Kshatriyas [51].

In contrast to Dalit movements developed in the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay, Dalit movement of United Provinces did not articulate a vigorous ethnic discourse. The Adi-Hindu movement certainly presented the Untouchables as the original habitants of India but as Hindus and the proponents of Sanskritization remained quite strong. The Dalit movement therefore faced the same difficulty as the OBCs in the Hindi belt, whereas things appeared to be easier in southern India and even in the West-though the differences must not be exaggerated.

CHAMAR MAHASABHA

Chamar caste constitutes numerically biggest scheduled caste not only in Uttar Pradesh but also in several north Indian states. Traditionally Chamars are treated as lowest caste and expected to do menial jobs in villages. Surge of leather industry at one level and commercialization of agriculture at another level-initiated transformation in the socio-economic conditions of Chamar society. Improvement in material conditions inspired them to claim higher status in traditional Hindu social order. Chamar histories borrowed inspiration from the Hindu Puranic tradition to claim kshatriya status equal to that of the dominant Hindu caste. Chamar politics in early 20th century aimed at carving respectable social status within the Hindu socio-religious structure. Chamar's questioned the traditional forms untouchability and exploitation. Particularly the tradition of begari (unpaid labour) in the form of agriculture work, leather work and personnel service of Zamindar's and Government officials has emerged as domain of resistance [52]. Two assumptions have characterized Indian Historiography on the Dalit movement. First almost all liberal and radical historians assume that Dalit histories must begin by critiquing Hindu religion and claiming the status of original inhabitants. Second also assumed that Hindu organization like the Arya Samaj wanted to Hinduize Dalits in order to make them part of the Hindu community. Both of these assumptions ignore discourse of Chamar writings and fail to take seriously the agendas laid out by Chamar's in their own histories and politics. The 1930's Chamar activists had raised a new set of issues and constituted an effective Dalit political force [53].

A series of histories were written and published in United Provinces on the past of Chamar. During first half of the 20th century, U B S Raghuvashi's Shree Chanvar Purana (between 1910 and 1916), and the Jaiswar Mahasabha's Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha (1926), Pt. Sunder Lal Sagar's Yadav Jivan and Ram Narayan Yaduvendu's Yaduvansh ka Itihas (1942) reflects the aspirations of Chamar for material and political progress by the way of alleviating their social status. Sagar and Yaduvendu claimed Kshatriya status to Jatav by associating their lineage to the Yadav Tribe of Lord Krishna. Jatiya Chamar was predominantly located in western parts of United Provinces, with large presence in the Meerut, Agra, Moradabad, and Badaun districts asserted for Kshatriya status by claiming descent from the Chanvar dynasty. Jatiya and Jaiswar are the two major Chamar castes and together they constituted two-fifths of the Chamar population of Uttar Pradesh [54].

The themes that outlined in the Chamar histories of the 1920's indeed had a wider social base among the Chamar caste. Weekly police reports give evidence of Chamar protest meetings between 1920 and 1928. Chamar protest describe in great deal in the weekly police report were noted in the nationalist press. Hindi language newspapers like

Pratap, Abhyudaya and Aaj widely reported upon the political activism of chamers. The Chamar movement is an indication of the first phase in 20th century, Dalit struggle in north India. A distinguishing feature of this phase is the adoption by the Chamar's of Hindu cultural practices, such as vegetarianism and the abandonment of impure practices like eating beef and doing leather work as part of their claim to Kshatriya status. In 1929 Sunder Lal Sagar referred to the ongoing struggles of Chamars in western parts of United Provinces, which he hoped would succeed in changing their status [55]. Chamar Sabhas (Associations) and Panchayats (Council) organized such gathering in both eastern and western parts. In Moradabad, Bulandshahar Meerut, Bijnaur, Saharnpur, Jaunpur and Basti such meetings provided a context to establish Chamar Mahasabhas [56].

Although Chamar protests evident in many parts of the state, police report indicate that the most organized and sustained agitation took place in western part of United Provinces. These protests were first noticed in 1920 in the districts of Meerut, Muradabad, Bulandshahar, Badaun, Bijnor, Barielly, pilbhit, Agra and Aligarh. By 1923-24 evidence of Chamar protest had also appeared in the districts of Saharanpur, Eta, Mainpuri, Mathura, Dehradoon, Lucknow, Unnao, Khiri, Sultanpur and Pratapgarh in central part of United Province. In Eastern part Beanras Jaunpur, Basti and Gorakhpur [57]. But the police report describes the meetings and activities in western parts as a "movement." In Moradabad we hear of a general revolt of Chamars in Bulandshahar it was reported that most of the villages were affected by protest by Chamers. In Meerut it was noted that "the Chamar movement continues to cause trouble [58]. A notable feature of the movement in this region was the collection of donations during meetings to fund various reform activities, particularly schools for Chamar children. In 1922 and 1923 the money collected in these meetings varied from Rs 200 to Rs 1000 in Moradabad and was as much as Rs 1500 in Rampur. The meetings appear to have been fairly well attended, with an average attendance of 500 or 600 and obtained as money as 1000 or 2000. In one case seven thousand Chamar meet in Bijnor in 1924 in this meeting they criticized Congress demand for Swraj. Similar resolutions were passed in Bulandshahar, Dehardoon and Kumaun. A congress activist named Babu Guru Prasad organized a Panchayat at gathering of five hundred Chamar of tahsil Bansgaon of Gorakhpur district in February 1921 to undertake various reform activities [59]. The Chamar Sabhas were the most vocal advocates of abstaining from meet and alcohol. In his novel Karmabhoomi, Premchand identified three factors for Chamar's untouchability Daru-sarab, Murda-mans and Chamra (Drinking alcohol, eating beef and doing leather work) one of the main characters, Amerkant, a caste Hindu and Congress activists who settles downs in a Rae dasi Village somewhere in Haridwar, convince the Chamar's to give up the first two as a way of attaining a pure status of like Hindus [60]. In eastern UP, Dalit caste

Panchayats of Chamars did pass resolutions not only to abstain from liquor and Ganjha but also meat and fish. In other parts of UP, especially in the western region, Chamar Sabhas propagated the agenda of aspiration to Kshatriya status without outside intervention.

Extensive debates over these issues in the meetings in the districts of Moradabad and Meerut were regularly reported. In the Tahsil of Chandausi, Sambhal, Rehra, Delari, and Guhroula in Moradabad, Chamar asserted a status similar to that of Jats claiming to be vegetarian caste Hindus. Meerut district was particularly noted for the strength of this movement. At a meeting four thousand Chamars gathered from the deferent part of the district at Mawona Qasba in November 1920, a series of resolutions were passed claiming Kshatriya status and committing to a purified life style.

The gross root level political and social activism in different parts of United Provinces converged in the form of establishment of Chamar Mahasaba in Mainpuri in May 1924 [61]. This Mahasabha tried to undertake multiple measures for development of Chamar caste. Those measures were ranging from social reforms to political rights. Chamar's vegetarianism and the purity of their living conditions were repeatedly mention in resolutions passed in meetings held through the 24 districts of the state. Some Sabhas went to the extent of imposing fines to enforce their new rules of purity on larger Chamar society [62]. Baba Ram Chandra popular peasant leader in Utter Pradesh participated in the meetings of Chamar Sabha at Pratapgarh and other surrounding districts [63]. In eastern Uttar Pradesh, the district of Gorakhpur was a major centre of reforms and protest, particularly in Hata and Padraona Tahsil. In July 1926, Chamar Mahasabha passed resolution in different areas of Benaras to abandon the impure and defiling occupation of leather work and the practices of removing carcasses, skinning and tanning. Interesting details include the refusal of Chamar in Moradabad to repair and stitch and shoes, refusal to skin dead animals in the Siana quasba of Bulandshahar and desertion of the occupation of Mochi in the Rajpura quasba of Badaun are being reported. In Saharanpur town Chamars sold their annual contract for hide to the Bhangies [64]. The Chamar's of Awadh region participated in Kisan Sabha agitation of 1921-22 which fought against bedekhali (eviction) and begari. Protest against the begari continued even after the movement ended. There were active protests in many districts of western UP, including Meerut, Moradabad, Bulandshahar, Aligarh, Saharanpur, Bijnaur, Etah, Kanpur agitations against begari. A report by the Hindi weekly Pratap in April 1928 commented on the two-day conference organized by the Raidass Sabha of Kanpur to demand the abolition of begari and similar practices. In the districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, like Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Allahabad, Benaras, Ghazipur and Gorakhpur, however, protest against begari was less evident than the promotion of vegetarianism and

purity. The Rudhali area of Basti District in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Chamar demanded wages for their women's work as dais [65].

CONCLUSION

The main focus of Chamar activism is to attack the traditional forms of untouchability that was practiced and its continuation during the British colonial rule. This problem was tackled by Chamar activism at two levels: by claiming Kshatriya status and mobilizing caste members to assert for respectable social status. By writing histories of their caste and by political mobilization of their community, the Chamar challenged the British and Hindu representation of both their past and their present. Writings histories that identified Dalits as the original inhabitants of India and launching political struggles to mobilize all untouchable caste in Uttar Pradesh, Chamar were at the forefronts of the Adi Hindu movement. Chamar politics and struggle were constituted primarily with this movement.

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