

Education and its Political Context for the Marginalised

A Study based on Ambedkar Nagar District

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to analyse the link between educational development and social mobility in deprived sections of the society. The basic thrust of the paper is to examine the multi-layered correlation between educational development and social and political mobility in society. A corollary to the same is an attempt at understanding how they affect each other. In this context, the central idea that this paper seeks to address and explore is the link that exists between education and social mobility, in light of a comparative framework built upon the ideas of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia. For the same, the district of Ambedkar Nagar, situated in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) has been chosen as a sample for the study. Data was collected from two schools, established with the cooperation of local people in the district, and interviews were conducted with people who actively participated in the social movements of the region.

INTRODUCTION

From the adoption of the Five Year Plan (FYP) model of development, the LPG era to the PURA approach¹, India's developmental process has been phenomenal and has witnessed several phases. But there

is one factor which has posed to be a major constraint in the path of development, that is, the caste system in India. Despite consistent efforts being made for ridding the society of caste-based discrimination, constitutional provisions being made;

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it continues to remain a dominant factor that affects the initiatives for development. Quite interestingly, at the dawn of independence, caste-based discrimination and the problem of untouchability were major issues of concern for all the leaders, and Gandhi himself declared that, without eliminating caste, freedom will have no meaning. However, caste as a constraint in social mobility and as a prominent factor in politics was not recognised.

In this context, the central idea that this paper seeks to address and explore is the link that exists between education and social mobility. For the same, the district of Ambedkar Nagar, situated in U.P. has been chosen as a sample for the study. Data was collected from two schools, established with the cooperation of local people in the district. Interviews were conducted with people who actively participated in the social movements of the region and were associated with Jai Ram Verma.

This paper consists of four sections. In the aforementioned context of caste, the first section deals with a theoretical understanding of the dynamics of politicization of education and how education can play an enabling role. This is based on a comparative framework built upon the ideas of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia. The second section begins with a brief introduction of the Ambedkar Nagar district, highlighting the reason why this particular geographical location was chosen

for our analysis. The third section forwards an interpretation and analysis of the data collated in light of the theoretical framework developed and with respect to the socio-political dynamics and historicity of the region. A comparative analysis of caste politics and the role of education have been attempted, with particular salience being accorded to local bodies of governance — *Gram Sabha*, *Gram Panchayats* etc. — which have played a vital role for establishing the schools by providing land and other necessities in a cooperative manner. The paper ends with a brief analysis of the movement which was garnered towards the social and political upliftment of the downtrodden. It also seeks to delve into the social phenomena of the emergence of the concept of social justice among the OBCs and Dalits as a consequence of this movement in the region chosen for the study.

TRIAD OF CASTE, POLITICS AND EDUCATION

In India's developmental process, the triad of caste, politics and education has been an important one. Though consistent efforts have been directed at development, it has failed to address the objective of being wholly inclusive in nature. One reason for this lack has been the undermining of the correlation between caste and education, and how it acts as a deterrent in the developmental process. In order to attain the vision

of an egalitarian society, both during the struggle for independence and in post-independent India, three leaders who advocated education as a way of achieving equality were Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia. Though their methods were different, but the idea was same in spirit.

In the trio, Gandhi was the first to realise that in the ongoing struggle for independence, without eliminating untouchability from India, both from being practiced in day-to-day life as well as from the minds of people, freedom will have no meaning, and a society based on the concept of equality cannot be established. It can be stated that Gandhi took forward the legacy of Phule and Periyar and linked the removal of caste-based discrimination with education. He proposed a formula for basic education, known as *Buniyadi Talim*, at Wardha in 1937. It was based on the concept of 'learning by doing' and it reflects Gandhi's attempt to hit upon the psychological barriers which tend to view manual work as menial and substandard². Gandhi, through this process, was unleashing a social experiment and he was quite sure about its success. He supported the view that the problem of caste must be resolved within the society and not by a reactionary approach. Though extremely critical of the rigidities of the caste system, this approach seems to emanate from a relatively tolerant attitude evident in his statements about the Varna system.

In an issue of *Young India*, December 1920, he writes, "Like every other institution, it (caste) is also fighting with its excrescences. I consider these four divisions as fundamental, natural and necessary. I am against any kind of attempt to end this traditional division." However, it is pertinent to note that such statements only give an overview about what was Gandhi thinking at that particular phase of time. His ideas transformed with the passage of time. Thus, there is a need to understand Gandhi's views in the context within which he was expressing them. Only then we can arrive at a holistic understanding of his thoughts and ideas.

While Gandhi was trying to deal with the issues of untouchability and caste discrimination in a systematic and moderate way, there was a similar assertion from another part of the country; voiced by Dr. Ambedkar, who wanted a more direct solution to this malady. In comparison to Gandhi, he gave a totally different view on the caste system. He placed himself outside the sphere of Hindu religion in order to investigate the reason for this malaise. In his essay, *The Annihilation of Caste*, written in 1936, he stated that inequality was inherent in the Hindu social system. Ambedkar too followed Gandhi's footsteps to fight against the problem of caste discrimination; but failure of the *Satyagraha* of *Parvati* and *Kalaram* temples proved to be catalysts in bringing about a shift in his ideology.

The similarity in the views of Ambedkar and Gandhi on the link between educational development and eradication of caste cannot be overlooked; but the approach adopted by the former was totally different. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar declared that education in English medium and knowledge of English language was vital for upliftment. Like Gandhi, he too emphasised upon the salience of primary education and regarded it as the most important need for empowerment of untouchables in India³. But it is the idea that aimed to use education as a means of political upliftment, which brings to fore the differences in the ideological stand points of Ambedkar and Gandhi. The former linked the question of 'self' among Dalits with education and always recognised it as a political affair. He encouraged Dalit students to establish student organisations which could help raise the voice of the marginalised in universities and colleges. In fact, his focus was always centred at gaining political power for wider social interests, mobilised through the development of education among the Dalits.

While Gandhi and Ambedkar were making efforts with their own specific ideas and concepts; it was Ram Manohar Lohia who analysed this problem with an even broader perspective. It involved expanding the idea of empowerment to other horizons and he sought to rid the society of discrimination on the basis of gender, language etc. He considered

all kinds of discrimination as a social malaise and a major obstacle for development.

While Gandhi failed to extricate himself from the structure of a Hindu 'self,' Lohia analysed the discriminatory nature of the Hindu society by looking at it as an outsider. He attacked the injustices of the caste system in an aggressive, yet logical manner. For him, caste was the primary reason for social exclusion, disregarding the merit of the individual and enslaving the mind. He shares the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the subject of caste eradication from the Indian society. Amongst these luminaries, Lohia was the first one who advocated, socio-political upliftment of the 'Backward Castes. Like Ambedkar, he also considered politics as a means of establishing equality, but he also supported the politicisation of OBC in order to attain an egalitarian society.

In Lohia's concept of equality women also found an important place. He advocated that all efforts for equality are useless if they cannot give equal rights to women. Drawing a link between caste and gender discrimination, he voiced the idea that a major reason for the decline of 'self' in society, both caste and gender-based differentiation are responsible⁴. Drawing on the mythological character of 'Draupadi'⁵, he sought to spread his message that women in India must be independent and should be empowered to take their own decisions. On the question

of education and the medium of instruction, Lohia had quite similar views like his mentor, Gandhi. He advocated education to be imparted in the mother tongue and criticised the unnecessary burden of English on education. He recognised the latter as a primary factor that promoted class division in India.

Lohia's side was close to the ideological constructions of Gandhi and Ambedkar. Like Ambedkar, he protested against caste-based discrimination and wanted that the unjust system must be ended. However, the latter also considered it necessary to give special rights or opportunities to the backward castes. The link between Gandhi and Lohia was that of *guru-shishya*. Though Lohia was in agreement with the ideas of Gandhi yet he forged an opinion of his own that was distinctive in nature. Though he disagreed and differed from Gandhi on the issue of caste, he supported Gandhi's ideas on education and language. Gandhi considered Lohia's ideas to be inevitable for independent India. In an issue of *Dharmayug* (1967), Lohia wrote, "... there have been only two forces which can unite India; first one is Gandhi and other is cinema."

Traditionally, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia have been seen as separate on the issue of equality. In a very dramatic way, their endeavours, directed at achieving social equality, have been accorded separate political affiliations. This has happened in total negation of the fact that there

might be a certain degree of basic similarity in their thoughts! This is replicated and manifested even in the school textbooks. Also, pertinent to consider is the fact that often Lohia's ideas are mentioned only as a passing reference in textbooks.

Therefore, when we talk about equality, it is necessary to consider the fact that the ideas of these three thinkers on equality are complementary to each other. According to D.R Nagraj (2008), "Gandhi and Ambedkar had transformed or modified each other's ideas. While Gandhi extricated the issue of upliftment of Harijans from the limitations of untouchability, Ambedkar accepted the role of dharma in elimination of caste from society⁶."

AMBEDKAR NAGAR: AN INTRODUCTION

District Ambedkar Nagar, situated between 26, 26' north and 82, 82' east, is one of the districts among those that were created in Uttar Pradesh in the 90s. The district is named after Dr. Ambedkar, a Dalit icon, by the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Ms. Mayawati, on 29 September 1995. It is spread across an area of 2496 km square and has a population of 23, 98,709 approximately according to 2011 census. Quite interestingly, in the town Akbarpur, one of the nine blocks of the district, is the birth place of Lohia⁷, of who hailed as the founder of socialism in India; and Jai Ram Verma⁸, one of most influential leader of the Congress party in the 60s and 70s.

Two blocks, Akbarpur and Jalalpur, have been chosen for this micro study. Two schools, situated in these two blocks were selected for data collection. This study seeks to probe into how education has played an empowering role and contributed to the dynamics of socio-political development of weaker sections. This has been analysed in the context of two schools situated in Ambedkar Nagar district. The history of their establishment and development over the past few decades have added to their significance. They are an important aspect of the local history of Ambedkar Nagar; and the people who were actively involved in this indigenous movement have been recognized in the local history as heroes.

While conducting this study, the basic focus was, to analyse the relationship between education and socio-political mobility in society. They are interdependent in nature and impact each other significantly. The changes manifested in one domain, regardless of whether they are positive or negative in nature, have a far-reaching influence on the other. These changes have an important place in channelling the course of history, or rather, people's history. A steady rise has been witnessed in the study of local history/narratives and it has aided in bringing to the fore, through research, the unique character of development and changes experienced in particular regions. And a distinct aspect that

characterizes local history is the overwhelming presence of oral narratives, folklore etc as potential sources. Often it does not follow a scientific method, scriptural evidence and documentation. Local stories and associated myths are valued by the people and thus, they must be accorded an appropriate place.

ANALYSIS⁹

Education has been often seen as an index of development; and within its ambit is included the idea of forwarding education as a means of enabling socio-political mobility. Further, educational development, it must be recognized, is an indirect process and has a long term impact on the different dimensions of the society.

In the Indian context, after gaining independence, a great challenge before the leaders of the nation was to diminish the barriers of caste and class in India. Numerous attempts were made in this regard and several evidences of affirmative action and reforms are available where education has been mobilized as a medium of social and political upliftment.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned context, the first section of the analysis gives a brief insight into the history of the establishment of the two schools, chosen for the study:

Jai Ram Verma Babu Inter College

The concerted efforts made by Jairam Verma, a leader with Gandhian

ideology, for establishing this school in Ambedkar Nagar (then Faizabad) are of seminal importance. In the beginning of 1949, he started this school at a ground, next to the road connecting Akbarpur to Iltifatganj, near the village Badagaon, Ibrahimpur. Initially, the school consisted of only four rooms, made with mud and *kaashehari*- a kind of grass which is used for making roof of huts in rural areas, with the help of local people. When it started, there were 25 students in the school and three teachers were appointed by Jairam Verma. The inhabitants of the local villages contributed a lot to the school as there was no other school where their children could get education upto the senior secondary level.

The process of how funds were collected for the school is quite interesting. Jairam Verma initiated a contributory collaborative effort where one ser (6 kg) grain was collected from each house; and by selling those collected grains, material for the school building was bought. He was recognised as a prominent OBC leader, and it helped in garnering support and motivating contribution from the nearby villages, which were primarily dominated by the OBC's and Dalits. Jairam Verma envisioned that these schools will produce at least one teacher in each house and will aid in the assertion of the OBC's and Dalits at the social as well as political front, both at the local and state levels. It appealed to the masses. It gives a glimpse of the visionary thinking of

Jairam Verma who, recognising the salience of education, made a great attempt in this regard. He adopted a bottom-up-approach and, with the help of education, was successful in challenging the social hierarchy in the area.

Sardar Patel Smarak Inter College:

The foundation of this school was laid down in 1965 by the then head of Jalalpur Block, Ramnarayan Verma. Once again, the contributions of Jairam Verma for the establishment of this school, obtaining certification from the commission for starting secondary education etc. cannot be overlooked. Though the school was opened quite late, in comparison to the first one, the idea and methods were the same for collecting aids from the local villagers. This school has also contributed immensely to raising the educational level of OBC's and Dalits.

In the next section, data collated through interviews and documentation from the school gazetteer has been interpreted. Data from the schools has been collected on decadal basis, and the founding year has been taken as base year for each school. Interviews done were primarily thematic in nature, and can be referred to as 'long conversations'.

The first school has witnessed a steep rise in the total strength of students from the year of its establishment. As mentioned above, there were only 25 students in the founding year (1949); but in the next

decade, the numbers rose to 156 students, with a prominent number of OBC and S.C. students in the school. The total number of students and overall popularity of the school increased with each passing year (Table 1) as the prominence of Jairam Verma in local as well as in state politics rose.

school was when the total enrolment went up to 2046 in 1999. This data is potently reflective of the socio-political changes which were taking place, especially amongst those who had been deprived. (Graph 1)

In the second school, which was named after Sardar Patel, the

Table 1

Number of Students in Jai Ram Verma Bapu Inter College

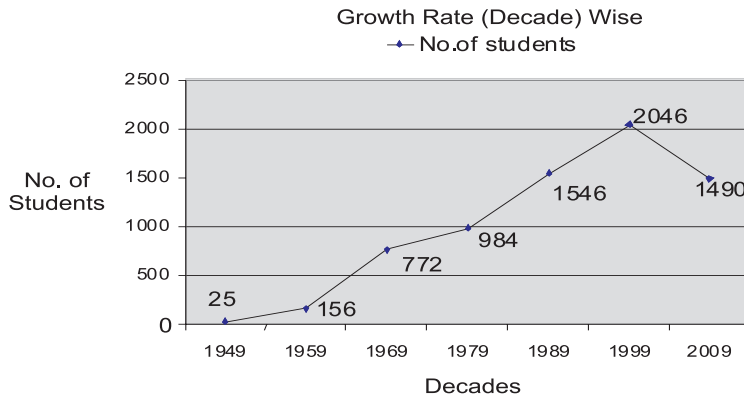
		General	OBC	S.C.	S.T.	Muslim	Total	Grand Total
1949	Boys	4	16	2	-	3	25	25
	Girls	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1959	Boys	40	83	16	-	17	156	156
	Girls	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1969	Boys	149	453	117	-	51	772	772
	Girls	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1979	Boys	161	610	167	-	46	984	984
	Girls	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1989	Boys	182	892	78	-	103	1255	1546
	Girls	48	157	43	-	43	291	
1999	Boys	202	985	254	-	88	1529	2046
	Girls	66	351	99	-	01	517	
2009	Boys	106	671	204	-	62	1043	1490
	Girls	35	234	151	-	27	447	

From 1959 to 1969, the number of students increased from 156 to 772 in the school, and in 1979, it was 984. Also, another important feature was that the school obtained a sanction for girl education, and the number of students increased to 1546. An all-time high in the strength of the

strength of the school in its founding year (1965) was 65 students, with 10 girls and more than fifty per cent of the students belonging to the OBC section. As the school is situated near OBC-dominated villages, especially *kurmis* – a dominant peasant community of Eastern U.P. – a visible

presence of student's hailing from this community is there. The total strength of the school rose steeply in the following decade, and in 1975,

the number of students in the school was 605, of which 180 were girls. (Table 2)



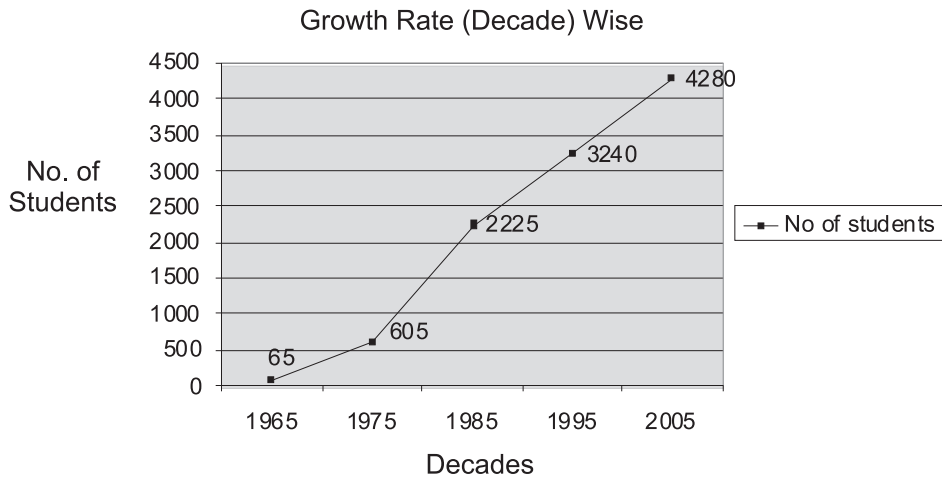
Graph 1: Number of Students in Jai Ram Verma Babu Inter College

Table 2
Number of Students in Sardar Patel Smarak Inter College

Decade		General	OBC	S.C.	S.T.	Muslim	Total	Grand Total
1965	Boys	6	30	12	-	7	55	65
	Girls	1	5	2	-	2	10	
1975	Boys	10	245	155	-	15	425	605
	Girls	11	105	60	-	14	180	
1985	Boys	54	1075	451	-	95	1675	2225
	Girls	21	310	190	-	20	550	
1995	Boys	60	1510	870	-	90	2530	3240
	Girls	27	451	202	-	30	710	
2005	Boys	55	1765	855	-	75	2750	4280
	Girls	30	910	530	-	56	1530	

Jairam Verma, an inspirational figure for establishing this school, always emphasized that this school should emerge as a centre for forwarding the cause of education of girls. In the following decades, 1985 and 1995, the strength of the school made an impressive increase

community. The most distinguishing part of this whole movement was that it involved local people in making of the school building. These two schools bear testimony to the significant role played by the *Gram Sabha* and *Panchayats* in the developmental



Graph 2: Number of Students in Sardar Patel Smarak Inter College

and was recorded as 2225 and 3240, in which the number of girls was 550 and 710 respectively. In 2005, the total number of students continued to increase and went up to 4280, in which 1530 were girls. (Graph 2)

The motive behind establishing the school was to promote education in the area and by that, to elevate the standard of the downtrodden in the socio-political structure of the district. These two schools successfully fulfilled the motive, and provided a platform for political assertion and social mobilisation of the deprived

process, as both the schools got land for establishing schools from the *Gram Sabha* only. It was quite obvious that being a Gandhian, Jairam Verma actively involved the *Gram Sabha* in this movement. Gandhi himself advocated that development at the grassroot level involves the active involvement of the local governing bodies. These two schools exemplify that any movement based on strong ideological standpoints, with the help of local governing bodies and people, can immensely contribute to the development of the area.

CONCLUSION

Where there is no scope for dialogue, the structure must be changed, and education, we believe, provides the opportunity to change the structure. In the context of Ambedkar Nagar, education has emerged as a primary source of change. People as a collective, with leaders such as Jairam Verma, successfully forwarded the legacy of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia, and used education as primary resource for development. It illustrates how the ideas of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia can be actively used to for democratization, social equality and upliftment of those who have been suppressed and exploited by the dominant in the power matrix. It is only then the constitutional provision of 'right to equality' can be

implemented in its true spirit. The data shows that these schools not only helped in raising the literacy rate of Ambedkar Nagar, but also played a vital role in empowering the weaker sections.

The efforts directed at achieving social equality, in India have yielded positive results; but still a lot needs to be done in order to achieve this goal. In order to attain equality in society, there has to be adequate and active representation of the Dalit and backward classes, from the grass root level, which is the Panchayat, to the highest representation of political power, the parliament. This is the reason why the ideas of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Lohia — on four main factors of caste, class, gender and language — hold relevance and are significant even today.

End Notes

¹Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG): The year 1991 marked the ushering in of the neo-liberal reforms in India. Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA) is a strategy for rural development in India. The concept was given by former president, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. It proposes that urban infrastructure and services be provided in rural hubs to create economic opportunities outside of cities. And the Indian central government has been running pilot PURA programs in several states since 2004. Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

²Krishna Kumar, *Shsiksha Aur Gyan*, 2002.

³Meshram Mukesh, 2010, *Aur Baba Saheb Ne Kaha.....*, pp.144-45.

⁴Ram ManoharLohia, 2008, *Lohia Ke Vichar*.

⁵Ram Manohar Lohia, *Draupadi*, 2008.

⁶Abhay Kumar Dube, *Aadhunikta Ke Aaine Me Dalit*.

⁷Indumati Kelkar, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia.

⁸Christophe Jaffrelot. *India's Silent Revolution*, pp 282-84.

⁹Interviews were conducted on 2-5 October 2010 and 4-5 April 2011 at Ambedkar Nagar and Lucknow.

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