
CONTRIBUTION OF DALITS TO SAMYUKTA MAHARASHTRA MOVEMENT

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Abstract—

A study of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement reveals a formidable challenge of weak opposition parties within that State by entering into an uneasy alliance strengthened by the Marathi people. The rise and growth of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement must be studied not merely in the general context of the country-wide agitation for linguistic States but also in the particular context of the society and politics in Maharashtra. It is widely known that politicians from the different sheds of Maharashtra responded in different ways to the demand for a unilingual State of the Marathi-speaking people. The Scheduled Castes Federation (later on Republican Party of India from 1957) led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was alone a constituent party in that episodes.

Keywords— strengthened , society , politics.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of united Maharashtra including the city of Bombay brought together all shades of political opinion and mobilized the Marathi-speaking masses. The struggle for United Maharashtra was carried out through one nonparty body, known as the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti and formed of various political parties to forge a broad opposition front against the ruling Congress Party. Eminent persons like Mr. D. R. Gadgil, Mr. D. A Potdar, Mr. S. A Dange, Shankar Rao Dev, Mr. M. R. Jaykar etc. comprising of all shades of opinion participated in the formation Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad. Through its delegates, the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad submitted its evidence before the State Reorganization Commission in November 1948.¹

On October 14, 1948, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar submitted his own evidence before the Dar commission. In the same year, 'Prof. R. D. Bhandare as a representative of the Scheduled Castes Federation gave Resolution notice to the Bombay Corporation regarding the demand of

Samyukta (United) Maharashtra.ⁱⁱ Later on, Mr. P. K. Atre proposed and Prof. R. D. Bhandare seconded the Resolution of United Maharashtra in the Bombay Corporation.

On April 23, 1953, the Times of India published Article of Dr. Ambedkar regarding to the Linguistic State and by the end of the year 1955, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar published book entitled, "Thought on linguistic States and visualized a unitary Maharashtra Province". In the Memorandum sent to the Government, he observed that 'Maharashtra would not merely be a viable Province but a strong Province in point of area, population and revenue. Maharashtra and Bombay were not merely inter-dependant; they were really one and integral. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar preferred the formation of multilingual states for the safeguards against the communal tyranny. 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar suggested forming three states of Marathi speaking people: (1) Western Maharashtra, (2) Central Maharashtra and (3) Easter Maharashtra'.ⁱⁱⁱ Though, Dr. Ambedkar opposed united Maharashtra, still insisted to merge all parts of Maharashtra into single province.

The fasting death of Telugu nationalist Mr. Potti Shriramulu forced Nehru Government to concede a separate Andhra State. The creation of a state on linguistic basis sparked off a series of demands and counter demands. Therefore, on December 29, 1953 Government of India appointed a State Re-organization Commission to look into the entire problem. The Commission recommended a bi-lingual state called Bombay of Maharashtra-Gujarat, with Bombay as its capital. The publication of the State Reorganization Commission's Report aroused bitter reaction against the SRC Report. On March 25, 1956, Chief Minister of Bombay State Mr. Moraraji Desai moved a bill of 'Three State Plan' on the floor of Bombay legislative Assembly. 'Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Strongly criticized State Reorganization Commission's Report for its recommendation of the creation of such Monolithic monstrous state as United Province, Bihar and Maharashtra and expressed his fear that those state would be a great danger to the Central Government as well as to the minorities'.^{iv} In protest of that Bill, Three legislators from Konkan region resigned of their legislator. Mr. B. C. Kamble legislator of Scheduled castes Federation criticized Congress Government and supported the suggestion made for creating Gujarat a separate State and Maharashtra including Mumbai, Belgaum and Karwar.^v

On November 18, 1955, Senapati Bapat declared one-day strike and led a demonstration against the Government. Again on 21st November one strike was called to protest Government's three states Plan. The police opened fire on about Five Lakh demonstrators where nine people died and three hundred activists were arrested. On January 16, 1956, demonstrators were fired

upon by the police at Flora Fountain in the capital city of Mumbai, where 105 people were shot by security forces during the period of agitation and at different places. In 1956 Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. Vallabhai Patel recommended creation of linguistic states of Andhra, Kerala and Karnataka. But the Nehru Government 1 November 1956 formed bilingual Bombay State in spite of bitter opposition against it. It stirred up political unrest in both the states.

The Ruling Congress was the main obstacle in the way of creation of united Maharashtra. Therefore, a Front known as Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti consisted of the Communist Party of India, the Socialist Party, the Peasant and Workers Party and even some dissident Congressmen came into existence. To broaden the opposition front, Leaders of the Samiti wanted All India Scheduled Castes Federation to join the front. Accordingly, on September 11, 1956 Mr. S.M. Joshi and Mr. P. K. Aatre considering the importance of All India Scheduled Castes Federation in defeating the congress Party in coming election proposed Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to join opposition front of the Samiti.^{vi}

The issue of a united Maharashtra offered Dr. B. R. Ambedkar a firm basis and the best chance of developing a strong opposition against the Congress party. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar decided to enter into alliance with the Samiti based on definite minimum programme. The All India Scheduled Castes Federation made election Alliance with the 'Samiti which included Praja Socialist Party, Communist Party, Shetkari Kamgar Party, Sanyukt Maharashtrawadi Congressjan Parishad,, Majdoor Kisan Party, Lal Nishan Group, Hindu Mahasabha, Jansangh and Revolutionary and Bolshevick Party.^{vii}The main guiding principles of the election programme of the Samiti other than creation of united Maharashtra with Bombay city, ownership of land to tiller, social justice and protection to workers, farmers and middle and productive classes, adequate taxation, right of work and education and eradication of Untouchability etc.

The organization Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (joint Maharashtra council) came in to existence on February 6, 1956 under the leadership of Keshavrao Jedhe in Poona. Prominent activists of Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti were Mr. P. K. Aatre, Mr. S.M. Joshi, Mr. S.M. Dange, Mr. N.G. Gore and Mr. K. S. Thakare, Mr. Senapati Bapat and others. 'The objectives of the Samiti were twofold: first, to agitate for the establishment of a unilingual state of Maharashtra, and secondly, to forge a broad opposition front against the ruling Congress party'.^{viii} The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti set its programme to carry on the agitation by the way of peace, non-violence and democratic manner and to give protection to the Linguistic Minorities

participating in the agitation. 'Its objectives were to establish broad and united State on the Linguistic province re-organization principle, to create democratic and socialistic Maharashtra and complete the programme adopted by the Samiti; and to build the economic, cultural and social life of Maharashtra on the basis of co-operation.'^{ix}

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar favoured the idea of electoral alliance with those whose objectives did not run counter to the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. 'On September 11, 1956 Mr. P. K. Atre and Mr. S.M. Joshi welcomed the decision of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to join the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti on the basis of minimum programme to defeat the congress in the ensuing election. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar declared, "My party Scheduled Caste Federation would ever join agitation against injustice done to the Maharashtra."^x Mr. B. K. Gaikwad concluded alliance on behalf of All India Scheduled castes Federation with the Samiti.

The First statewide agitation of Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti began from 9 March 1956 from Belgaum Satyagraha by one group headed by Mr. Yashawantrao Tilak. The Agitation carried on at different places of Maharashtra from March to August 1956 more than 75000 people participated. Participation of women's from different castes and communities was one of the features of this Agitation. The leaders of Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (United Maharashtra) carried on peaceful, legitimate activities and began Satyagraha against the bilingual Bombay state. Mr. S.M. Joshi, Mr. Shripat Dange, Mr. N.G. Gore and Mr. P. K. Atre and All India Scheduled Castes Federation leader Mr. B. K. Gaikwad fought relentlessly for Samyukta Maharashtra, even at the cost of sacrificing the lives of several people and finally succeeded in convincing Congress leaders that Maharashtra should form a separate state. Mr. C. D. Deshamukha the then Finance Minister of India of the Nehru Cabinet submitted his resignation and joined the Movement.

On April 4, 1957, The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti constituted a Central constitution Drafting Committee for the preparation of its Constitution. Mr. B. C. Kamble contributed as its member in drafting the constitution. Forming of Maharashtra state as Linguistic, united, democratic, socialistic, and setting up of social, economic and cultural life of Maharashtra on the co-operative basis, were the objectives of the Samiti embodied in its constitution.^{xi} Democracy and peace were the chief source of achieving its goal.

The Ruling Congress was the main obstacle in the way of creation of united Maharashtra; therefore, its defeat was must. In the 1957 election, the opposition parties, banding themselves

together under the banner of the Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti went to electors with the slogan of a united Maharashtra. The emotional appeal of the slogan was so strong that, in the 12 district of western Maharashtra, the Samiti bagged 102 of the 134 seats and in Bombay city, the Samiti won 11 of the 24 seats in the Bombay State Assembly the Congress Party for the legislative Assembly won 136 seats and for the Lok Sabha 20 seats. On the other hand, the Samiti for the Legislative Assembly won 128 seats and the Lok Sabha won 23 seats.^{xii}

In 1957 General Election the All India Scheduled Castes Federation contested 25 seats out of which 11 seats were from Bombay Presidency. Out of 25 contested seats, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation won 9 seats.^{xiii} For the Assembly Elections in 1957, All India Scheduled Castes Federation 12 seats were from Bombay State. An alliance with other opposition parties in Bombay and a strong upsurge of opposition sentiment demanding the creation of Maharashtra State provided change in electoral situation. The All India Scheduled Castes Federation benefited from this alliance in the election of 1957. The Alliance of political parties in the Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti won 72 seats in the Bombay Corporation elections held in May 1957. 'In May 1959 Mr. P.T Borale, Republican corporate of the B.M.C was elected as Mayor of the Bombay Corporation.'^{xiv}

In the General election of 1957, the Samiti defeated the stalwarts of Congress by securing 101 seats out of 133, including 12 from Mumbai. The Congress party could form a government only with the support of legislators from Gujarat, Marathwada and Vidharba regions. The Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti and All India Scheduled Castes Federation were successful in defeating the stalwarts of the Congress. Mr. Yashwantrao Chavan was replaced Mr. Morarji Desai as the Chief Minister of the bi-lingual Bombay State. The Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti achieved its goal on May 1, 1960 when the State of Bombay was divided into the Marathi-speaking State of Maharashtra and the Gujarati-speaking State of Gujarat. Mr. B. K. Gaikwad was the chairman of the Second session of the Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti held in October 1960 in Mumbai. Mr. B.K. Gaikwad from the chair of President said that "Sanyukta Maharashtra Samiti on the support of Marathi people for the creation of united Maharashtra including Mumbai carried long standing agitation is significant event in post independence India. The leaders of the Republican Party and Samiti came on common platform to defeat autocratic Congress. The Samiti leaders attempted to minimize the rift between Hindus and Scheduled castes in villages and tried to solve injustice done on Scheduled castes. Mr. B. K. Gaikwad

assured that the Republican party of India would support Samiti in setting up Maharashtra as socialist, Democratic and welfare state in India''.^{xv}

Growing differences among the member parties weakened the strength of Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti after the elections were over. In February 1958, Jan Sangh left samiti. Jansangh was not ready to accept the constitution of Samiti and demanded Samiti should be federation of member parties in nature. After the creation of the State of Maharashtra Praja Socialist Party began to press that, the Samiti should exist only for the limited purpose of the Boundary Question. In May 1960, Praja socialist party left Samiti. The Republican Party was also split into groups.^{xvi} The B. C. Kemble group from Republican Party remained supporter of the Praja Socialist Party in the Samiti. The Khobragade and Gaikwad group of the Republican Party continued to be in the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti and made alliance with the Samiti in the 1962 General Elections in Maharashtra. The Kamble group entered into an election alliance for the 1962 general election with Praja Socialist Party in some constituency and with the Jana Sangh in some others.

The Member Parties in the Samukta Maharashtra Samiti lost election heavily. Republican Party of India also lost all 20 seats in Lok Sabha Election in 1962.^{xvii} The opposition parties suffered from two handicaps. They did not have a stirring issue to appeal to the emotions of the people nor had they come together as they did in 1957, to fight the Congress. The division among their ranks went to the advantage of the ruling party. The rehabilitation of the Congress among the people began with the formation of Maharashtra. The Praja Socialist Party did not see eye to eye with the Samiti. The Jana Sangh and the Socialist Party fought the election on their own. The Republican Party was split into factions. The Gaikwad-Khobragade group of the Republican Party continued to be with Samiti even after 1962 election.

Even after the formation of Maharashtra the Samiti called two sessions and even prepared future plan of constructive Maharashtra.^{xviii} The Samiti was to be accountable to create Socialist Maharashtra by eradicating poverty and unemployment. The decline of Samiti began after its heavy loss in 1962 election. Formation of United Maharashtra was the main and immediate objective of Samiti. It was fulfilled in 1960. Complexity of rural class and caste could not hold common front longer. Scarcity of food, rising prices, Boundary question, problem of water distribution and problem of merging Goa remained not issues of class struggle it became national

problems. The member parties of the Samiti saw towards it as opportunists but role of Republican Party of India was beyond that.

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