

BAMCEF: As a Civil Sphere of Indian Excluded Communities

Vivek Kumar

*Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi, India*

Email: vivekkumar@mail.jnu.ac.in

Abstract: This paper attempts to analyze how the 'BAMCEF' (Backward and Minorities Communities Employees' Federation) can be defined as an indigenous counterpart of the 'Civil Sphere' propounded by Jeffrey C. Alexander (2006) in his Civil Sphere Theory (CST). At the outset, it discusses how the Bahujans constituted this sphere and how this sphere helped 'BAMCEF' to create a discourse. It has identified who the actors who established this Civil Sphere were. How with the help of 'BAMCEF,' they established a discourse of binary between the so-called upper castes, who were termed as 'Manuvadi' by the BAMCEF members, and the exploited castes, who were termed as 'Bahujans.' This article has also probed how BAMCEF galvanized a counterpublic, which later on gave birth to the vibrant social movement 'DS4' (Dalit-Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti- literary translated it means – Dalit-Exploited Society Struggle Association) 'as a communicative institution to convince the public' with the help of 'cultural and institutional' arrangements to raise their voices against 'Manuvadis' and their exploitative values. The paper has tried to find out how it deepened the divide between 'Manuvadis' and 'Bahujans' and highlighted the role of uncivil institutions of the so-called upper castes, which subjugated and excluded the 'Bahujans.' It has found out how the 'Bahujan' have polluted the so-called upper castes by publicly denouncing them through demonstrations and organizing public meetings, criticizing their exploitative institutions, through democratic means, and so on. Towards the end, this article demonstrates how 'BAMCEF,' through galvanizing a counterpublic, gave birth to a social movement, DS4, that later turned into a political party called 'Bahujan Samaj Party' (BSP), leading civil repair- Whether repair was through civilizing the so-called upper castes or whether the repair was done by giving the erstwhile excluded castes self-representation or by giving them a share in the resources.

Keywords: Indian; Civil Sphere; Castes; Hindus; Dalit; Social Movements.

BAMCEF AS CIVIL SPHERE

Reading with Alexander's (2006:4) CST, we can treat BAMCEF akin to the Civil Sphere as '...a world of values and institutions that generate the capacity for social criticism' of the so-called upper caste Hindus by Bahujans and on the other hand a sphere of 'democratic integration' of the Indian backward groups which included – Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Castes (OBCs), and religious minorities converted to other religions-like Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. Further, drawing from Alexander and Palmer (2010:1), BAMCEF can also be accepted as a space 'within which people' like backward castes and communities of Indian society 'perform and act democratic values forming a community that includes' their groups and 'excludes' so-called upper castes 'based on binary code that defines civil and anti-civil motives, relations and institutions'. According to Alexander (2016: 75), the discourse of civil society is binary. To recognize rationality, we need to understand irrationality; for honesty, deceit; for openness,

secrecy; for autonomy, dependence; for freedom, slavery" (2016: 75). Similarly, BAMCEF has drawn a binary between 'Manuvadis' and 'Bahujans.' We will see later how BAMCEF members, taking lessons from history, depict that the so-called upper castes, to whom they identified as 'Manuvadis,' have cumulatively excluded the backward classes from social, economic, political, educational, religious, and spatial (read mainland of villages) spheres of the society (Ram 1981, 1982, Kumar 2014).

BAMCEF leaders, in their cadre camps, public and corner meetings, quoting Ambedkar (1979), argued that 'Manuvadis' declared them unfit to participate in daily life. Another aspect of the Civil Sphere, as highlighted by Alexander (2006), is that it is 'autonomous of social structures and institutions such as family, religion, State and economy.' This can be applied to BAMCEF because only government employees belonging to excluded communities could be its members. It was non-political, non-religious, and non-agitational without formal registration with the State. Its leaders decided not to give any representations

of their demands to any state or legislative organs of the government of the day. The most significant aspect of the Civil Sphere associated with BAMCEF is that, like the Civil Sphere, it is also '...not governed by power alone and the pursuit of self-interest does not fuel it, but feelings for others...' (Alexander 2006: 3). Seen in this light half-a-century-old organization BAMCEF's leaders while mobilizing and uniting the excluded and the subjugated collectivity of Indian society argued that this sphere 'has been established based on moral values like - 'Pay Back to society' and 'Self-respect movement will be run by self-help' (Ram 1981). Further, as Alexander (2006: 199) argues, keeping time and space in mind, "every society has actually been founded by some particular person at a particular time." Similarly, Kanshi Ram-a Dalit Sikh from Punjab, founded BAMCEF on 6th December 1978 in the national capital, New Delhi.

CIVIL SPHERE BEFORE AND AFTER CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

Further, drawing a parallel from Stack and Alexander (2019:2), who have argued that the Civil Sphere 'can also be found outside constitutional democracies and elements of them long precede the democracies of recent countries,' it is worth mentioning that in Indian society as well 'Civil Sphere' did not emerge only because of constitutional democracy instead its roots go much before the constitutional democracy. In this context, we have found that America and London-educated Ambedkar (1987:452), the chief architect of the Indian Constitution champion of human rights of Dalits, women, and religious minorities, had remarked that monastic communities of Buddhist monks had a most democratic constitution. He borrowed from Buddha's philosophy of equality, liberty, and fraternity in his struggle for civil inclusion of excluded collectivities like Dalits, tribes, women, and religious minorities. Civil Sphere-like spaces of ex-untouchables with democratic and fraternal values also existed during the medieval ages. For instance, Ravidas, an ex-untouchable saint in North India, established his sect of formless god because ex-untouchables were not allowed to enter the Hindu

temples because their touch would pollute even the gods and goddesses.

Second, he envisaged a utopian society, 'Begampura', which means 'the locality without any sorrows' (Omvedt 2008). His couplets also, part of oral history, depict how, in this locality, the rich and poor will live together without difficulty. Ravidas's other couplets emphasize the value of fraternity and how human beings can be real human beings if they give up their primordial identity of caste. In a way, he was highlighting the fact of the existence of caste exclusion led by so-called upper castes. Thereby its annihilation for the emancipation of whole humanity (Kumar 2014 a: 33). Against the anti-civil ways of the so-called upper castes in western India (Maharashtra), Jotirao Phuley (1828-1890) and Savitribai Phuley established a group of individuals in the year 1948 to open schools and impart education among the erstwhile excluded communities and women of all castes. The so-called upper caste thought that if the children of the ex-untouchable communities sat beside the children of the so-called upper caste, they would pollute the children of the upper castes by their touch. Influenced by Thomas Paine's 'Rights of Man' and American struggles against slavery, Phuley established the 'Society of Truth Seekers' in 1873 (O'Hanlon 1985).

Similarly, Ambedkar also established an organization named 'BahishkritHitkarini Sabha' (Depressed Classes Welfare Association) in the year 1923 and launched several satyagrahs (sit-ups) for human rights of ex-untouchables to emancipate them from their degraded status in Indian society. For instance, in 1927, he launched a movement to take water for the untouchables of that time because the so-called upper caste Hindus had denied them from taking water from that tank because the water tank would get polluted by their touch. In the same year, he started publishing the fortnightly journal Bahishkrit Bharat (Excluded India) from his society to sensitize the oppressors and oppressed regarding the wretched condition of the ex-untouchables (now known as Dalits). Most importantly, he mooted the idea of annihilation of caste in 1936 (Ambedkar 1979).

Alexander (2006: 195) states, "The more developed the society, the more different kinds of institutional spheres and discourses emerge." In this light, during the colonial period, the British introduced several modern institutions like

judiciary, bureaucracy, Army, University, and Industry to modernize Indian society. They also introduced modern systems of communication and transportation (Singh 1994). However, even after approximately 150 years of rule, the British could not succeed in annihilating the draconian Caste System and other forms of exclusion that had dehumanized millions of people. Under profound inequality, hierarchy, discrimination, and exclusion circumstances, the Indian Constitution was promulgated on 26th January 1950.

As Granville (2002) emphasized, "India's founding fathers and mothers established in the Constitution both nation's ideals and the institutions and processes for achieving them...Democracy, representative government, personal liberty, and equality before the law were revolutionary for society (Granville 2002: ix-x). Along with equality of opportunity, the excluded communities were also given equality of condition by the framers of the Constitution. The practice of untouchability against them was abolished and made a punishable offense under Article 17 of the Indian Constitution. The SCs and STs were given special representation in the polity under Articles 330 and 332 and in public jobs under Article 335. The state should ensure their educational interest under Article 46. However, Waghmore (2013: xx) argues, "The case of continued caste violence and Dalit exclusion illustrates how the morals of democratic civility and tolerance are yet to be achieved in India's public'.

The moot question is why, even after introducing such diverse spheres, Indian society lacked civil values that couldn't emancipate the erstwhile excluded collectivities. Alexander (2006: 195) answers that "...the "complete" realization of civil society is restricted by these spheres; at the same time, however, the civil sphere must enter into institutional and moral interchanges with these worlds." Further, he also adds that "...the civil spheres of democratic nation-state have been mocked by gross exclusion and inequality. These destructive intrusions have entered the civil sphere's construction, distorting their discourse, institution, and interaction" (Alexander 2006: 265). It is in this context that educated and employed members of the backward castes realized that even after two decades of promulgation of the democratic Constitution, the SCs, STs, OBCs, and converted religious minorities were denied both

human and fundamental rights which they got for the first time in Indian history through the Indian Constitution. Hence, by latching onto constitutional values and leveraging institutions based on universal values, the erstwhile excluded communities established their civil sphere, which was called BAMCEF. Through BAMCEF, the employees of the groups above shaped their ideal world and aspired to 'pay back to society' as a moral path to serve their brethren who have been exploited for ages by the so-called upper castes (Ram 1981). BAMCEF constituted this ideal to inspire the members of SC and ST communities who had benefited from representation policy in government jobs and educational institutions only because they belonged to the community. Once they benefitted, it was their turn to pay back the community's debt. Hence, we can observe that the Civil Sphere type of space existed in India before and after democracy in India.

UNDERSTANDING COUNTERPUBLIC

Alexander depicts that subaltern civil societies create a social space within which critical social movements may develop. To put it in Alexander's words, they emerge as Counterpublics that make up "shadow communities of discourse, stimulated by voluntary organizations" and that may help develop "positive new identities and solidarities in opposition to the polluted and demeaning categories that have been applied to them by dominant" groups. The creation of a Counterpublic, Alexander continues, is what Black Americans did by establishing a counterpoint to the 'anti-civil abuse of power' by whites: "The very subjugation of the black community gave it a separate space for defining itself against the efforts of whites to construct the African American population in an anti-civil way." Moreover, as a result, there eventually emerged within black communities a vigorous civil sphere and public life" (Alexander 2006:278). Although Alexander (2006:207) devolved his understanding of Counterpublic based on Frazer and Eley however, he has contested their reading of the same for reducing "Counterpublics to countercultures" where they reject the values and norms of the dominant public sphere (2006: 277).

Kane states, "With his civil spears theory, Alexander argues that while marginalized groups vehemently oppose their exclusion from the dominant structures of discourse and public institutions, their struggle is for inclusion in a civil society that lives up to its claim to full equality, justice, and democracy. In other words, counterpublic share the democratic principles of the dominant civil sphere, yet oppose and strive to reform, even transform the anti-civil nature of the latter" (2006a:277)" (as quoted in Kane 8 yet to be published). A significant aspect added by Kane, in line with Alexander and Jeffery Wimmer, is that she also views 'counterpublic' as both a 'process and entity.' In this context, she elaborates, "What is crucial in two-dimensional conceptualizations is the interrelationship of the constituent components of a counterpublic emerging through social movement. The counterpublic entity- its constituent groups and members, its identity in solidarity construction, and its voluntary communication when regulatory organizations- is constructed through discursive practices and political performance. In return, the nature of the Counterpublic's discourse is consolidated through ongoing and growing participation of often diverse social groups as well as by outcomes of discursive and political performance." (Kane 9). This helps them establish "the basis of political resistance and movement of civil repair" (Alexander 2006: 276). In the above light, we will analyze how BAMCEF, with its discourse, develops a Counterpublic.

BAMCEF DISCOURSE AND COUNTERPUBLIC

In light of the above and Alexander's analysis of black civil society waging a civil war against racial exclusion, we have tried to analyze BAMCEF as a civil society of the backward castes (considered as subalterns of India) that launched protests against their cumulative exclusion meted out to them by the so-called upper castes like – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. It criticized the sacred texts of Hindu society, which legitimized the exclusion of the backward castes. With these exercises, one can argue that BAMCEF created an 'other' called 'Manuvaad' against whom Bajujans can pitch their battle. Further, BAMCEF, acting like a 'shadow community' created a 'discourse' to 'ameliorate' the 'wretched condition, and undo the injustice done to' the backward castes

(Ram 1981:1). Along with the criticism of the so-called upper castes through its discourse BAMCEF propounded a 'positive and a new identity' called 'Bahujan' for the backward castes (Ram 1981). It was so because its members thought that the earlier identities like- Ashprishya, Antayaja, Antvasin, Chandala, etc., accorded to them by Hindu religious texts were stigmatizing and contemptuous.

BAMCEF did not accept the Dalit identity because it smacked off the negative connotation of 'crushed and ground to pieces.' Instead, they evolved a positive identity, 'Bahujans,' which means majority. By declaring themselves as members of the majority community, BAMCEF motivated its demoralized members, cutting across the language, religious, and caste boundaries with their numerical strength. This exercise of BAMCEF was significant because, as Tognato and Alexander (2008:1) have argued, "...the civil sphere defines itself in terms of solidarity, the brotherly and sisterly feeling of being connected with every other person in the collectivity". Therefore, the fragmented, divided, and demoralized communities got a positive and unified identity, strengthening their solidarity.

Further, to strengthen its discourse, Kanshi Ram created a formula $N \times D \times S = C$ (In this equation, N =Need, D = Desire, S= Strength, and C= Change). Kanshi Ram used to explain the meaning of the aforementioned equation in his cadre camps. According to him, every excluded individual or group needs social change. However, do they have desires for social change as well? If not, social change is impossible only because the public needs it. Ram was convinced that the excluded and subjugated individuals do not desire change. Hence, through this discourse, he wanted to ignite a desire for change among them. He substantiated his argument by highlighting the fact that 'because of centuries of exclusion, exploitation, and slavery, the excluded masses have lost desire for change. They have started enjoying their exclusion and subjugation. Regarding 'S' for strength in the equation, he used to argue that it is of two types: one, financial strength, and second, human resources. BAMCEF has to mobilize both resources. According to BAMCEF, three variables - need, desire, and strength are required- for change to be ushered in. Even if one variable's value is zero in the equation, its product

will also be zero. Therefore, like a scientific and mathematical equation Kanshi Ram, the founder of BAMCEF, created a discourse for change among the BAMCEF members.

'Self-respect movement will be run by Self-help' is another significant characteristic of the 'shadow community' that added great momentum to the discourse. There were two main reasons that BAMCEF emphasized self-help and refused to take help from other than Bahujans. One, they were convinced that 'If you take help from outside, from other castes, particularly from a business class, then they can lay down their conditions along with donations, and then the movement will be forced to accept conditions laid down by them as one will become dependent on their donations.' That means they did not want to compromise on their autonomy, so self-help was most effective. Second, BAMCEF members were convinced among themselves about the fact that '...the movement of the excluded and exploited will not be funded by the oppressors' (The Oppressed Indian: October 1982). Relying on the members of such groups would enable BAMCEF to be independent and not be skewed by the influence, interests, or agendas of other social groups, especially the so-called upper castes and people in business belonging to that community.

On the other hand, according to BAMCEF leaders, 'Self-help could take many forms. For example, by tapping into doctors and medical students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, BAMCEF would serve the poor sections of society by providing them with medical services (Ram 1981: 12). Further, the provision of assistance would, in turn, build cohesion and establish 'bonds of brotherhood amongst all sections of the oppressed and exploited society.' (Ram 1981: 21-13). Similarly, the educated employees within BAMCEF from all linguistic groups who excelled in the literary field can contribute to the building of that cohesion by representing the oppressed in their contribution to 'Dalit Literature' (Ram 1981: 13). Further to be more moralistic Ram insisted the BAMCEF should not to be reactive instead, it needed to set a large positive agenda that could accommodate all. He said, "Do not rub it off to shorten a line. Draw a bigger line in front of it, and the other line will be shortened on its own (BAMCEF Cadre Camp)."

To garner the legitimacy from the members and motivate them, Kanshi Ram strengthened its discourse by constituting a pantheon of leaders Jotiba Phuley (1828-1890), Narayana Guru (1856-1928), Sahuji Maharaj (1874-1922) and E. V. Ramasamy Periyar (1879-1973) and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1981-1956) (Ram 1982). It adopted these icons from various castes and regions to inspire a sense of belonging among the erstwhile excluded castes and communities (Kumar 2020). BAMCEF declared the icons above as the founders of the civil protest against the Hindu Social Order for the emancipation of the backward castes. The leaders narrated the stories of the struggles and sacrifices of the icons above. All these leaders were forgotten and erased from the school and higher educational curriculum. However, all of them have indeed launched radical movements against the anti-civil customs of the Hindu social order. It is significant to remember these icons because, as Alexander (2016) argues, 'A charisma of time' gets attached 'to founders'. It is also "Because the origin myths of civil society narrate the founders' roles in the discourse of liberty" (ibid).

Alexander also says that 'Inside the civil sphere' there 'are communicative and regulative institutions' (2016:75). Further, "The democratic discourse of civil society flowed through public opinion; it could anonymously crystallize on social media" (Alexander 2016:79). We could find out that BAMCEF also acted like a 'communicative and regulative institution' among the excluded communities of India. To communicate and regulate the Bahujan masses, it emphasized the need for a New Service of the Bahujans (The Oppressed Indian 1979), and it started its own English monthly magazines, first the 'Untouchable India' and then 'The Oppressed Indian'. Leaders did it because they were convinced that Hindu Press, which they termed as 'Manuvadi Media', were erasing their news and views of the Bahujans (ibid). Later, as time passed, BAMCEF started publishing Bahujan Nayak (Majority Hero) Hindi and Marathi Weekly. The March 1980 issue of 'The Oppressed Indian' reveals that BAMCEF had envisaged a 'News Service of the oppressed and exploited society' with nine more publications. Accordingly, they had thought of two daily newspapers, three weekly news magazines from three important centers, and four monthly magazines in four different languages (The Oppressed Indian May 1980). By now, we are

aware that their publications were published in English, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, and Gujarati languages (The Oppressed Indian March 1980). Bahujan Times was a Daily Newspaper published in English, Hindi, and Marathi. Along with the ideological articles, news, pictures of the Bahujan pantheon, and the history of the Bahujan movements were published in these publications (Shewde 2010: E-k). However, it is also a fact that only 'Bahujan Sangathak' (Bahujan Organizer) Hindi weekly Magazine could run for 26 years while other publications died soon.

BAMCEF further created a discourse by raising voices against the exploitation of Schedule Caste, Scheduled Tribes, and Dalits who converted to Islam and Christianity. According to Kanshi Ram's editorial in the mouthpiece of BAMCEF 'The Oppressed Indian,' he opined that "... beating, harassing and killing of the Schedule Castes and other oppressed sections of Indian society is going on. Further, "In all cases... the connivance of police and administration with the feudal lords is apparent and found in abundance" (March 1980). Raising the issues of Tribals, the editorial of the mouthpiece argued that "Baring Africa India has the largest portion of the Tribal population... The problem of the Tribals is in plenty. Basically, they are socio-economic and cultural and have extreme exploitation by the ruling caste of India... almost the entire population of the Tribal is below the poverty line. Socio-cultural exploitation of the Tribals is beyond description. Most striking evidence of the worsening plight of the tribal population is the increasing presence of their girls in the red-light areas of the Metropolitan cities". They are being forced into prostitution or traffic in other states (The Oppressed Indian: August 1980).

The BAMCEF's mouthpiece revealed the nature of communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. It alleged that in "... major communal riots, Hindu right-wing organization (RSS) hand is alleged". Second, 'An exceptional feature of the riots is that subtle efforts have been made to pitch the Muslims against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes. These are very dangerous trends for all the oppressed and exploited Indians" (The Oppressed Indian: July 1979). Therefore, he cautioned them to be careful and avoid self-destruction and pleaded for building harmonious relationships amongst them (ibid).

Highlighting the issues of Christians, Kanshi Ram appealed to them that they should "...learn to co-operate with co-sufferers to face the common enemy...the Christian leadership must ...win over the backward and minority (Muslim) community". In fact, BAMCEF was mainly focusing on the one crore Christians who had converted from Scheduled Castes and were facing 'repulsion and fear' to use Alexander's terminology (2006:200) in place of discrimination which, according to him, 'is a rather antiseptic and legalistic term.' Further, Kanshi Ram also highlighted that the converted Christians are also facing untouchability by the Christian converts from the higher caste Hindus. He argued that Dalit Christians face segregation and exclusion in schools and churches, but they face the same even after their deaths when they are buried in separate graveyards (The Oppressed Indian: May 1979).

Along with discourse on the exploitation and exclusion of the SCs, STs, OBCs, Muslims, and Christians, BAMCEF tried to expose the dubious role of the so-called upper caste social reformers. For instance, criticizing one such reformer, Ram opined

Vinoba Bhave, a blue-blooded Brahmin from Maharashtra, played havoc with the oppressed Indians during the post-Gandhi era. At least in this regard, he proved to be a true disciple of Gandhiji. He could blunt the anger of the landless laborers and marginal farmers by conducting a successful farce known as Sarvodaya. Now, he has chosen to take up the cause of cow, and Brahmin must enjoy special privileges. Being a Brahmin himself, he has evoked the religious feelings of Hindus to protect the special privileges of the cow, showing complete this regard for the buffalo and other varieties of animals being butchered daily. As a blue-blooded Brahmin, he has shown his Contempt for the animals. By establishing the superiority of the cow over the animals, he hopes to evoke sympathy and respect for the superior status of the Brahmins as per the same Dharma (The Oppressed Indian, May 1979).

That is why BAMCEF would also reach out to SCs, STs, and OBCs and push back on the propaganda by Gandhi (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) and the Indian National Congress, who posed as the emancipators of the oppressed by staging fairs like - Ambedkar Mela on Wheels. Through these fairs, BAMCEF publicly exposed the lip service paid by the leaders above and established a discourse about who was/were their real emancipators.

Drawing a parallel with Alexander (2006:278), the above discussion reveals how the very subjugation of the backward castes and communities gave them a separate space for defining themselves against the so-called upper castes to construct solidarity among the population of the backward castes in the prevailing anti-civil social milieu.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND BAMCEF

BAMCEF, as a civil sphere with its civil values, positive identity, the binary between civil 'Bahujans' and anti-civil 'Manuvadis,' and with several socio-cultural narratives of history, created a discourse with the help of its mouthpiece and other communicative institutions. With this exercise, BAMCEF galvanized a counterpublic that was ready to take its discourse and protest to the nook and corners of Indian society. However, as the leaders were committed that BAMCEF would be non-political, non-religious, and non-agitational, they established a mass organization with the same values that could launch a social movement to further its goal. This movement was known as DS4, which we now turn to analyze the role of BAMCEF as a civil sphere of India's backward and excluded castes.

However, before we do that, we will briefly touch upon how Alexander (2006) uses his social movement theory in the context of the Civil Sphere. He says (2006: 202), "Social movements are communicative institutions to convince that "history" must be revised; they use regulatory institutions to make outmoded versions of history illegal." Providing a coherent alternative to the classical model' of social movements with the help of 'cultural and institutional' context, according to Alexander (2006: 229), 'most social movements

emerge and struggle within differentiated spheres that possess distinct value regimes'. Further, he adds that '...the most significant idioms, codes, and narratives employed by strong movements...are independent of their structural position in particular spheres' (ibid: 229). 'These transcending, overarching symbolic frameworks refer to the imminent realization of civil society, a sphere that is separated from other institutional domains even though it may intrude upon them' (Alexander 2006: 230).

In this light, "Social movements, then, it can be seen as social devices that construct translations between the discourse of civil society and institution-specific processes of a more particularist type. Social movements are particular and historical, yet at the same time, they can succeed only if they can employ the civil metalanguage to relate these practical problems to the symbolic center of the society and its utopian premises" (Alexander 2006:233). Another critical aspect of the analysis of social movements by Alexander (2006:232), which assumes importance for this article, is that "Movement leaders and organizations initially seen as lonely and downtrodden activists, are transformed into heroic figures embarking on a romantic quest. Melodrama paints the movement and its opponents in black and white, sentimentalizing the conflict in moralistic and simplistic ways."

Seen in the above light, BAMCEF -tapped into civil values and deployed a civil discourse to realize one crucial social and political mission, that is, enhance the political self-representation of the excluded and transform a hierarchically caste-ridden society into a society based on equality, liberty, and fraternity led to progressive socio-cultural movement like DS4 (Dalit- Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (Dalit -Exploited Society Struggle Association)) on 6th December 1981 three years after the launch of BAMCEF (The Oppressed Indian, December 1981) with the Slogan:

THAKUR, BRAHMIN, BANIYAN CHODD
BAKI SAB HAI DS4

The literal translation of DS4 in the aforementioned slogan means that except for Thakurs (Kshatriyas), Brahmins, and Vaishya (Tradesmen), all are DS4.

In this slogan, the first 'D' stands for Dalits, and S4 stands for four 'S' in which the first 'S' stands for Shoshit (Exploited), the second 'S' stands for Samaj (community), the third 'S' stands for Sangharsh (Struggle) and fourth 'S' stands for Samiti. Therefore, we can observe that 'the most significant idioms and narratives employed by' the DS4 movement was 'independent structural position' of the groups 'in the particular sphere.' Further, this slogan tried to deepen the already existing binary between twice-born castes (Manuvadis) and Dalits and Shudras, converted minorities who all are members of Dalit-exploited communities' struggle committee and were termed as Bahujans. In this way, we can argue that DS4 constitutes a 'metalanguage' that further condenses the binary between the backward and so-called upper castes so that their movement can be intensified and masses can easily understand the binary.

As "Social movements are communicative institutions to convince that "history" must be revised," Kanshi Ram to communicate message retorted to "Miracle of Two Feet and Two Wheel"- a forty days Bicycle march touching seven critical states of North India viz., Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Delhi and Chandigarh (Union Territory). This cycle march started on 15 March 1983 to further sensitize the backward castes that they are being used by their oppressors in the game of show-of-strength when political parties (Left, Right, or Centrist) organize their program. Instead of going on Buses and other vehicles of the opposition parties, the SCs, STs, and OBCs use their two feet and their bicycle to build their Organization by participating in the meetings of their own Organization.

Similarly, 'to revise' and declare history as wrong, leaders of DS4 launched another movement, 'Denunciation of Poona Pact.' The Poona pact was signed between Gandhi and Ambedkar on September 24th, 1932. The pact annulled the 'separate electorate' awarded to Scheduled Castes, and a Joint electorate with reserved constituencies was put in place. Hence, on the golden jubilee year of the Poona Pact in September 1982, the Congress party celebrated the anniversary of this pact. However, to mark the occasion, BAMCEF leaders denounced the pact throughout the country because, in the words of

Ambedkar, they thought that it "...has completely disfranchised the Scheduled Castes". They thought they could not send their genuine and committed representatives to parliament and assemblies because of the Poona Pact. Kanshi Ram wrote a book using the metaphor 'Chamcha,' 'The Chamcha Age: An Era of The Stooges' (Ram 1982) to explain the disadvantages of a joint electorate. Quoting Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram highlighted the uncivil behavior of Gandhi by coercing helpless SCs via his fast unto death.

According to Ambedkar, "The Poona Pact is thus fraught with mischief; it was accepted because of the coercive fast of Mr. Gandhi... There was nothing noble in the fast. It was a foul and filthy act. The fast was not for the benefit of the untouchables. It was against them and was the worst form of coercion against helpless people... To live on the mercy of caste Hindus" (The Oppressed Indian, September 1982). The whole exercise established the civil role of B. R. Ambedkar as the true emancipator of the excluded and the subjugated masses.

Further, the 'Peoples' Parliament' was a hundred-day program launched by DS4 on October 14, 1982, to remind the backward castes and communities that the national Parliament is not truly representative. In the same vein it was envisaged to allow the people to debate and discuss their burning issues, which are sidetracked in the national Parliament. According to DS4 leaders, such debate and discussion, if conducted on a large scale over the length and breadth of the country, can influence the national Parliament. Besides, such a debate by the People's Parliament without any power will constantly remind the oppressed and exploited masses to make the national Parliament a truly representative one as early as possible (The Oppressed Indian, October 1982).

DS4 launched another movement, 'Struggle for Equality and Self Respect', a 100-day social action movement launched on December 6, 1983. The movement was launched from the southernmost part of India, Kanyakumari, and soon it engulfed the whole of India from all the other four corners of India- Kargil (Northern), Kohima (northeastern), Puri (eastern), and Porbandar (western). In terms of outreach in 100 days, according to Kanshi Ram's editorial in his mouthpiece, this movement reached 100 million

people. Bicycle activists covered half a million kilometers to travel in the nooks and corners of villages, slums, and other localities in the country. The point that sparked this movement was the increasing economic and social hiatus between the Scheduled Castes and the so-called upper castes. BAMCEF reminded its members that Ambedkar, while submitting the final copy of the Constitution in the constituent assembly, has apprised the members that with the promulgation of the Indian Constitution, we will enter an era of contradiction. By the principle of 'One man, one vote and one vote, one value,' we will have equality in the political realm. However, because of our structure, there will be inequality in social and economic realms.

Under these circumstances, BAMCEF leaders emphatically argued that Ambedkar had suggested that the Indian leaders remove the contradiction as soon as possible to develop democracy. However, after 33 years of democratic rule, the so-called upper castes have taken measures to strengthen and perpetuate this contradiction by way of increasing social and economic inequality. Hence, this movement was launched to make both the oppressor and oppressed conscious of the existing economic and social inequality.

There are several such examples in which DS4 exposed the uncivil nature of Indian society even after the promulgation of the democratic Constitution. However, what is important to note here is that, as Alexander (2006) says, 'most social movements emerge and struggle within the differentiated sphere that possesses distinct value regimes'. However, their 'idioms, codes, and narratives may transcend particular spheres. In this light, we can observe how BAMCEF's movement DS4 transcended from the civil to the political sphere. Also, this movement's significance is that its leaders and organizations that were initially seen as lonely and downtrodden activists' were soon 'transformed into heroic figures embarking on a romantic quest.' For example Kanshi Ram and Ms. Mayawati soon became household names who later on became icons.

BAMCEF TO DS4 TO BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY (BSP) AND CIVIL REPAIR

According to Alexander (2006:265), if a civil sphere retains its autonomy despite the 'destructive intrusion' of other spheres, the possibility for 'civil repair' emerges. According to him, the civil sphere can offer resources to "...repressed in the name of a restricted and particularistic conception of civil competence so that they can save themselves" (ibid). He has suggested this while explaining the social movements around gender and race and asserts that 'they must be viewed as movements of civil repair.' In this light, I have tried to analyze the social movement of the backward castes and communities called DS4, which came out of the BAMCEF civil sphere, leading to civil repair through a political party known as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) established on April 14, 1984. A moot question is why BAMCEF as a civil sphere could lead civil repair through the political sphere only. The answer comes from Ambedkar, who argued that on January 26, 1950, after India became a democracy, it would enter into an era of contradictions. By virtue of 'one man, one vote-one vote, one value,' there will be equality in the political sphere but inequality in the social and economic sphere (Ambedkar 1995: 1216). Hence, because the backward castes and communities got equality in the political sphere, they also approached civil repair through politics. Though BAMCEF led a vibrant movement DS4, the backward BSP came to power four times in India's most populated state, Uttar Pradesh, in 1995 (for four and a half months), in 1997 (for six months), in 2002-2003 (for almost 17 months), and between 2007 and 2012 (for a full term of 5 years) and started the civil repair. As soon as BSP came to power, it converted BAMCEF into a shadow organization and started pursuing its agenda of 'Social Transformation and Economic Emancipation,' which can be considered a social repair.

At the outset, for the first time in the history of India, a Scheduled Caste woman, considered to be triply exploited on the basis of gender, class, and caste, became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. This was itself a soothing impact on the scar-self of the Dalits and other marginalized sections. Second, by capturing political power and

occupying various offices of governance, BSP empowered the powerless backward castes. The whole process instilled confidence among the excluded community, facing repulsion for ages, that they can also occupy positions of power and make policy decisions. Third, BSP leaders tried to civilize the so-called upper castes by capturing political power in a caste-ridden society and challenging their political hegemony. Moreover, the lesson was further endorsed when they gave the so-called upper castes tickets according to the percentage of their population, making them contest elections from BSP (a political party lead and dominated by the backward castes), and then distributing the portfolios of Ministries to them according to their choice. By directly pitching their greeting symbol, Jai Bhim (which comes from Bhimrao Ambedkar), against Jai Sri Rama (the greeting symbol of Hindutva Forces in the name of Lord Shri Rama), BSP challenged the religious symbol of the mainstream upper castes as well.

Further, the BSP, in its fourth government from 2007 to 2012, declared 'Uttar Pradesh a cradle of Buddhism' (See Booklet 2010) against the land of Sri Rama and Krishna as declared by Hindutva forces. With several social welfare schemes like- the Ambedkar village scheme for rural Schedule Castes, Kanshi Ram housing scheme for the urban poor, scholarships for female students below the poverty line, etc., the BSP leaders started redistribution of resources and facilities that were denied to them in the regimes of the so-called upper castes. Renovating and establishing eight Universities with the vision that value-oriented higher education is necessary for the emancipation of the backward castes because they were denied the right to education for ages, BSP laid a strong foundation for social transformation in future times. Here, a special mention may be made regarding a university specifically made for the disabled in the capital city of Lucknow.

The most significant contribution of BSP was that with its strict administration and zero tolerance for communalism, it controlled the regular Hindu-Muslim riots in Uttar Pradesh. Under strict action, the Police Stations were supposed to have a fair representation of the Scheduled Castes in the post of Station House Officer. Secondly, the BSP regime put 1.5 lakhs of Mafias and goons behind bars because its leaders thought that the poor and

backward castes were the worst sufferers at the hands of the mafia and Goons. Third, the effective implementation of the 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 also gave solace to the sufferers of the systems. In this way, Civil Sphere BAMCEF produced a discourse that led to the development of counterpublic and gave birth to a vibrant social movement. Then, BAMCF became a political party, leading to civil repair in Indian society. Today, it is India's third-largest political party. As a result, the exploited and socially excluded castes and communities have been registering their presence in various spheres like- bureaucracy, Industry, non-governmental organizations, Universities, in the field of literature, Media (social and print), and Diaspora as well (Kumar 2021:125-44)

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion and analysis, we can conclude that BAMCEF features civil characteristics and functions as propounded by Alexander (2006). BAMCEF has created a space for the subjugated and excluded castes in Indian society to critically evaluate the mainstream and develop solidarity among the SCs, STs, OBCs, and religious minorities so that they can affirm their human and fundamental rights. Unlike the revolutionary movement of Afro-Americans, BAMCEF was/is a constitutional and democratic movement and was a non-political, non-religious, and non-agitational movement. It drew from a civil sphere in India that predated the Indian democratic constitution and went far back to medieval India. It has successfully highlighted the uncivil ways in which the so-called upper castes tried to subjugate and hegemonize them. BAMCEF created a discourse that, in turn, created a counterpublic. Further, it gave birth to a vibrant movement produced by the political party BSP, which led to civil repair by redistributing resources to the deprived castes and challenging the hegemony of the so-called upper castes.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alexander, C. Jeffery, 2006, *The Civil Sphere*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- [2] 2016, *Progress and disillusion: Civil repair and its discontents*, Thesis Eleven, vol. 137 (1), pp. 72-82, Sage.
- [3] Alexander, C., Jeffery, and Stack Trevor, 2019, *Breaching the Civil Order: Radicalism and the Civil Sphere*, Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Ambedkar, B.R., 1979, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Volume 1*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.
- [5] 1987, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Volume 3*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.
- [6] 1994, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Volume 13*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.
- [7] Austin, Granville, 2002, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [8] Dirks, Nicholas, B., 2002, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Permanent Black, Delhi.
- [9] Kane, Anne, (in press), *The Northern Ireland Republican Movement and Counterpublic Construction, 1969-1976*.
- [10] Kumar, Sanjay 'Sanjay', 2012, *Sahib Kanshi Ram: A Socio-Political Giant*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi.
- [11] Kumar, Vivek, 2014, *Inequality in India: Caste and Hindu Social Order*, Transcience, Vol. 5, Issue 1, (pp36-52), <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/transcience/page1.htm> (accessed on 30-09-22, New Delhi).
- [12] 2014a, *Caste and Democracy in India: A Perspective from Below*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi.
- [13] 2020, *Dalit Movements*, in Biswajit Ghosh (ed.), *Social Movements: Concepts, Experiences and Concerns*, Sage Texts, New Delhi.
- [14] 2021, *Dalit assertion and Different Shades of movements defining Dalits: From accorded to asserted one*, in Vivek Sachdeva, Queeny Pradhan and Anu Venugopalan (eds.) *Identities in South Asia: Conflicts and Assertions*, Routledge, London.
- [15] Mathew, Joseph, 1986, *Ideology, Protest and Social Mobility*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi.
- [16] O'Hanlon, Rosalind, 1985, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-century Western India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi.
- [17] Omvedt, Gail, 1976, *Cultural Revolt In A Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay.
- [18] 2008, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anti-caste Intellectuals*, Navayan, New Delhi.
- [19] Oommen, T.K., 2007, *Knowledge and Society: Situating Sociology and Social Anthropology*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [20] Ram, Kanshi, 1981, *An Introduction to BAMCEF*, (Self Published) 5323, Hardhyan Singh Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi.
- [21] 1982, *The Chamcha Age: An Era of Stooges*, (Self Published) 5323, Hardhyan Singh Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi.
- [22] Shewde, Uttam, YEAR? *Manyavar Kanshi Ram: Writings and Speeches*, SamtaPrakashan, Deeksha Bhoomi Sandesh, Nagpur (Maharashtra).
- [23] Singh, Y., (1994), *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.
- [24] Veeramani, K, Dr. 2005, *Collected Works of Periyar E.V.R*, The Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution, Chennai.
- [25] Waghmore, Suyakant, 2013, *Civility against Caste: Dalit Politics and Citizenship in Western India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- [26] Booklet, 2010, published by Information and Public Relations Department, UP, printed by Prakash Packagers, Lucknow.

(The earlier version of the paper was presented in the 'Civil Sphere in India' workshop organized by Jeffery Alexander at the Centre for Cultural Sociology, University of Yale, from 22-23 October 2022. I thank Prof Jeffery Alexander, Suryakant Waghmore (IIT Mumbai), and Dr. Gaurav Pathania (EMU in Virginia) for their insights and comments and several rounds of discussions on the topic.)

Received on 23-02-2024

Accepted on 09-03-2024

Published on 25-03-2024

© 2024 Vivek Kumar; Licensee ATSK Publishers.

This is an open-access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>), which permits unrestricted, noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.