

The Evolution of Dalit Political Consciousness in India: Electoral Politics and Social Movements (1952–2024)

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Abstract

Present study explores the evolution of Dalit political consciousness in India from 1952 to 2024 by examining the relationship between electoral politics and social movements. Drawing upon data from the Census of India, the Election Commission of India, state statistical reports, and established scholarly literature, it traces five major phases of Dalit political development, from Congress dominance and reserved-seat politics to the rise of the Dalit Panthers, the Bahujan Samaj Party, coalition politics, and contemporary political realignments. The study argues that constitutional safeguards and electoral reservations alone were insufficient to ensure substantive political empowerment. Instead, Dalit political consciousness evolved through sustained social mobilization, Ambedkarite ideology, autonomous organization, and grassroots activism. It further highlights regional variations, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Punjab, while examining the impact of political fragmentation, sub-caste differentiation, and recent electoral changes. The study concludes that Dalit political consciousness remains a dynamic and evolving force, shaped by democratic participation, constitutional values, and continuous struggles for social justice, equality, dignity, and inclusive political representation in contemporary India.

Keywords – Dalit, Dalit Politics, Dalit Movement, Dalit Politicisation

Introduction

The political journey of India's Dalit communities since the first general election of 1952 represents one of the most consequential, and least adequately theorized, transformations in modern Indian democracy. Constituting roughly sixteen to seventeen percent of India's population according to successive Census enumerations of Scheduled Castes (Census of India 2011: p. 11), Over the past seven decades, Dalits have progressed from being largely dependent on upper-caste political leadership to becoming an influential electoral force and developing an independent political identity. This study explains how Dalit political consciousness has changed over time by using two types of information that are usually studied separately. The first includes official government records, such as the Census of India, Election Commission of India (ECI) reports, and state statistical reports, which provide information about elections, voting, and political representation. The second includes books, research articles, and doctoral studies that describe the history and development of Dalit social movements. By combining these two sources, the study shows that Dalit political consciousness did not develop only because of constitutional provisions like reservation or

because of political parties. It also grew through the efforts of Dalit leaders and social movements, the experience of participating in elections, and the changing political choices of Dalit voters as they became dissatisfied with the Congress Party and later with other political parties (Jaffrelot, 2003, pp. 14-17).

The study is organized chronologically into five phases: the Congress-dominant phase of reserved dependency (1952–67); the phase of movement radicalization and the Dalit Panther insurgency (1968–84); the period of Bahujan assertion and the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (1984–2000s); the phase of fragmentation, sub-caste differentiation, and coalition bargaining (2000s–2014); and the most recent phase of Dalit politics under Hindutva hegemony, marked by both co-optation and renewed grassroots assertion (2014–2024). Each section draws on quantitative indicators, reserved constituency counts, voter turnout differentials, candidate nomination patterns, and seat-share data alongside qualitative movement history.

Conceptualizing Dalit Political Consciousness

Before examining the historical development of Dalit political consciousness, it is important to understand what the term means. Dalit political consciousness is different from simply participating in elections as a Scheduled Caste voter. It refers to the awareness among Dalits that caste-based discrimination is a social and political problem that can be challenged through collective action and organized movements, rather than something that must be accepted as part of society (Omvedt, 1994, p. 3; Guru, 2000, p. 110). This awareness developed over time through education, urbanization, religious conversion, political participation, and the influence of the Ambedkarite movement (Zelliot, 1996, pp. 26, 34). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played the most important role in this process. Through organizations such as the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, the Independent Labour Party, and the Scheduled Castes Federation, he encouraged Dalits to organize, demand equal rights, and participate actively in politics. His ideas and leadership laid the foundation for the growth of Dalit political consciousness in modern India (Zelliot, 1996, p. 73).

It is important to understand that Dalit political consciousness is not the same as the reservation of seats in legislatures. The Constitution of India, through Articles 330 and 332, provides reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies according to their population in each state. This system was first implemented in the 1951-52 general elections (Election Commission of India, 1955, pp. 9-12). Although reservation ensured that Scheduled Castes had representation in legislatures, it did not always mean that their interests were effectively represented. Until the 1980s, most reserved seats were won by Congress candidates who often followed the policies of the party leadership rather than raising the independent concerns of Dalit communities (Galanter, 1984, pp. 41-46). Therefore, this study argues that there is an important difference between having reserved seats and having leaders who genuinely represent Dalit interests. Understanding this difference is essential for explaining the growth of Dalit political consciousness in India.

1. The Congress Dominant Phase Reserved Dependency (1952–1967)

According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), 72 out of 489 Lok Sabha seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the first general election of 1951-52. After the delimitation of constituencies, the number of reserved seats increased to 76 in 1957 and 79 in 1962, reflecting the Scheduled Caste population, which was about 15 percent of India's total population according to the 1951 and 1961 Censuses (Election Commission of India, 1955, p. 21; Election Commission of India, 1959, p. 18; Election Commission of India, 1962, p. 24; Census of India, 1961, p. 7). During this period, the Indian National Congress won more than 80 percent of the reserved Lok Sabha seats in the first three general elections (Election Commission of India, 1962, pp. 40-42). According to Kothari (1964, pp. 1162-1165), this happened because the Congress Party was politically dominant and there were very few strong opposition parties representing Dalit interests in most parts of India.

Many Scheduled Caste candidates elected on Congress tickets depended more on the support of the party leadership than on the support of Dalit voters. As a result, they often followed the policies of the

Congress Party instead of independently raising the concerns of their communities (Chandra, 2004, pp. 50-51). Government records from states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra also show that, despite having reserved seats in legislatures, Scheduled Castes remained underrepresented in important positions such as ministers, cooperative society leaders, and panchayat chairpersons (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Uttar Pradesh, 1965, pp. 88-91). This shows that political reservation alone was not enough to ensure equal participation in decision-making or effective representation of Dalit interests.

The Republican Party of India and its Limits

After the death of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 1956, the Scheduled Castes Federation was reorganized as the Republican Party of India (RPI) in 1957. It was the first major political party formed to represent Dalits independently at the national level (Zelliot, 1996, p. 174). However, the party achieved only limited success. In the 1962 and 1967 Lok Sabha elections, the RPI won only a few seats, mainly in Maharashtra, some parts of the Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab. Its national vote share remained very low, making it difficult to challenge the political dominance of the Congress Party (Election Commission of India, 1967, pp. 55-58). According to Zelliot (1996) and Gokhale-Turner (1979), one of the main reasons for this poor performance was that the RPI was divided into several groups because of regional differences and leadership disputes.

Another important reason was India's electoral system. In reserved constituencies, only the candidate must belong to a Scheduled Caste, but all voters, regardless of caste, can vote. Therefore, Dalit candidates needed the support of both Scheduled Caste and non-Scheduled Caste voters to win elections (Galanter, 1984, p. 49). In many cases, they also depended on the support of powerful local leaders from dominant castes. As a result, some elected representatives gave greater importance to party interests and influential local groups than to the independent concerns of Dalit communities (Deshpande & Palshikar, 2008, pp. 96-98). This shows that political reservation alone could not always ensure independent and effective representation of Dalit interests.

2. Radicalization and the Dalit Panther Movement (1968–1984)

During the late 1960s and 1970s, Dalit political consciousness changed in important ways. Instead of depending mainly on elections, many Dalits began organizing social movements to fight against caste discrimination and social injustice. A major turning point came in 1972 with the formation of the Dalit Panthers in Mumbai by Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar, and Raja Dhale. Inspired by the African American Black Panther movement, the Dalit Panthers openly opposed caste discrimination, violence against Dalits, landlessness, and poor living conditions in urban slums. Unlike the Republican Party of India (RPI), which mainly focused on elections, the Dalit Panthers believed that social protest and direct action were necessary to achieve justice (Omvedt, 1994, pp. 142-148). According to Rao (2009), the movement strengthened Dalit identity by promoting the ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, and Karl Marx and by challenging both caste oppression and social inequality.

This period also witnessed the growth of Dalit literature (*Dalit Sahitya*), which became another important source of social awareness. Literary journals such as *Asmitadarsh* encouraged Dalit writers to share their experiences of discrimination and untouchability. Through autobiographies, poems, and essays, these writers gave a voice to the struggles of Dalit communities and inspired people to fight for equality and dignity (Limale, 2004, p. 31). Research studies have shown that Dalit literature played a significant role in creating political awareness, especially among educated Dalit youth (Kamble, 1991, cited in Rao, 2009, p. 168).

Electoral Developments

Although the Dalit Panthers became an influential social movement, they did not develop into a strong national political party. By the late 1970s, the movement had split into different groups. Some leaders joined the Congress Party, while others, including Ramdas Athawale, continued their political activities through the Republican Party of India (RPI) (Rao, 2009, p. 178). Even so, Election Commission of India (ECI) reports

show that during the 1971, 1977, and 1980 general elections, the number of independent and small-party candidates contesting Scheduled Caste reserved seats increased. At the same time, the Congress Party's dominance in these constituencies, especially in Maharashtra, began to decline, although it remained the strongest political party (Election Commission of India, 1978, pp. 33-39). The 1977 general election, in which the Janata Party defeated the Congress at the national level, marked the first major challenge to Congress dominance in many Scheduled Caste reserved constituencies.

The 1981 Census reported that Scheduled Castes made up about 15.05 percent of India's population. However, their population was not evenly distributed across the country. States such as Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu had larger Scheduled Caste populations than the national average (Census of India, 1981, p. 14). These regional differences influenced the growth of Dalit movements. Maharashtra became a centre of the Ambedkarite movement and the Dalit Panthers, Punjab witnessed strong Ad Dharm and Ravidasia movements, and Uttar Pradesh later became the main base of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). In contrast, states with smaller or more divided Scheduled Caste populations experienced weaker Dalit political movements (Juergensmeyer, 1982, pp. 5-6; Rawat, 2011, pp. 187-188).

3. Bahujan Assertion and the Rise of the BSP (1984–2000s)

Kanshi Ram and the Theorization of the Bahujan

One of the most important developments in Dalit politics after Independence was the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) by Kanshi Ram in 1984. Before starting the BSP, Kanshi Ram had established two organizations: BAMCEF (All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation) in 1978 and DS-4 (Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti) in 1981. These organizations helped build a strong social and political base for the BSP (Narayan, 2011, pp. 44-45). Kanshi Ram's main idea was to unite Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and religious minorities into a single political group called the Bahujan or "majority people." He believed that these communities could work together to challenge the political dominance of upper-caste groups (Narayan, 2006, p. 88; Pai, 2002, pp. 23-24). This approach was different from earlier Dalit political parties such as the Republican Party of India (RPI), which mainly focused on Scheduled Castes alone. Kanshi Ram also encouraged educated Scheduled Caste government employees to become active members of the movement and support it financially and organizationally. This strong network of dedicated workers played an important role in the growth of the BSP (Pai, 2002, p. 31).

Electoral Growth of the BSP

The Election Commission of India (ECI) records show that the BSP gradually became a major political force. In the 1984 Lok Sabha election, the party received very few votes. However, by the 1989 general election, it had won its first Lok Sabha seats and secured about 2.07 percent of the national vote, mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab (Election Commission of India, 1990, pp. 71-74). The BSP's growth was even more impressive in Uttar Pradesh. It won about 13 Assembly seats in 1989, increased its strength to 67 seats in 1993 through an alliance with the Samajwadi Party, and achieved its greatest success in 2007, when it won 206 seats and formed the government with a clear majority (Election Commission of India, 1994, pp. 28-31; Election Commission of India, 2007, pp. 19-22).

The BSP's vote share in Uttar Pradesh also increased steadily, rising from 9.4 percent in 1989 to 23.1 percent in 1996, 25.4 percent in 2002, and 30.4 percent in 2007 (Election Commission of India, 2007, p. 24). Scholars such as Jaffrelot (2003, pp. 397-398) and Chandra (2004, p. 153) consider the BSP one of the most successful examples of an independent Dalit political party that transformed social support into political power. By 2007, the party had also expanded its support by attracting voters from upper-caste communities, especially Brahmins, while continuing to represent Dalit interests (Pai, 2007, pp. 1334-1338).

The Role of Mayawati

The rise of Mayawati marked another important stage in Dalit politics. She became the first Dalit woman to serve as the Chief Minister of an Indian state, holding the office four times in Uttar Pradesh between 1995 and 2012 (Narayan, 2006, p. 121). Her leadership became a symbol of Dalit empowerment, especially for Dalit women. During her tenure, the BSP government-built statues, memorials, and public parks dedicated to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, and other Dalit leaders. These projects aimed to honour Dalit history and increase the visibility of Dalit identity in public spaces (Narayan, 2011, pp. 162-164). Government records also show that significant public funds were allocated for these memorials and parks during this period (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Uttar Pradesh, 2011, pp. 142-145). However, researchers have pointed out that political success did not solve all the problems faced by Scheduled Castes. Studies based on National Sample Survey data and state statistical reports show that even during BSP governments, many Dalits continued to experience lower literacy rates, limited land ownership, and higher levels of poverty compared with other social groups (Kumar, 2014, pp. 211-214). This suggests that although the BSP greatly increased Dalit political representation, social and economic equality remained an unfinished goal.

4. Fragmentation, Sub-Caste Differences, and Coalition Politics

Declining Pan-Dalit Unity

During the 1990s and 2000s, Dalit politics in India gradually became more diverse and fragmented. Earlier, political leaders and organizations attempted to unite all Scheduled Castes (SCs) under a common Dalit identity. However, as electoral competition increased, differences among various Dalit sub-castes also became more visible. Kumar (2007) describes this process as the "politics of differentiation," where different Scheduled Caste communities began supporting different political parties according to their local interests and political priorities (Kumar, 2007, pp. 121-124). The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), although established as a party representing all Dalits, depended mainly on the support of the Jatav/Chamar community in Uttar Pradesh. Other Scheduled Caste groups, including Pasis, Valmikis, Koris, Dhobis, and Khatiks, often showed lower and less consistent support for the BSP. This political division allowed regional parties and national parties to attract different Dalit communities through separate electoral strategies (Kumar, 2007, p. 130). Studies conducted by Lokniti-CSDS after the 2014 Lok Sabha election also found that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made significant gains among non-Jatav Dalits, while the BSP retained stronger support among Jatav voters. These findings suggest that Dalit voting behaviour is no longer uniform but varies considerably across sub-castes. The 2011 Census of India also supports this argument by showing considerable diversity within the Scheduled Caste population. India had 201.4 million Scheduled Castes, constituting 16.6 percent of the country's total population. However, literacy rates, occupational patterns, and population concentration differed widely among Scheduled Caste communities across states, indicating that Dalits cannot be treated as a single homogeneous political group (Census of India, 2011, pp. 11, 27-30). These differences have influenced political preferences and leadership patterns over time.

Regional Differences: The Punjab Experience

Punjab presents a unique example of Dalit politics. According to the 2011 Census, Scheduled Castes constitute 31.9 percent of the state's population, the highest proportion among all major Indian states (Census of India, 2011, p. 18). Despite this large population, the BSP has never achieved the same electoral success in Punjab as it did in Uttar Pradesh. Instead, Dalit political identity in Punjab has been influenced by the Ad Dharm movement, the Ravidasia religious tradition, and institutions such as Dera Sach Khand Ballan, which have strengthened social and cultural identity alongside political awareness (Ram, 2007, pp. 4067-4072; Jodhka, 2009, p. 53). Election Commission reports show that the BSP remained a relatively small political force in Punjab despite the state's large Scheduled Caste population. Political competition in Punjab has traditionally been dominated by the Indian National Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal, while more recently the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has emerged as another major political actor.

Consequently, Dalit voters in Punjab have been divided among several political parties rather than supporting a single Dalit-based party.

Coalition Politics and Changing Electoral Strategies

From the late 1990s onwards, Indian political parties increasingly adopted coalition-building strategies to attract Dalit voters. Instead of relying only on traditional caste support, parties attempted to combine Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities, and sections of upper-caste voters into broader electoral alliances. Scholars describe this process as social engineering, where parties expand their support by appealing to multiple social groups simultaneously (Hasan, 1998, p. 78). The BSP itself successfully implemented this strategy during the 2007 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. Under the leadership of Mayawati, the party formed a broad alliance of Dalits, Brahmins, and other communities, winning 206 of 403 Assembly seats with approximately 30.4 percent of the popular vote. This was the first time that the BSP secured an absolute majority in Uttar Pradesh and demonstrated that coalition politics could transform a regional Dalit party into a ruling party.

After 2014, the BJP adopted a different electoral strategy by expanding its support among non-Jatav Scheduled Castes and non-Yadav OBCs through welfare programmes, symbolic recognition of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and greater representation of these communities within the party organization. Post-election surveys conducted by Lokniti-CSDS indicate that this strategy significantly increased BJP support among several non-Jatav Dalit communities, contributing to the BSP's electoral decline in Uttar Pradesh. Election Commission data further show that national parties have gradually increased the number of Scheduled Caste candidates contesting from both reserved and general constituencies. However, Dalit candidates continue to constitute only a small proportion of contestants in unreserved seats, indicating that descriptive political representation has improved more rapidly than substantive representation in leadership positions. Overall, the period since the 1990s demonstrates that Dalit politics has become increasingly complex. Political competition now reflects regional identities, sub-caste differences, coalition strategies, and changing voter preferences rather than a single unified Dalit political movement. While these developments have broadened political participation, they have also made it more difficult to sustain a common pan-Dalit political identity across India.

5. Dalit Politics under Hindutva, 2014-2024

Electoral Decline of the BSP and Changing Dalit Voting Patterns

The period between 2014 and 2024 marked a major transformation in Dalit politics in India. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the dominant political force at the national level after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), once regarded as the principal political voice of Dalits, experienced a steady electoral decline. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), the BSP won 21 Lok Sabha seats in 2009, but failed to win a single seat in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, despite securing approximately 4.1 percent of the national vote. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the BSP contested in alliance with the Samajwadi Party and won 10 seats, most of them from Uttar Pradesh. However, in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the party's performance declined again, winning only one parliamentary seat, indicating a significant reduction in its political influence (Election Commission of India, 2014; 2019). Political analysts attribute this decline to several factors. One of the most important was the gradual shift of non-Jatav Scheduled Caste voters towards the BJP. Post-election surveys conducted by Lokniti-CSDS indicate that while the Jatav community largely continued to support the BSP, many Pasis, Valmikis, Khatiks, Koris, and other non-Jatav Dalit communities increasingly voted for the BJP in the 2014 and 2019 elections. This change reduced the BSP's ability to maintain a united Dalit vote bank and weakened its electoral position in northern India (Lokniti-CSDS National Election Studies, 2019).

The BJP adopted a broad strategy to expand its support among Dalit communities. Along with welfare programmes such as *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana*, *Ujjwala Yojana*, *Swachh Bharat Mission*, *Ayushman Bharat*, and *PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana*, the government also emphasized the legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

by developing the Panch Teerth sites associated with his life and celebrating Ambedkar Jayanti at the national level. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment also expanded scholarships, hostels, and educational assistance for Scheduled Castes under various centrally sponsored schemes. These initiatives helped the BJP strengthen its appeal among sections of Dalit voters while presenting itself as a party committed to social inclusion (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Annual Report 2022-23). Despite these efforts, scholars argue that welfare benefits alone cannot fully explain changes in Dalit voting behaviour. Waghmore (2020) and Pai (2020) observe that the BJP also invested heavily in promoting Dalit leaders within the party, increasing outreach to local communities, and building alliances with non-Jatav Scheduled Castes. This strategy gradually reduced the BSP's influence outside its traditional Jatav support base.

Grassroots Dalit Mobilisation and Social Movements

Although the BSP weakened electorally, Dalit social movements remained active throughout the decade. Several incidents of caste-based violence led to widespread protests and renewed political awareness among Dalit youth. One of the most significant events was the death of Rohith Vemula, a research scholar at the University of Hyderabad, in January 2016. His death generated nationwide protests demanding equal opportunities and an end to caste discrimination in higher education. Universities across India witnessed demonstrations, public discussions, and student movements that brought issues of caste discrimination into national political debate. Later in July 2016, the public assault on Dalit men in Una, Gujarat, for skinning a dead cow triggered another nationwide protest movement. Thousands of Dalits marched across Gujarat demanding justice, dignity, and protection from caste violence. The incident attracted widespread coverage in newspapers such as *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, and *The Tribune*, making caste discrimination a central issue in national politics.

Government data also indicate that caste-based crimes continue to remain a serious concern. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cases registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have remained consistently high during the last decade. The Crime in India 2022 report recorded more than 57,000 crimes against Scheduled Castes, reflecting both the persistence of caste discrimination and increased reporting of offences under the law (NCRB, *Crime in India* 2022). Another important development was the emergence of the Bhim Army under the leadership of Chandrashekhar Azad in western Uttar Pradesh. Established in 2015, the organisation focused on protecting Dalit rights, improving education, and responding quickly to incidents of caste violence. Unlike the BSP, which mainly concentrated on electoral politics, the Bhim Army relied on grassroots mobilisation, public protests, and legal support for victims of caste discrimination. In 2020, Chandrashekhar Azad also established the Azad Samaj Party, attempting to combine social activism with electoral politics. A major turning point came in April 2018, when Dalit organisations across India organised the Bharat Bandh to protest against the Supreme Court's decision that was widely perceived as weakening the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The nationwide protests led the Government of India to pass the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2018, restoring the original provisions of the Act. The movement demonstrated that Dalit organisations retained the ability to mobilise large numbers of people independently of political parties.

Dalit Politics in the General Election (2024)

The 2024 Lok Sabha election highlighted the changing nature of Dalit politics. While the BJP remained the single largest party nationally, the opposition INDIA alliance, particularly the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, improved its performance in several Scheduled Caste reserved constituencies, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Political observers and post-election analyses suggested that issues such as unemployment, inflation, social justice, and concerns regarding the protection of constitutional reservations influenced Dalit voting behaviour during the election. Although the BSP recorded its weakest electoral performance in decades, Dalit voters did not shift uniformly towards any one political party. Instead, voting patterns varied across regions, generations, and sub-castes. In Uttar Pradesh, Jatav voters continued to support the

BSP in significant numbers, while many non-Jatav Dalit communities supported the BJP or regional parties. In Punjab, Dalit voters remained divided among the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, BJP, BSP, and regional parties, reflecting the state's unique political and social structure.

Conclusion

The evolution of Dalit political consciousness in India between 1952 and 2024 reflects a gradual transformation from political dependence to greater political participation and assertion. In the early decades after Independence, constitutional provisions such as reserved legislative seats ensured political representation for Scheduled Castes, but they did not always guarantee independent leadership or effective representation of Dalit interests. The emergence of organizations such as the Republican Party of India (RPI), the Dalit Panthers, and later the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) marked important milestones in the development of an autonomous Dalit political identity. These movements, inspired by the ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, played a significant role in promoting social justice, political awareness, and democratic participation among Dalit communities. The study also demonstrates that Dalit politics has become increasingly diverse over time. Regional differences, sub-caste identities, coalition politics, and changing electoral strategies have reshaped voting behaviour across different states. While the BSP successfully mobilized Dalit voters and achieved political power, especially in Uttar Pradesh, its decline after 2014 highlights the changing nature of Indian politics. National parties, particularly the BJP, expanded their support among several Dalit communities through welfare programmes, symbolic recognition of Ambedkar, and broader social coalitions. At the same time, new organizations such as the Bhim Army and various grassroots movements continued to raise issues related to caste discrimination, social justice, and constitutional rights.

Overall, the study suggests that Dalit political consciousness cannot be understood only through election results or political representation. It has evolved through the combined influence of constitutional safeguards, social movements, leadership, education, and continuous struggles against caste-based inequality. Although significant progress has been made in expanding political participation, challenges such as social discrimination, economic inequality, and uneven political representation continue to affect Dalit communities. Therefore, strengthening constitutional values, ensuring inclusive governance, and promoting equal opportunities remain essential for achieving the broader goals of social justice and democratic equality in India.

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