

Name –Laxman Singh

Supervisor Name- Dr. Mujib Alam

Department- MMAJ Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia

Topic of the study-Socio-Political Assertion through Art forms: A case study of Dalits in India and Nepal

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Abstract

Art is manifestation of ideas, in contemporary world Art form has become an instrument of social and political expression. In south Asian societies especially in India and Nepal Dalits are using Art forms as a emancipatory tool. Art forms like songs, theatre and visual imagery are being used for social and political assertion. For Dalits the meaning of Social assertion is denial of pre established birth based caste hierarchy, advocated by religious scriptures. Dalits have been creating parallel theological and spiritual movements based on cultural symbols. Dalits are also trying to image makeover as practicers of Arts. There are many internal and external factors influencing this new assertion. Dalit Panther movement was inspired by Black Panther movement of United States of America. Social assertion of Dalit began in medieval times when saint like kabir, Ravidas denied Brahminical notions of caste hierarchy and challenged monopoly of social elites on God and spiritual matters. Modern Dalit political assertion began with Ambedkar in India. His Demands of separate electoral and reservation in jobs paved paths of economic and social upward mobility of Dalits. Adi Dharma movement in different state gave a new identity to Dalits. Saint and social reformer Swami Achhutanand composed many plays as a propaganda tool to counter Brahminical hegemony. 2 Different social movements also influenced Dalits to unite and to fight for their rights. After independence Maharashtra became hub of dalit cultural production. Many prominent Dalit began to write their autobiographies followed by stories and poem and plays about dalit life. Bahujan Samaj Party, cultural wing identified many Dalit heroes like Jhalkaribai Kori, Uda Devi Pasi, Mahaviri Devi and propagated about them through songs, plays and imagery. This propaganda helped Bahujan Samaj party to get niche in different Dalit castes. After getting power in Uttar Pradesh , Bahujan samaj party, s leadership created many monuments dedicated to dalit heroes. Huge money was spend on these monuments. In Punjab , upwardly mobile Dalits have began dalit pop. Which mentions caste name. like putt chamara de. In Uttar Pradesh ,young and innovative dalit theatre director like Ramendra Chakrwardi ,Dev Kumar ,Shayam Kumar are producing though provoking plays based on Dalit themes. Many painters are regularly painting on dalit themes. Statues of Ambedkar are in

vogue in Dalit households and colonies. Khela of Reshma and Chuharmal is very good example how Dalits are asserting for a dignified place in society. In visual art many dalit painters are coming forward for their assertion. Savi Savarkar is flag bearer of this new radical Dalit brigade. His sketches convey an intense feeling. He is the first Indian painter who through his work wanted to portray plight of Devdasis. In Nepal Dalits constitute around 17% of total population. During monarchy Nepal was governed by Muluki Ain, Nepalese constitution which was heavily influenced by Manu Smriti. After Maoist insurgency Dalits got empowered. After the democratization of Nepal, many NGOs helped Dalit artists to create a new genre of art which revolves on dalit themes. Songs, paintings and Kachahari theatre [Nepali version of forum theatre] all are educating Dalits for their rights. Gandhrvas are asserting their identity by singing songs on new themes. Painters like Aruna Hingmang is creating a new language Dalit woman assertion. Her paintings depict Dalits life in a dynamic way. Kachahari theatre is healing wounds of violence affected Dalits and paving a way for catharsis. Social assertion is also found in songs of Nepalese Musahars. Jagran media centre, a NGO founded by Dalit journalists has produced a television serial on Dalit theme named DALAN. Jagran media centre has produced hundreds of songs about rights of Dalits, about Dalit culture. They regularly air these songs through their community Radio in various districts of Nepal. Badi women, who used to entertain aristocrats are now turned into sex workers, many NGOs working for them, educating their children and inspiring to indulge in meaningful art practices. Art practices are changing image of Dalit. Emergence of Dalit aesthetics not only countered pre-conceived notions of aesthetics but also gave a boost to Dalit identity. It's interesting to note these art practices are somehow inspired by globalization but creating new identity.