

The Bahujan Samaj and Indian Society: Some Questions

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By Bahujan, we mean the majority of people in India. Presumably, our interest in the Bahujan lies in understanding their lives and circumstances; and having understood it, to imagine a process that leads to their liberation from the chains that bind them to poverty, indignity and continuous dispossession of the fruits of their labor.

Several thoughts arise in this context, addressing which may help us develop our ideas further.

1. Evidently, we seem to have rejected a “caste” view of the composition of the Bahujan Samaj (by excluding from it the “developed” sections of castes). In that case, while speaking about its empowerment, we must be able to differentiate it from the *rule of the people*, that is, a system that promotes *the greatest good for the greatest number*, which is a standard definition of (utilitarian) democracy. And list out distinctions that go beyond the observed fact that “democracy” seems to have failed everywhere, having served as a proxy of imperialism for the last few centuries, except for a brief period in the 20th century in some parts of the world.
2. At first glance, it appears that Bahujan is an “outside-in” category that helps us categorize it as a conceptual entity from the outside. To understand this more clearly, a few questions need answers:
 - A. The Indian society is deeply divided along caste, class, language and regional lines, implying that the Bahujan Samaj is currently a mere large collection of people. Obviously, the Bahujan Samaj does not constitute a homogenous category. The point however is, are there dimensions along which their heterogeneity may be potentially superseded? If yes, what are they?
 - B. It seems that a partial pre-requisite for their self-recognition as a Samaj is for them to understand the circumstances that have led to their enslavement. Does the Bahujan Samaj consider its state to be one of distress whose evolution needs to be understood?
 - C. Since its members do not consider themselves today as forming a Samaj, how will such a consciousness come about? Can they derive that by themselves, or do they need something from us, that is, the outsiders?
 - D. We are of the belief that the Bahujan Samaj collectively possesses Knowledge and Skills derived outside of the formal education system which serve its livelihood needs against all odds, the values of cooperation and Bhaichara which serve its conduct and the mechanisms of Nyaya and Spirituality which serve its need for justice.
 - E. What then do they lack due to which the lives of the Bahujan is in deep distress?
 - F. What type of transformation of the Bahujan Samaj are we interested in? Does the Samaj desire to be transformed?
 - G. As we understand, how should the Bahujan be transformed: economically, culturally or in some other fashion?

- a. If economically, what is the cause of their sad state? If through exploitation, by whom and how?
 - b. If culturally, how has this come about? Who has done this?
 - c. If in some other fashion, what is it?
- H. What is holding them back from making changes to their lot themselves? Why are they unable to articulate what ails them?
 - a. Are these factors economic? In which case we may have to look at the structure and practice of production, consumption, distribution, capital, wages, profits, rent etc. And how the means to impoverish people are created and sustained.
 - b. Is the problem due to society being Sanskritic, Patriarchal, dominated by markets influenced by imperialism, etc.?
 - c. If they have knowledge, skills and bhaichara, why are they unable to forge a collective consciousness that can help them overcome the impediments to their lives?
- I. For nearly 75 years now, there have been sections of the Bahujan Samaj that have been elevated to the status of the elite classes through various mechanisms including reservation policies etc. Why are these erstwhile members of the Samaj unable to create changes in it and what underlies their turning away from it?
- J. What are the mechanisms through which the Bahujan Samaj can find its feet again and break the chains that bind it?
- K. Marx had a theory for this. So did Gandhi and perhaps a few others. What is that theory which enables us to understand the distress of the Bahujan Samaj considering its roots, connections with the ruling classes, mechanisms for economic and cultural deprivation, etc.? Or to find methods to overcome the oppressive structures underlying these?
- L. Meanwhile, there is a great churn in the international arena with great power rivalries, economic upheavals, challenges to the unipolar world and dangerous wars developing all around us. What are the implications of this for the Bahujan Samaj?