

## DALIT PANTHERS MOVEMENT AND ITS COUNTER IDEOLOGY AGAINST THE HEGEMONIC CASTE SYSTEM IN MAHARASHTRA

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### ABSTRACT

*Socio-Economic and Political background is responsible for the emergence of Dalit activism and literature. The formation of Dalit Panthers is the revolt of one culture against another culture in relation with the canonical literature, norms of religion and caste. The literature of that time expresses the social reality and the oppression of the Dalits. During the time of Dalit Panthers movement Dalit writers and activists wrote their life experiences. It is a kind of resistance through the literature. The Dalit literature became the one of the global discourse due to the inspiration of Dalit Panther's Movement. It was the Dalit Panthers Movement gave the voice to the voiceless and gave strength to revolt against the injustice to those who were exploited under the name of caste and village duties. Dalit Panther's Movement remained one of the significant organizations after the death of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Literature and activism of Dalit leaders like NamdevDhasal, J.V. Pawar, Raja Dhale, ArunKambke, LatifKhatik, PrahladChendvankar, BhaiSangare, AvinashMahatekar, Anil Kamble, RamdasAthwale, GangadharGade, PreetamkumarShegaonkar, and T. M. Kamble who motivated and mobilized the Dalit youth against the caste issues in Maharashtra.*

**Key Words:** Caste, Literature, Hegemony, Oppression, Resistance.

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Socio-Economic and Political background is responsible for the emergence of Dalit activism and literature. Caste discrimination is the central point of Dalit writing. Caste system helped to maintain hegemony of upper caste in the society. Mr. Nesfield defines caste as “a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but person of their own community” (qtd. in Ketkar 1: 14). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar gave the solution in his *The Annihilation of Caste*(1936). He says caste can be annihilated through material means like inter-caste marriages (Ambedkar 43). Literature gave platform to raise the voices of Dalit and it also paved the way to the rise of Dalit Movements. The earlier Marathi writers wrote about only Upper and Middle Class and the issues of these classes. But the lower caste person could not become their issue or the leading character in their literary works. According to PrahladChendwankar, “it was the need of Dalit to become literate first then writer and activist”\* (75). Dalit writers like AnnabhauSathe, BandhuMadhav, ShankarraoKharat move forward and express the reality of Dalits (Nimbalkar 101).

After taking the education from Milind College, Aurangabad and Siddharth College, Mumbai, the first batch of educated Dalit youths became the part of Little Magazine Movement (1956). It was the time when the mode of realistic writing was emerged. Some of the Marathi magazines like *Vidroha*, *Magova*, and *Amhi* gave platform to raise their voice against the system (Contursi 325). It was the time when the writers like Baburao Bagul created a storm in Marathi literature with the writing of short stories *Jevha MiJaat Chorli*

*Hoti* (1963) and *Maran Swast Hot Ahe* (1969) (Murugkar 82). The various conferences made platform to Dalit youths to express the social reality from their perspective. Ghanshyam Talwatkar, a Marathi Dalit activist and writer, took the initiative to organize various programmes of Dalit youths. He formed Dalit Sahitya Sangh and organized conference in 1958 in Mumbai, Maharashtra Buddhist Sahitya Sabha 1967 (Chendwankar 76-77). 1971's Mahad Buddhist Sahitya Sammelan proved that Educated Dalit youth of Maharashtra has revolted against the age old caste hegemony with the writing about the social reality (77).

The rise of Dalit Panther Movement has some of the prominent reasons, for instance on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1957 The Scheduled Caste Federation came to an end and the Republican Party of India was formed (Limble 6). After the formation of Republican Party of India, the Republican Student Organization was formed which worked college and hostel level. Later on, Republican Party of India was divided into two groups. Both the groups failed to work on the question of caste due to their greed of power, selfishness (Bhole 222). According to Nalini Pandit "Dalit Panthers Movement emerged because anger of Dalit youth against the injustice with Dalits and the doubts against the Republican Party's leadership"\* (qtd. in Limble 8). This is one of the main reasons for the establishment of Dalit Panthers Movement. Another thing is that no single Dalit organization was working effectively at that time. Day by day the exploitation of Dalits increased and the question of caste became critical. It was the time when a powerful Dalit organization needs to come forward against the caste issues. Dr. M.N. Wankhede introduced the Black panthers Movement and Black Literature to Dalits when he came back from America. Dalit youths were highly influenced by the Black Panthers Movement and its literature (Chendwankar 78). It was the need to form a movement which will fight against the injustice with the Dalit. A large number of Dalits were humiliated, beaten, paraded naked, killed and raped because of their castes. On 10th April 1970, Perumal Committee presented its report regarding the atrocities against the Dalits. According to this report 1177 Dalits were reported to be killed due to the caste

factor (qtd. in Dhasal 31). In Parbhani district a village named Brahmangaon where two Dalit women were paraded nakedly because they tried to drink water from SopanDajiba's well (qtd. in Dhasal 29). Looking at the increasing incidents of this kind, Dalit youths planned to form an organization which fights against the social evils of caste system. On 9<sup>th</sup> July 1972, the Dalit Panthers Movement was formed and it gave a platform to Dalit youths to express their thoughts and to fight against injustice (ibid). With the establishment of Dalit Panthers movement Dalit leadership came forward from the oppressed community. The members of the Dalit Panthers movement are Namdev Dhasal, J.V. Pawar, Raja Dhale, Arun Kamble, Latif Khatik, Prahlad Chendvankar, Bhai Sangare, Avinash Mahatekar, Anil Kamble, Ramdas Athwale, Gangadhar Gade, Preetam Kumar Shegaonkar, and T. M. Kamble, etc. (Limbale 7).

Dalit Panthers Movement shaped the thoughts of the Dalit youths. The formation of Dalit Panthers is the revolt of one culture against another culture in relation with the canonical literature, old norms of religion and caste. The literature of that time expresses the harsh realities of the Dalits. Dhasal's *Golpitha* (1971) created a storm in Marathi literature. One of the poems *Mansane* from the above poetry collection expresses various types of crimes took place in this world on the basis of caste, gender and religion. In the end he says that we have to sing the song of humanity and live peacefully (Dhasal 30-32). The language of Dalit writing is different from so called standard language. In his poem *Nimitta 15 August* Dhasal says,

Which female ass's name is freedom  
On which floor of Ramrajya we live\* (Dhasal 72).

This is a revolt against the literary norms in relation with language and tried to express the everyday reality. A large number of Dalit writers inspired from the Dalit Panther Movement (1972) and after 1970 a large number of Dalit life narratives were written by the Dalits who express the lives of oppressed people who belonged from various castes. The life narratives are Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1978), Laxman Mane's *Upra* (1980),

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LaxmanGaikwad's *Uchlya* (1987), Baby Kamble's *SjinaAmucha*(1986), Kumud Pawde's *Antasphot* (1981), Mukta Sarvagod's *MitleliKavade* (1983), Shantabai Dani's *RatrandinAmha*(1990), Janabai Girhe's *Marankala* (1992), Kishor Kale's *Kolhatyacha Por* (1994) and Vimal More's *Teen Dagdachi Chul*(2000). In a certain sense the Dalit Panther Movement gave platform to the emerging Dalit youth and writer.

With the formation of Dalit Panthers the Dalits made counter hegemony against the caste based society. The leader tries to break the religious power that operates in day to day life. The leaders like Raja Dhale and NamdevDhasalgave inspiration to the Dalit youths. Raja Dhale wrote an article entitled '*Kala Swatantriya Din*' which was controversial. He criticized that,

*Sala*National Anthem's insult has three hundred rupees fine. *Salanational* flag is nothing but a cloth. National symbol colored with special color. These symbols have insulted anybody then the fine is three hundred rupees, and Sonna village's woman stripped naked has fifty rupees fine. National flag's insult and flag will have to put someone's backsides\*(qtd. in Limbale106).

This title proved that, still Dalits are entrapped in the net of slavery and the question arises is whether the national symbol is important or its people? This is the situation of Dalit women who were victimized on the basis of their caste. Dalit Panther Movement (1972) gave the sense of self-respect and made them aware about their own oppression at both village and urban level. Dalit Panther has its own style to solve the problems of both cities and villages. For instance, Bhugaon case in Pune district uncovers an incident where a dalit woman was raped by an upper caste man. On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1973,ChandrakantPhalke, an upper caste man, raped a Dalit girl. Dalit Panther decided to teach a lesson to the villages and they armed with bat, hockey, swords, chain, clubs etc. entered in Bhugaon. They succeed to beat the village wrestlers and asked the villagers whereabouts ofChandrakantPhakle. At that time,Namdevrao Mate, a MLA, came and convinced Dalit Panthers that he will help to find ChandrakantPhalke and punish him (Dhasal 141). This

incident shows that Dalit Panther forced the state administration to punish the criminals. Earlier, police did not help the victims. The incidents of Varli riot and Naigaon proved that state was working against Dalits. Dalit Panther tried to stop Shankaracharya's campaigning who supported caste system. On 29<sup>th</sup> March 1973, there was a meeting organized in Ganesh temple by Shankaracharya. Dhasal has thrown his sandals towards Shankaracharya saying, "Caste system *Murdabad*, Shankaracharya *Murdabad*" when he has crossed the limits of religious freedom and its campaign. Dhasal has done this job because the Panthers are insisting that Shankaracharya should be charged under 153 A acts, but the police and government neglected this issue. Instead of arresting Shankaracharya police started beating Dalit Panther's volunteer (142). The ruling government failed to give justice to Dalits as a result they lost in the election. On 5<sup>th</sup> January 1974 Dalit Panther organized a meeting in Varali to protest against the Congress government during the elections in Mumbai central (Chendwankar 94-95). At that time, some of the upper caste youths who were in the police uniform attacked Dalits. The police did not help Dalits at that time. Instead of catching the criminals they caught Dalit Panther's leader and volunteers. On 10<sup>th</sup> January 1974, Dalit Panther Movement organized March to protest against the Varli riot, police and government (95). When the march reached at the Paral a large number of Dalits were injured by *Shivseniks* from the building and Bhagwat Jadhav a young Dalit Panther's volunteer was killed in the attack. This time also police has badly beaten all the volunteer of Dalit Panther. Then the question arises is to whom should Dalits ask for justice? Because of these incidents Dalit gave their votes to other parties and one of the biggest leaders called Ramrao Adik lost in the election (97).

At the time of Renaming Movement (1978) the casteist tried to crush Dalit with the inhuman acts like setting fire to houses and beating Dalits. M B Chitnis, a Dalit leader, says the attackers shouted, "You must not say *Namnaste* when you meet us but bend your back and say *Johar* as your forefathers did" (qtd in Abrahams 1190). This is how caste operates in rural as well as urban areas. From 1976 Dalit Panther Movement has struggled for

Renaming of Marathwada University, Aurangabad as Dr. BabasahebAmbedkarMarathwada University,Aurangabad. The NamaantarAndolan became the issue of Dalit identity (Abraham 1190). A large number of members are the follower of Buddha and has protested by organizing theSatyagrahas and March rather than the armed revolt. In 1977,Dalit Panther Movement organized Satyagraha in Aurangabad and March in Mumbai. (Kamble 115).During the Renaming Movement literature also done a significant job, poets like P. M. Shinde published his poetry collection '*Sarvamat*' and ParthPokle's life narrative *Abhran* (1984) has references of the burning issue of Namantar (Limbale Fourteen). Dalits struggled for the Renaming of Marathwada University for fifteen years. Youths were highly influenced by the ideology of Dalit Panther. This issue of Renaming of Marathwada University did not remainrelated only to Marathwadabut it spread in Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. KrushnaGambre, a resident of London has organized a march in London which proved that this issue has crossed the boundaries of state and nation (Kamble 187). Through the conferences Dalit leaders mobilized Dalits for the Ranaming of Marathwads University as Dr. BabasahebAmbedkarMarathwada University, Aurangabad. During 1983 Dalit Panther Movement organized conferences in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, and Aurangabad. Dalit Panther Movement organized the national level conferences in Delhi (1980) and Mumbai (1884) in order to pursue the renaming issue. The state did not give any response during the agitations. During 24-30 May 1982, Dalit Panther organized the JailBharoAndolan under the leadership of ArunKamble and YuvakKranti Dal's SubhashLomte. According to KamlakarKamblein this Satyagraha the jails were full with the Dalits but state did not take it seriously (188). Some of the incidents proved the engagement of Dalit youth in protest. On 16<sup>th</sup> April 1980, a youth named YashpalSarwade jumped on chief minister SharadPawar's car. GautamWaghmare, a Dalit youth from Nanded district has self-immolated on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1993 (Sixteen). Renaming has become the significant issue when one can see the protest of Dalit Panther.

In 1974 Dalit Panther Movement was divided into two groups that are Dhale and Dhasal. The controversy took place in 1974 when Dhasal wrote Dalit Panther's Action Plan, at that time it was rejected in Dalit Panther's first meeting in Nagpur by criticizing that it was written from the communist point of view (Chendwankar 101). The Dalit Panther Movement failed to maintain its own existence after 1978 due to the internal disputes of Raja Dhale and Namdev Dhasal (Dhasal 64). Both of them started criticizing each other and Raja Dhale announced that he has dissolved Dalit Panther Movement and started Mass Movement in 1977 (ibid). Arun Kamble says that because of Renaming of Marathwada University, Dalit Panther neglected other issues and in reaction Dalit Panther failed to concentrate on other issues (115). Later on, some of the Dalit leaders like Arun Kamble, Ramdas Athwale, Dayanand Mhaske, Bapusaheb Parikhadde, Rameshchandra Parmar, Gangadhar Gade, Pretamkumar Shegaonkar and Bhai Sangare, S. M. Pradhan, Waman Nimbalkar, T. M. Kamble, etc. has reorganized Dalit Panther Movement and they renamed it as Bhartiya Dalit Panther (Limbale Eleven, Kamble 181). This act proved that the Dalit Panther tried to rise once again to end the caste-based atrocities and untouchability at village and urban level.

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Note: The symbol of \* indicates that the translation is done by me.

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