

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL & POLITICAL MOVEMENTS



EDITOR
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■ Dr. Sandip B. Kale

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Editorial

I am very happy to publish this book on **SOCIAL & POLITICAL MOVEMENTS**. All the professors and researchers have made a concerted effort to clarify the contemporary context of social & political movements through various perspectives on the occasion of Republic Day (26th January - 2023). An honest effort has been made in cooperation with the professors and researchers to analyze and explicate their views in context with the social & political movements which has been a boon for knowledge through the present editorial book.

The Indian society is encompassed by caste, race, religion, languages, regions etc. and these have been highly stratified. There are profoundly ingrained social and economic disparities. Despite seven decades of democracy, norms are still rigid with respect to inter-group ties, marriage, religious and ritual observance. India's past is loaded with social movements set in motion against institutional and cultural obstacles that stopped persons going in the direction they wanted. Democratic movements aim to create a social system of equal standing in general. However, counter-social movements are also present, which oppose these attempts and do whatever possible to retain the status quo. Social movements have an advanced agenda, with the aim of reforming political and social structures. The social movement initiatives are focused on the goal of restoring society. A social movement may be described as a concerted effort to change certain social ties that are formed. Movement is never an ongoing trend because it is aimed towards those very specific intolerable aspects of the activity of society under the control of a large section of the population.

A social movement is a mass movement and a concerted effort by people to promote change or to fight change. The central principle of all social movements is that people

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Dalit Panther-Resistance And Militant Movement In Maharashtra

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The Dalit Panther a social organization was found by educated slum dalit youths of Siddhartha Nagar in Mumbai Maharashtra to combat caste discrimination in 1972. Educated Writers and poets Raja Dhale, Namdeo Dhasal and J. V. Pawar are known as its founders. They desired to bring all dalits on one platform and mobilize them for the struggle for civil rights and justice. They believed that lower castes are willing to accept indignities and their worst conditions shall be improved by protest only. The movement was inspired by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and US Black Panthers.

Babasaheb since 1920 tried to end Dalit oppression giving them power. He insisted for separate electorate for Dalits but in vain. He embraced Buddhism in 1956 with masses. Caste discrimination was prevailing in India in the early 20th century preventing Untouchables from using water tanks, entering temples, sitting in classroom with other students, occupying dignified employment which was rooted in the hierarchical ideology propagated by religious book Manusmriti. Babasaheb blow this hierarchical caste structure resisting caste discrimination by the Constitution and conversion to Buddhism a resistance movement.

After untimely demise of Babasaheb leadership issue arise. Most of leaders were selfish hence fractions in Republican Party occurred. Leaderless dalit society was in search of such organization recognizing their grievances and pursue to the government. The 1960 saw new wave of educated dalit youths benefited by the Constitutional provisions and inspiration of Babasaheb having good sense of poetry and prose. They expressed dalit sorrow by the power of pen. That time media undoubtedly dominated by upper class community. The writing of dalit youths give birth to Little Magazine Movement in 1967. This literature was speaking about oneself. Problems of dalits were identified and addressed collectively by writing. According to Lata Murugkar this challenged and protested against the monopoly of the established caste Hindu writers ideology in the literary field. The young generation or new Dalit intelligentsia wanted to articulate themselves in their own words without

sense of barrowing and this was attempt to un-caste the literary world. Period of frustration and despondency gave birth to this literary movement. Monopoly of established was challenged and anti-established literature was brought creating new language through which dalit resistance to power and oppression became public discourse. It established a trend for dalit politics that every dalit could write and become an activist. Educational facilities and stable employment was responsible for such literary movement. This phase is known as Little Magazine movement in which Dalit Panther Movement (DPM) is rooted. In 1971 Dalit issue was increased as special committee by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reported on atrocities against Dalit and two women were forced to naked in a Maharashtra village. By that time RPI was fractioned. Giving boost to the unrest against its leaders Dalit Panther originated with Scheduled Caste of Maharashtra particularly Ambedkarites as a social base. Pawar and Dhasal were very instrumental. In the first meeting of Dalit Panther Raja Dhale was invited to give speech who wrote article Black Independence Day about unfair laws against Dalits. Further officially he joined the organization. Dhale-Dasal-Pawar took role of organization president, defense minister, and general secretary respectively.

Prior to the foundation of DP, Shiv-Sena was influential organization with the support of Dalit and non-Dalit youths in form of united gangs working for electorate politics. Formation of Dalit Panther started declining Dalit support of SS and conflict between two groups arisen. SS blamed Panther undermining Maharashtrian unity raising caste issue while DP counterargument was SS only represented upper-caste community. In January 1974 election boycott to South-Central Bombay by-election constituency and Maharashtra Legislative Assembly was announced by DP as Congress candidate was supported by both RPI and SS. Maharashtra Bandh Day on January 2 led by Communist Party of India, along with some opposition parties was supported by DP. It wished to win CPI. It also backed mill workers strike led by CPI. In the same year DP was attacked by civilians mostly SS supporters and police. Meeting of organization in Worli was treated same way with stones and police made lathi charge arresting 19 persons. After five days police arrested four important leaders of DP during a march against brutality and partisan attitude towards Scheduled Castes persons on a BDD Chawl violence case. During Worli riots Bhagwat Jadhav a Panther activist was killed by a grinding stone thrown from an apartment at the rally. Even then DP didn't give its way and marched towards goal getting success.

The Dalit Panther Movement (DPM) was largely inspired by the U.S. Black Panther Party a socialist sought to combat racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans. In mid 20th century it occurred during civil rights movement. After reading about Black Panther in Time magazine Dalit youths selected this name and adopted same organizational-political structure and strategies. Dalit Panther was influenced by Afro-American literature also. Black Panther acknowledged and supported Dalit Panthers through its weekly newspaper from 1967 to 1980. The DPM combined the work of Babasaheb Ambedkar with military and self-defense of Black Panthers combating atrocities against Dalits. Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, J.V.Pawar and Arun Kamble were poets and writers whose anti-establishment poetry and short stories published in Dhasal's Vidrodh magazine. That was powerful realistic descriptions of the oppression of Dalits and their revolutionary struggles for change. Self-defense in response to atrocities against Dalits, election boycotts, demonstration against ruling party and attacking religious deities to protest caste oppression were adopted.

For Dalit Panther Dalit means downtrodden, lower castes, untouchable, broken, oppressed and ground down people who are good servants of high castes. Dalit is a casteless term challenging history of class oppression. It comprises Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Neo-Buddhists, working class, landless and poor farmers, women and all those who are exploited politically, weaker economically and neglected in the name of religion. Panther means to fight for their rights like Panthers similar to Black Panthers. Its formation was necessary due to lack of political power. Most of Dalits engaged in degrading jobs like removing human waste, dead animals and sweeping streets. Though having population 18 per cent they faced segregation in schools and restaurants, police violence, sexual violence and also lack of access to drinking water. The most crucial factor for the rise of DPM was the repression and terror under where oppressed SC continued to live in rural areas.

The Dalit Panther advocated for and practiced radical politics fusing ideology of Karl Marx to Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule. It adopted the idea of class conflict, directing criticism towards upper-caste capitals and those oppressed Dalits. Panther affirmed defended use of necessary violent strategies, affirmed a complete revolution needed to fulfill Dalit emancipation. They proclaimed themselves defender of all exploited people in spite of caste community i.e. agricultural workers, small peasants, industrial workers

unemployed and women. Radicalism was seen to indicate they were a political force committed to overthrow socio-political system. They had contact with left groups, disgust RPI leadership, campaigned for election boycott etc. Panthers aimed to create an independent mass-based political movement through demonstrations and strikes instead of traditional parliamentary arena.

Dalit Panther's manifesto published in 1973 read as: "We do not want a little place in the Brahmin Alley. We want the rule of whole land, we are not looking at persons but at systems and change of heart... liberal education will not end our state of exploitation. When we gather a revolutionary mass, rouse the people, out of the struggle, the giant mass will become tidal wave of revolution". According to Satyanarayana and Tharu this manifesto fit the Ambedkarite spirit into broader Marxist framework and heralded the rise of an autonomous Dalit perspective in post-independence India. It integrated Marxism capitalism exploitation with Buddhism identifying Dalit enemies as landlords, capitalists, money-lenders and government controlled by ruling castes. Manifesto was consisting 18 demands pertaining to the emancipation of Dalits. It reflected the enthusiasm of Dalits to mobilize poor masses in order to fight against the partisan and exploitative social system in the country and claimed that while Hindu feudalism may have spawned caste inequality, its extension by the modern Indian state had created oppression a 'hundred times more ruthless'.

Dalit Panther aimed the destruction of caste system and build organization of all oppressed sections like landless poor peasants and urban industrial workers along with Dalits. A society where division of labor led inequality and exploitation and caste system degenerated Dalit life into pathogenic condition, occupation changed into castes DPM started seeking justice through speeches, literary works, plays, music, cultural organizations, street protests and other means available. This led to rapid growth in Mumbai and Maharashtra. But the radical stance and message of members became targets of state surveillance and brutality as well. The movement's heyday lasted until 1977.

In 1974 DPM saw divergences due its manifesto and ideological basis. Dhale and Dhasal had differences between Marxism-Buddhism ideologies. Dhasal favoured Marxism and Dhale Buddhism. Dhale criticized Communists for having failed to bring fundamental changes in the life of downtrodden. Dhasal had allegiances with the Communists and Dhale found the potential of Communists disturbing ideological composition of organization. According to Dhale manifesto was not a

representation of the Panthers ideology but simply publish without consensus of working committee. Due to differences and proper leadership movement failed to move in the right direction.

By 1974 original Dalit Panther was dead only two years after its foundation. Further divergences led to the dissolution of the organization in 1977. After split Dhale took majority of the members and Dhasal made movement of more radical members. Dalit Panther saw new fractions as Mass Movement (Raja Dhale), Maharashtra Dalit Panther (Arun Kamble), Dalit Panthers (Sangare-Mahatekar), and Dalit Panthers (Dhasal).

Some of the achievements of the Dalit Panthers are as below:

- DP provided courage to rise and battle against heinous crimes against Dalits.

- Myth that Dalits are mute and passive proven false, they spoke about oppressive caste system.

- Began debate on Ambedkar ideology, compelled government to fill the backlog, serve as deterrent to power politics.

- Made significant contribution to Dalit literature, poems-novels-street plays etc resulted as rival movement's voice.

- Successfully established counterculture and distinct identity, popularized term 'Dalit' instead of 'Harijan' or 'Untouchables'.

- Captured imagination of younger generation, projected militant image, influenced national political and social landscapes.

Failures of Dalit Panthers can be cited as:

- The organization became unstable with splits, lacked organizational resources bringing together more oppressed and other castes.

- No serious efforts found towards Dhale-Dhasal joint actions, unable to launch movement at national level,

- Failed to provide proper leadership, execute ideas towards better future, no serious attempts were made to comprehend-tackle problems of village Dalits.

- Due to ideological differences, lack of experience and organizational structure movement failed to move in right direction.

Although DPM short-lived it kept together due to Ambedkarite ideology continued with different groups. According to Paswan and Jaideva nearly 10000 people took part in protest from different parts of Maharashtra. Nearly in 20 states it was active. Anyone was allowed to join the fight. They also paid attention to women issues as Dalit women experienced incidents of abuse, rape or kidnapping by police of outsider.

Maharashtra government and police constantly harassed the Panthers, booked under various charges.

DPM gave visibility and strength to current literary movement that keeps advocating for Dalits rights and denouncing brutal caste system. Creation of new literature with multi-caste perspective, conceived idea of Indian proletariat, opposed bourgeois literature, used patios of dalit suburban people living in ghetto. It addressed basic and concerns about the essence of freedom, liberty and justice for oppressed. Obviously DPM was political force committed to overthrow socio-political system. Still it exists in India fighting for Dalits. As J. V. Pawar said "I cannot think of anyone who could replace us, as many end up compromising their idealism in quest for power in politics. But the movement for a new radicalism is waiting to be born."

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