

**Dalit Assertion in Independent India: A
Study of Dalit Panther Movement (Uttar Pradesh)**

SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO

**BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY
LUCKNOW**



**FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN**

HISTORY

SUBMITTED BY

**BASANT KUMAR KANAUIYA
ENROLLMENT NO: 666/12**

**UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
DR. V. M. RAVI KUMAR
Assistant Professor**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SCHOOL FOR AMBEDKAR STUDIES
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY
(A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
VIDYA VIHAR, RAEBARELI ROAD
LUCKNOW-226025
UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA**

2019

SUMMARY

Dalit Assertion in Independent India: A Study of Dalit Panther Movement (Uttar Pradesh)

Conceptually Dalit assertion denotes a process in which the former untouchable communities of India fought against several stigmas that they were subjected to in colonial and post- colonial period. It has been a process having multiple movements, personalities, incidents that have operated with the objective of demanding social justice to Dalits in all walks of life. This study is an attempt to track the trajectory of Dalit movement in India with particular reference to the Dalit Panther Movement. This topic has been chosen as the Dalit Panther Movement represents more aggressive assertion of Dalit identity at one level and exercised significant impact upon the politics of Dalits at another level. In order to explore this unique trend in Dalit politics, this study attempts to explore the discourse and practice of the Dalit Panther Movement and its role in creation of identity-based politics under the umbrella of Dalit as a socio-cultural and political category.

The concept of Dalit as a representational category represents multiple castes, which are traditionally treated as untouchable communities, by caste Hindus as a tradition sanctioned by customs. Even though it was prohibited as a practice by the Constitution of India, its practice could still be seen in different domains of Indian life. The caste system is basically a system of elaborately stratified social hierarchy- this phenomenon distinguishes India from most other societies. Indian society is divided into numerous castes and sub-castes numbering roughly over

four thousand, besides the sizeable number of tribes and other religious communities. This hereditary based caste system is broadly classified into three: the *dwijas* (twice born) or the upper castes, which are also called, in some regions, the intermediate castes commonly known as backward castes or classes, and the lowest castes or Untouchables of the earlier times. Sanctified by religious texts and solidified through norms of restrictions on intermarriage and inter-dinning, the caste system essentially orders different groups in the Hindu Indian society into an occupation based hierarchy.

The caste system in India not only determines the individual's social status on the basis of group to which he/she is born but also differentiates and assigns occupational and economic roles. This caste system puts the Brahmans or the priests at the pinnacle while the 'Shudra' *Varna* was kept at the bottom, and the population outside the *Varna* system being subsequently categorized as Untouchables. This class of population constitutes nearly 17 percent (over 20 crore) of the total population in India. But, despite being one of the largest sections of the population, they have been subjected to oppression and exploitation for centuries and many of them forced to live miserable life. The process of Dalit assertion is thus a reflection of their quest for shedding untouchable status and attempt for gaining respectable identity and improvement in material status.

For representation of Dalit communities in public discourse and literary expressions, different nomenclature has been used. Officially they are known as the Scheduled Castes and at the level of social discourse the words Harijan and Dalits are being used. The term Dalit has acquired wider circulation after popularity of the Dalit Panthers in 1972-73, when they add

various religious minorities, women, tribes, backward castes and economically deprived sections in their definition of the term Dalit. But, the term Dalit is currently used for the ex-untouchables all over the country. Over a period of time the social scientists have begun referring to the Dalits and Untouchables or the Scheduled Castes inter-changeably. We have also used the term Dalit, in this work, for ex-Untouchables or the Scheduled Castes by articulating their self-realization and their struggle against the caste-oppression, their "will to act against exploitation and a rise from oppression. Dalit as a conceptual category rooted in ideological discourse of Jotiba Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar and E.V. Ramaswami Periyar, with many others throughout India (Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Acchutanand in U.P., Mangoo Ram in Punjab etc.). It was a social collectivist discourse that represents a common history and aspirations of former untouchable communities.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

There has been an upsurge of the Dalit movement in all over India right from the late nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, "the broader anti-caste movements" have become a central democratic movement of Indian society. In the pre-independence period this anti-caste movement comprised strong non-Brahmans movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as well as Dalit movements in Maharashtra, Punjab (the *Adi-Dharma* movement), Kerala (Narayana swami Guru's movement), and Hyderabad (*Adi-Hindus*). Independent India saw two decades of quiescence for anti-caste struggle, then a renewed upsurge from the early 1970s marked by the founding of the Dalit Panthers in 1972. This time the Dalits and their organisations were clearly in the vanguard with the non-Brahmin castes, now known as Other Backward Castes (OBC's). Then during the 1980s, a new wave of assertion was felt when the Dalits wanted to exercise the

political power themselves, particularly in the northern states of India, more specifically in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar.

Dalit movement has been one of the vocal and vibrant social movements that demanded social justice for lower sections of Indian society. It had strong roots in colonial period by the way of put forwarding several demands for gaining access to respectable life. The tempo of Dalit movement continued in independent India. Increased level of literacy rate at one level and access to employment opportunities offered by the Indian Constitution at another level resulted in sustained and vibrant movement for social justice by Dalits. Ascendency of Bahujan Samaj Party in politics of Uttar Pradesh (biggest state in terms of population in India) at one level and emergence of Dalit militancy in the form of Bhim Army, which had advanced aggressive assertion of for human rights, captured the attention of public and academia. In the contemporary times, the atrocities over Dalits have been increasing steadily. This context necessitated a historical approach to study Dalit movement to track the trajectory of demands and strategies of Dalit movement for social justice. This investigation can be done better by exploring the activities of the Dalit Panther Movement. Historically Dalit Panther Movement created a literary consciousness among Dalits; its manifestation could be seen in the contemporary times as the category of Dalits acquired a status of social discourse. Hence, this study attempts to capture the historical roots of Dalit extremism by focusing on ideas and strategies of DPM and its ideological and activist dimension and their impact upon the subsequent movement by Dalits.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

While narrating the history of Dalit assertion movement with particular reference to DPM, this study revolves around the following objectives. These objectives guide the organisation of this study in a systematic way:

- 1- To explore the process of emerge of Dalit assertion in India and offers an analysis on the factors responsible for assertive discourse of Dalits.
- 2- To document the factors responsible for emergence of Dalit Panther Movement.
- 3- To document history of Dalit Panther Movement.
- 4- To analyse context of Dalit radical assertion in independent India.
- 5- To illustrate the core demands and strategies of Dalit Panther Movement.
- 6- To capture the literature representation of Demands made by Dalit Panther Movement for development of Dalit communities.
- 7- To document the impact of Dalit Panther Movement in Uttar Pradesh.
- 8- Analyzing the impact of Dalit Panther Movement and Dalit politics of India.

HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY

While narrating the historical roots of Dalit assertion with particular reference to Dalit Panther Movement, the proposed study attempts to address the following points of hypothesis:

- 1- Dalit Panther Movement brought about psychological revolution among the lower and marginalized section of India.

- 2- Dalit Panther Movement had significant impact upon assertion and mobilization of Dalit politics.
- 3- The literature produced by Dalit Panther Movement significantly popularized the work and concept Dalits all over India.
- 4- Dalit Panther Movement influenced the Dalit youth and created significant assertive awareness among them.
- 5- Dalit Panther Movement gave significant impetus to political activities of Dalit communities all over India.
- 6- Dalit Panther Movement played a significant role in shaping the political activities of Dalit communities in Utter Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The proposed study is basically a historical analysis of Dalit movement by using analytical and descriptive methods. This is done by focusing on the literature available in Hindi and English languages. So far as secondary sources are concern, book, articles related to Dalit movement in general, and Dalit Panther Movement in particular have been explored. Besides this, attempt has also been made to explore the primary sources such as manifesto of Dalit Panther Movement, books and poems written by activists of the Movement. For narration of history of Dalit Panther Movement the conceptual framework of discourse analysis has been used in order the capture the assertive narratives put forwarded by activists belong the movement. The present study will attempt to analyse this assertion, its spread and impact upon the lives of the Dalits. For this

purpose, the present study will analyse the roots and the course of the Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh, its socio-political context, leadership factor and its limitations.

The proposed study is basically an historical analysis of Dalit movement in India with particular reference to Dalit Panther Movement. This task is done by focusing on the politics of Dalit movement and the narratives that are being put forwarded by activists involved in the movement. In a way this study use the concept of discourse analysis in order to explore the meaning and intention of activists engaged in the movement and its impact upon the collectivist consciousness of Dalit assertion. This study mainly depended upon literary as the main intention of the study is to capture the pattern of Dalit assertion that took shape from the early 1970s when the Dalit Panther Movement acquired prominence.

CHAPTERISATION OF STUDY

This study has been organised into the following chapters:

CHAPTER -1

The first chapter of this study entitled introduction presents schematic and thematic structure of this study. Concepts such as context of the study, objectives of study, hypothesis of study, methodology of study, review of literature and a brief narration of chapters of study have been explained.

CHAPTER -2

The second chapter entitled origin of Dalit Panther Movement deals with the historical roots of Dalit movement with particular reference to Dalit Panther Movement. The main objective of this chapter is to analyse the factors that are responsible for emergence of vibrant, assertive and extremist form of Dalit protest in the form of Dalit Panther Movement. Attempt has also been made highlights the discourse and strategies of Dalit Panther Movement in order to capture the core message of the Movement.

CHAPTER -3

The third chapter entitled Dalit Panther Movement and Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh mainly focused on the impact of the movement on the Dalit politics of Uttar Pradesh. The main objective of this chapter is to capture the way in which Dalit Panther Movement unleashed a new dimension of more aggressive form of political mobilisation among Dalits of Uttar Pradesh.

CHAPTER -4

The final chapter of this study entitled conclusion and findings proposes a summary of the study and highlight some of the important findings that are not being covered in the existing literature on Dalit Panther Movement.