DALIT ASSERTIONS: TRACING A DALIT FEMINIST CRITIQUE

In this chapter, we will map out the politics of Dalit feminism since the 1960s to the present, and outline Dalit feminist assertions of the period. The main thrust will be on three fundamental political movements, in which we will examine the role of the Republican Party of India (RPI). The chapter looks into how Mahar and Mang politics followed different paths and how the Mahar-Mang tensions in politics are reproduced in Dalit feminist politics.

Section I: Struggle for Land Reform

Maharashtra became an autonomous state in 1960 thanks to the efforts of the Sayukta Maharashtra Samiti. Several political parties, the Congress party and Republican Party of India included, played a vital role in it. But they had differing positions on this issue. The Congress party was in favour of creating a state with the joint Marathi and Gujarati speaking people. On the other hand, RPI was in support of Marathi speaking Maharashtra. In the 1957 election, RPI won 18 seats, 5 at Lok Sabha and 13 at the Vidhan Sabha. Nevertheless, the agenda of the RPI to oppose the Congress party did not last long. The RPI fragmented into two groups: one led by Dadasaheb Gaikwad, Rajabhau Khobragade, N. Shivraj, Datta Kutti, and R.D. Bhadare, and the other by B.C. Kamble, H.D. Awale, Dadasaheb Rupvate and others. The RPI had numerous factions and alliances within itself that impeded the development of Dalits in general and the transformation of the vision for Dalit politics in particular.

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1 Suhas Palshikar (2003), jat aani Maharashtra Sattakaran, Samkalin Publication, p. 33.
2 Harsh Jagzape (2007), "Republican Paksha", in Suhas Palshikar and Kulkarni (eds.), Maharashtrtil Sattasanghrasha, p. 165. One group was called 'Durutha' and the other 'Nadurutha'.
Hence, except for the Mahar Buddhist, the Congress party succeeded in accommodating the other Dalit castes within it.³

Deenkar Salve argues that Dalit politics remained rooted in reserved constituency to acquire the power and autonomy, and, therefore, the fundamental questions and problems of its toiling masses were sidelined. Except for the demand for land reform, the Republican Party of India did not have any impact on the welfare of the Dalits in the ten years duration from 1960 until 1970.⁴ The Bhumihiin Satyagrah⁵ was the first advancement for Dalits after the formation of the nation state. It was Babasaheb Ambedkar who fundamentally structured the legacy of the Bhumihiin Satyagrah. Through the Independent Labour Party, he raised his voice for agrarian change and insisted the abolition of the Kothi system.⁶ He also highlighted the disastrous consequences of the Watandari system.⁷

In 1954, he started an organization under the name of Dalit federation in which he cultivated the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad and nominated him as the president. The Bhumihiin Satyagraha raised the land question and demanded the allocation of forest land, common property land, wasteland and grazing land for landless Dalits. It called for the abolition of untouchability and bonded labour. This particular Satyagrah not only empowered ex-untouchables but also other marginal categories irrespective of caste, class, and region on the issue of land

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³ Palshikar (2003), Jat aani Maharashtratil Sattakaran, p. 33.
⁴ Deenkar Salve, Dalit Movement after 1956, Original in Marathi, Krantising Nanasaheb Academy, Dignath Prakashan, Pune. p. 1
⁵ Protest against land alienation.
⁶ In the Kothi system a huge tax on farming or revenue collection from the ryots (public) were imposed on villagers.
distribution. *Bhumihin Satyagrah* movement had three phases. The first phase, which began in 1953, was restricted to Marathwada and Ahmadnagar district. During the second phase starting from 1958-59, the movement spread to the whole of Maharashtra as well as to other parts of India. Significantly, the struggles during this phase had its repercussions in New Delhi in 1964-65. To understand the final phase of the movement we must first briefly consider the first two phases of the Satyagrah.

Under the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad, the agitation first started from the region of Marathwada where the hegemony of feudal lords and capitalists were widespread. In his speech, Dadasaheb Gaikwad argued that Article 17 of the Indian constitution advocates the eradication of untouchability. Nevertheless, Government officials practiced untouchability despite Article 17. The Nizam had given land—comprising of a wasteland, grazing land and forest land—to the Dalits. Yet, the government did not permit them to cultivate that particular land. Dalits did not benefit from the Tenancy Act or Kul Kayada. Dalits from the Marathwada region suffered the plight of miserable poverty, and there was every possibility that many of them would die from starvation. Thus, he created a slogan that said “Give us work or Give us bread”. On 7 October 1953, Dadasaheb was arrested along with seven hundred Satyagrahi.

The Marathwada region had three committed activists who organised Sabhas at different part in the region. They were B.S. More, T.G. Kharat and Salve. In Ahmadnagar the Scheduled Caste Federation unit under the leadership of D.T.

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9 Ibid., p. 128.
Rupwate decided to take up the cause of landless Dalits. Activists like Shantabai Dani, A.G. Pawar, P.G. Tapase and others participated in this Sabha. They passed a resolution demanding an autonomous organisation for Dalits in the sugar factories to protect their rights.\textsuperscript{10} Every \textit{Taluka} should have a working committee. Also, financial assistance should be provided to the students residing in hostels in Sangamner and Karjat districts.

Around ten thousand Scheduled Caste Federation members declared their solidarity and were arrested in the Nagar Satyagraha. Since a majority of the Dalits of Nagar had converted to Christianity, the effort was aimed at the welfare of Christians.\textsuperscript{11} The State was criticised for its silence on Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe policies and their implementations. State agencies opined that the social mobility of Dalits could come about only through land reforms and reservation in the public sector. Yet, the Scheduled Caste Federation showed that the \textit{Veth-bigari} system was still being practised in rural areas even after its abolition under article 374 of the constitution. The 12.5\% reservation for Dalits was not implemented properly.\textsuperscript{12} Hence, the state agencies failed to pay heed to the issue of the alienation of Dalits from the land. The second phase of the movement began in the year 1958-1959. In 1957, the SCF had been dissolved following the demise of Ambedkar. Therefore, the RPI took steps to carry the struggle forward. R.D. Bhandare raised the wasteland question in the assembly using statistics as evidence. He argued that government always gave the guarantee of governmental programmes for Dalits and marginalised

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 130.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
communities but failed to implement them. He criticised the lacunae in the
government's policies on the issue of land for Dalits. He further reminded them
that articles 43 and 46 of the constitution emphasised better life chances for the
weaker sections. The Ministry of Revenue, mentioning the Government's
Resolution, clearly said that if anybody tilled a piece of land for more than three
years, then that particular land should be provided to that landless person as a
permanent asset.

The RPI emphasised the issue of food security of India and raised questions
about how agricultural infrastructure can be built up. According to them,
agriculture will provide platforms for the unemployed youths of the country;
hence distribution of land was an urgent task. Rajabhau Khobragade handed
over a memorandum that read that, land allocation process has to start
immediately. Livelihood was a major problem for the Dalits and adivasis. Everywhere they were subjugated intensely. The government should take the
incentive to stop the social and economic exploitation of Dalits and adivasis. The
Satyagrah spread to the whole of Maharashtra and elsewhere in India. Everywhere in India, the socialist, communist and other political parties lent
their support. The Satyagrah also witnessed massive atrocities, in which Dalit
women had to face the draconian repression of the state agencies.
Nevertheless, the Satyagrah acquired a distinct direction in the year 1964. From
all over India, people gathered at Lalkilla and from there marched to the Lok
Sabha in support of the land rights. The following demands were made.

13 Ibid., p. 139.
14 Ibid., p. 140.
15 Urmila Pawar and Minakshi Moon (2000), Aamichihi Itihaas Ghadavila, Sugava Prakashan, Pune,
1) The statue of Dr. Ambedkar should be placed in the premises of the Lok Sabha.

2) The law should be amended and it should accommodate the real tiller.

3) The government should give wasteland to landless sections.

4) The distribution of grain should be channelled in a proper manner. And the government should keep the check and balances on the prices of day to day commodities.

5) The 1948, Minimum Wages Act has to be implemented urgently.

6) Living conditions of slum areas has to be improved.

7) Those who are converted to Buddhism as Neo-Buddhists must get the reservation as a Scheduled Caste.

8) The Government should take the harsh step to stop the atrocities on Dalits.

9) The Scheduled Caste must get the complete protection under the judiciary by the constitutional laws such as the prevention of untouchability Act.

10) The Government of India must fulfil the backlog of Scheduled Caste and Tribe.16

In the protest on 6 December 1964, around three lakh and forty thousand people were imprisoned for participating in the agitation. During the Bhumihiin Satyagrah, Dadasaheb put a question to the government of Maharashtra: “Those who have land can till it, but what will happen to those who are alienated of it.”17 He demanded that Scheduled Castes must be strengthened through the

16 Ibid.

provision of land; he made three suggestions as to how the land distribution for the landless Dalit could be channelised. They were:

a) Barren land should be converted into productive/cultivable land.

b) The *Kaman Zamin Kayada* should be implemented, under the 1961 act of the Government of Maharashtra.\(^{18}\)

c) Efforts should be made to confiscate the land from the *Boodaan*\(^{19}\) and *gramdaan*.\(^{20}\)

This land reform movement created awareness related to land and its reform within eighteen states of India.\(^{21}\) According to the Perumal committee, in the year 1965 between January and August, some 39,16,676 acres of land titles were distributed to scheduled castes.

Dadasaheb further demanded that after the distribution of land for cultivation, all the expenses relating to cultivation such as buying seeds, fertilizers etc., should be provided to the people. Each family should get five acres of cultivated land, which should be registered in the name of concerned person during the allocation. Even the land from the forest department should be made available for distribution to the scheduled castes. According to Dadasaheb, through these reforms, poverty, unemployment and hunger can be alleviated to some extent. The whole country supported the land struggle, which was organised by the volunteers and leaders of RPI. To mobilise the people, they coordinated with

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\(^{18}\) The people demanded that laws relating to surplus land should be abolished and maximum land should be made available for landless masses.

\(^{19}\) Bhudaan means donated land in Marathi.

\(^{20}\) Gramdaan means land donated by the village.

each other at every level: village, taluka, district and centre level. This movement was remarkable for the large number of children and women that participated in it. The two major journals *Janatha Saptahik* and *Prabuddha Bharat* analysed and authenticated the entire struggle that went on for sixty days. The struggle for land reform was successful as all the demands were accepted by the government of India.

It is rightly pointed by Suhas Palshikar that Dadasaheb Gaikwad perceived the struggle for the land reform as a realm of contestation that may reach out beyond the caste-based politics of the RPI. However, the RPI had failed to accommodate non-Dalits in the party through the land struggle. And then Gaikwad entered into alliance with the congress party during the Zilla Parishad elections in the year 1967. Thus, the RPI was fragmented again and some of its leaders joined the congress party. The struggle for land reform can be read from a broader perspective as Alain Touraine argues that Dalit assertion should not be reduced into the rubric of identity politics because of its unique democratic proclivities. It surpasses the impeachable claims of identity politics.

**Section II: Dalit Panther Movement**

The Dalit Panther movement in the 1970s was a major landmark in the history of the Dalits. It represented the fundamental socio-economic anxieties of the Dalits in Maharashtra by challenging the patriarchal state agency. Simultaneously, it raised its voices on the industrial growth in the urban spaces and particularly

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23 Ibid.
exposed rural caste chauvinism in Maharashtra.\textsuperscript{26} They also evaluated Dalit and non-Dalit leaders/parties for their irresponsible approaches to the atrocities committed on Dalits and the alienation of Scheduled Caste and Tribes in education by the Central and State Government after 23 years of independence.\textsuperscript{27} Palshikar argues that Dalit Panther was formed to challenge and change the political and cultural discourse of Dalits in Maharashtra.\textsuperscript{28} Dalit Panther had Marxist, Phule Ambedkarite and socialist ideological inclinations; the main reason for this was many of them belonged to the marginal class categories.\textsuperscript{29} According to Lata Murugkar, Panther emerged from the focal points of identity crisis. She argues that after embracing Buddhism they were locating themselves in new forms of socio-cultural location comparing with caste Hindus.\textsuperscript{30} On the other hand, parties like the Shiv Sena, which emerged parallel to the Panther, questioned the failure of the government mechanism on the issues such as unemployment, black money, rural urban migration but excluded the caste issue.

According to Murugkar, Dalit Panther emerged as a historical force to counter the hooliganism of the Shiv Sena.\textsuperscript{31} However, one has to understand that women's movements and radical organisations like Yuvak Kranti Dal, S.S.P. Militants, Magowa Communist and Naxalites were no accidental forces but emerged out of the disappointment of parliamentary democracy.\textsuperscript{32} The Dalit Panther adopted certain strategies to popularize the movement among the masses. It published the Navakal on 19 June 1972 and the Praja Sattak on 26 June 1972. The initiative to

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Manifesto of Dalit Panther, 1973, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{28} Palshikar (2003), \textit{Jat aami Maharashtratil Sattakaran}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
start the organization was taken jointly by Dhasal and J.V. Pawar. Raja Dhale’s article “Kala Swatantra Din” (Black Independence Day) published in Sadhana journal became a sensation and helped Dalit Panthers become the most popular movement in the entire Maharashtra. According to Palshikar, Dalit Panther tried to build up cultural capital for Dalits with three fundamental forces in the context of culture, symbols and the attempt to develop a distinct identity to severe the relationship with Hindu society.

The growth of the Panther movement had three distinct phases. The first phase began in the middle of 1972 and lasted until 1974 resulting in the first faction. The second phase began from the end of 1974 until the beginning of 1977. And the third phase lasted from 1977 until the end of 1979 marking the agitation for the re-naming of Marathwada University. During the first phase of the movement, the organization had no official wings. During 1972–74 Panther opened around hundred branches/chavanies all over Maharashtra and one branch in London. In the year 1973, the organization had a meeting to elect its office-bearers. Raja Dhale was elected as the President, Vittal Sathe as Vice-President, J.V. Pawar as Secretary, and Bhai Sangare as Joint Secretary. The Treasurer was Avinash Mahatekar and Defense Minister was Namdeo Dhasal. The Communication Minister was Thorat and Public Minister was Uddhav Salve. Jayavanta Jagdhane was put in charge of the women’s wings, which never functioned for the cause of Dalit women. In fact, branches of the main

33 Ibid., p. 60.
34 Palshikar (2003), jat aani Maharashtratil Sattakaran, p. 34.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 65.
organization were active on an ad-hoc basis and started working militantly in 1974 during the first phase, under the name of Dalit Panther.  

The elections of January 1974 for the Central Bombay Constituency resulted in Worli riots. Worli riots led to a conflict among the Dalits and within the Dalit Panther. For instance, R.D. Bandare, who had served as the Governor of Bihar under the Congress in 1966, resigned as a member of the constituency. In addition, the political conflicts left them frustrated with the ruling congress party. Thus, Dalit Panthers declared bandh on 2 January 1974 to protest against the hike in prices, scarcity of food resources and unemployment. This protest was jointly organised under the leadership of the Communists and Dalit Panthers. They also supported the strike of the textile workers on 8 February 1974. Dalit Panthers recognised that their might be a possibility of gaining the support of the masses and thus winning the election. Yet, they boycotted the election because of the alliance between the Congress, Shiv Sena and RPI. However, a split occurred and Dhasal and Dhale went their own separate ways; the differences of opinion between them stemmed from the political positioning that revolved around Buddhism, Ambedkarism and Communism. Dhasal viewed Ambedkar as a leader of distinction but was aware of the vanguard role of the masses in the construction of history. Dhale opposed the incorporation of Marxist dogmas. Thus, he argued that Ambedkar should be redefined because the conversation to Buddhism was a symbolic rupture.

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39 Ibid., p. 68.
40 Ibid., 157.
41 Ibid., 71.
42 Ibid; Jayashree Gokhale (1993), From Concession to Confrontation, Popular Prakashan, p. 278.
There were two groups now: the Dhale group and the Dhasal group. Dhale became the president of his group (the Dhale Group) and Pawar was made the secretary. Dhale left the job to devote his time for the organization. Leaders such as Mahatekar, Sangare and Pawar were active in the group and helped to spread it to the entire state of Maharashtra. This group opened new branches in Bombay at Aagwala Chawl, Bhimnagar, Chembur and at Gautam Nagar. A new constitution was drafted and declared at Nagpur on 23 and 24 October 1974. It clearly instructed that those who truly believed in the ideology of Ambedkar could accept the membership of Dhale group. He should be at least 18 years of age and not engaged in any political party or organisation.

As for the Dhasal group, its leader Dhasal shifted its base to Pune where a new working committee was declared. Latif Khaitik was appointed as President, Sunil Dighe as Vice-President, Namdeo Dhasal as General Secretary, Arjun Dangle as Joint Secretary, S.M. Khadtal as Treasurer, P. Chendwanka as Organizer, and Bal Khairmode, Mallika Dhasal, Uttam Kamble, Kiraman Pagare, C. Kikalje, and B. Ratho as organization members.

However, both the groups were split again. Dhasal had a major disagreement with Divekar and Dighe on the policy and programme of the organisation. According to Murugkar, Dhasal was against co-operative farming of land in which he had opposed the landlord of Pune named Kakade. However, later,

43 Murugkar (1991), Dalit Panther Movement, p. 73.
44 Ibid., p. 73.
45 Ibid., p. 76.
Dhasal was found guilty of corruption and thus lost the faith of the majority of his supporters.46

Meanwhile, the Dhale group supported the Congress but factions within it opposed the move to merge with the Congress. Also, the Congress spread false information regarding an alliance with the Dalit Panthers to win the elections. Therefore, on 5 January 1974, to debunk the Congress party's false propaganda, a public meeting was organised by the Panthers with A.R. Antuly. The Panthers vehemently criticised the Hindu religion in the public meeting. This provoked the audience leading to violence. Maharashtra's print media reported this incident as a defamation of the Hindu culture.47 The Indian Secular Society and Maratha Mandir formed a committee to investigate the root cause of the violence. The committee's findings reported that the speeches were political in nature and criticised the populism of the different groups including the Republican Party of India.48 It also maintained that no speakers provoked the audience through a confrontational speech. This violence was suspected to have been incited by some vicious forces, which were against the decision to boycott the elections.

This particular incident provoked a series of violent incidents across Maharashtra. The repressive state apparatus responded to it by arresting leaders like Dhale.49 The Panthers warned the state saying that the arrest will lead to devastating consequences. Meanwhile, a peace committee was formed to bring the situation under control. The Panthers expressed their anguish over their

46 Ibid., p. 78.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 161.
exclusion from the political arena of RPI and claimed that RPI achieved political momentum after the incident.

The election was held on 13 January and the voter turnout was only 38 per cent. Rosa Deshpande of the Communist Party of India was elected. The congress candidate Adik was placed in third position. Thus, the boycott of elections by the Panthers became a successful act for the Republican Party of India. In the meantime, Shiv Sena and Dalit Panthers had a major ideological disagreement, and the Shiv Sena played a big role in unleashing violence against Dalits. There was political turmoil from 5 January until 17 April 1974. A major tussle took place between the Neo-Buddhists and Hindus, because the Panther speakers had made derogatory remarks on Hindu deities. The police descended on the B.D.D. (Bombay District Development) Chawls at Worli and attacked the Neo-Buddhists. According to Jayashree Gokhale, 10 per cent of the B.D.D. Chawls were occupied by police employees who were from the Brahmin caste; 20 per cent were occupied by Dalits who were daily workers/labourers in the mill; and 70 per cent were occupied by caste-Hindus who were into the police force and other services. Panthers conducted a procession to the council hall against the police firing and demanded judicial enquiry into the Worli riots. Organizations like Magova Mandal, Progressive Youth Federation, Samajwadi Yuvajana Sabha, and Yuvak Kranti Dal joined the demonstration with Dalit Panthers. Namdeo Dhasal in his uproarious speech declared himself a hardcore communist. The right wing media interpolated it and intensified Shiv Sena’s hatred of Dalit panthers. The pamphlet of Comrade Vaidya entitled “Dalits of Worli are beyond

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50 Ibid., p. 159.  
51 Ibid., p. 160.  
52 Ibid.
threats” created conflict between the Dalit agitators and the Maratha caste Hindus.53

In response to this situation, the Dalit Panthers submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister Vasantrao Naik demanded the suspension of the police officials involved in the riots, allotment of Chawls to Neo-Buddhists etc. In this discourse, Leftist leaders such as Dange also shared his sympathy with the struggles of Dalit Panthers.54 And the different progressive political movements in Maharashtra problematised the suppression of Dalits through their solidarities. Dalit Panthers were sceptical of the involvement of the state government because activists like Narayan Kamble had faced a series of punishment.55 Raja Dhale suspected the surveillance and repression of the state apparatuses. He argued that the enquiry commission on the Worli riots may turn against the Dalits. For instance, neo-Buddhists who gathered on 13 April 1974 for flag hoisting and Buddha Vandana, were disrupted by caste Hindus who pelted stones.56

The police suppressed the conflict using lethal weapons, and four people killed in the incident. The Matunga labour camp near Dharavi witnessed a cultural scrap between the right wing and Dalit Panthers. A cartoon that appeared in the journal Marmik caricaturing the Buddha who surrenders to the activists of Dalit Panthers was pasted there. The panthers agitated by seizing all copies and declared that they would burn it. Thus, communal vested interests of caste Hindus triggered the atrocities against Dalits.

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p. 161.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., p. 162.
The Panther movement was marked by several splits. The original Dalit Panther organisation broke up into various sections and by April 1977 they had emerged as different groups. The major groups among them became mass movements under leaders like Raja Dhale. Maharashtra Dalit Panther movement was led by Arun Kamble. Another Dalit Panther faction was led by Sangare and Mahatekar. And Namdeo Dhasal led another faction. The Panther was thus leading military force that challenged the entire Congress and Shiv Sena parties, and hence became a strong force in the politics of Maharashtra.\(^{57}\) In the end, although the Dalit Panther was phenomenon in itself, it did not sustain because of the lack of organisational structural set up and failure to strength the Dalit politics.

Another significant perspective developed by Dalit Panther was in the realm of literary genres, although Dalit literature in Maharashtra has its own history that begins from the 13th-century Bhakti tradition of saints and the 19th-century Ambedkarite movement.\(^{58}\) It created an aura in the cultural sphere by challenging the dominant Brahmanical doxas in literature.\(^{59}\) Eleanor Zelliott points out “Dalit Sahitya, as a school, a self-conscious movement”.\(^{60}\) However, the literature evolved within the field of Russian, Chinese, Bengali and Premchand classics. According to Gail Omvedt, in the 1960s Black Panthers were attacking dehumanisation based on racism, and Dalit Panther has taken a motivation from them.\(^{61}\) Therefore, one can argue that Dalit literature was born in the womb of

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\(^{57}\) Palshikar (2003), *Jat aani Maharashtratil Sattakaran*, p. 34.

\(^{58}\) The Bhakti tradition was individualist in which Chokhamela and Namdeo raised the question of caste. It also includes women saints such as Janabai and Nirmala who talked about caste, class and gender. Also see Eleanor Zelliott (1992), *From Untouchables to Dalit*, Manohar Publication, p. 269.


\(^{60}\) Eleanor Zelliott (1992), *From Untouchables to Dalit*, p. 269.

angst, pain and inequality in the society. Through experiential account, Arjun Dangle argues that Dalit literature projects the right to live a life with self-dignity.62

The startling advent of Dalit literature had a positive impact on other marginalized communities resulting in the rise of rural, folk, Muslims, tribal and Gondi literary forms in Maharashtra.63 Thus, it instilled imaginations on inequality, and signified the binaries like larger societies and subjugated communities. Hence, one can argue that the writing of Dalit women is the structural consequence of Dalit literature.

Section III: Namantar Movement

The inception of Namantar movement was based on the fundamental ideology of Dr. Ambedkar. It was an extended force of Dalit Panther movement. At the inaugural function of the Milind Mahavidhyalaya, established by Babasaheb, he asserted that Marathwada region needed a separate university because historically it was the most backward region in Maharashtra.64 In 1954, people from Jalana district organised a massive protest and demanded the government to establish the university. In response, the Chief Minister, Yashvatarao Chavan established a committee under Justice S.M. Palnitkar on 1958. Thus, the university was founded in the year 1962.65 This committee suggested a list of the names of eminent personalities such as Ambedkar for the university. However, following a deliberation, the members of the committee passed a resolution

64 Machindre Sakte (2005), Namantar aani Natar, Khayansurya Prakashan, p. 36.
65 Deenkar Salve, Dalit movement after 1956, p. 25.
stating that the university had to be named as ‘Marathwada’. Since then, until 1975, Marathwada has had three Vice-Chancellors—Dogarikar, Nanasaheb Tawde and R.P. Nath. During the tenure of R.P. Nath, the politics of naming it as Dr. Ambedkar University was instigated. The student organisation agitated against the corrupt practices in the education institutions and beat up the Vice-chancellor. The Republican Vidhyarathi Sanghatana in 1974 raised the issue of naming the university as Dr. Ambedkar University; they sent a memorandum to the chief minister stating that the university should be named Ambedkar University. The secretary to the Chief Minister, Yashwantrao Chavan wrote to the students’ organisation explaining that the government of Maharashtra was seriously thinking about naming either the Aurangabad or Parbhani District University as Dr. Ambedkar University.

In 1975, to bring the situation in the institution under control, Shankarrao Khatar was appointed as Vice-Chancellor. He was a radical Ambedkarite, Dalit writer and associated with Ambedkar in his various movements. It was a time when Dalit Panther was very active as a radical force in the whole of Maharashtra. Through speeches the Panther leaders critically evaluated the caste system and raised the question of self-respect and dignity. The caste Hindus were not able to come to terms with a Vice-Chancellor from a Dalit community. Caste Hindus also harassed and abused Dalit students in the educational institutions. Under such humiliating circumstances, Karat only managed to sustain for two years; he

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69 Ibid.
resigned. Meanwhile, the Congress party lost in the Lok Sabha election of 1977; the Janata party emerged victorious. At the same time, the political alliances of Maharashtra too changed, and in 1978, the state announced the Vidhan Sabha election.

By this time, the congress had fragmented into two groups and Vasandada Patil of Reddy Congress group became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. He appointed B.R. Bhosale as Vice-Chancellor of Marathwada University.

Raja Dhale of the Dalit Panthers announced the dismissal of the Panthers. However, Arun Kamble, Gangadhar Gade, Ramdas Aathawale .and others renewed the Panther. They held a meeting in Aurangabad. The meeting outlined some of the agendas and incorporated the issue of Namantar. In 1977, at Mahad, the government organised a celebration marking 50 years of Mahad Satyagrah. The Chief Minister gave a speech during the celebration, and a few Dalit activists and writers of the Panther demanded the naming of Dr. Ambedkar University.

Vasandada Patil agreed to the demand and asked the Panther activists to forward an official memorandum to the government of Maharashtra. The Panther sent the letter but soon realised that nothing was going to come out of it. On 18 July 1977, the day Annabhau Sathe died, the historical Namantar movement was launched in his memory. Eminent socialist leader S.M. Joshi and Baba Adhav also supported the naming of Ambedkar University. However, freedom fighter Govindbhai Shraff publicly opposed the move. Thus two groups
emerged with differing positions. One group supported the Namantar and the other opposed it.\textsuperscript{72}

The pro-Namantar group agreed on the following points: \textsuperscript{73}

1) If Shivaji University can be named at Kolhapur, Mahatma Phule University at Rahuri, Panjabrao Deshmukh University at Akola, Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, then, why can't the university at Aurangabad be named after Ambedkar?

2) The foundation of higher education was laid in Aurangabad through the efforts of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Therefore, we must pay our respects to him by naming the university after him.

3) The idea to have a separate university at Aurangabad was originally proposed by Ambedkar; so one must fulfil his dream.

4) Two universities bear the name 'Marathwada'. What is the problem in naming one of them after Ambedkar?

5) Babasaheb Ambedkar is the architect of the Indian constitution. So, a memorial should be constructed to acknowledge his service.

6) The demand for Namantar is not only by Dalits. All professors, students, the principal and senate members support the movement.

7) Around 26 per cent of the students at Aurangabad University were Dalits. Hence their demand has to be considered by the concerned authorities.

8) If Daulatabad can be named as Devgiri, Khadaki transformed into Aurangabad then why not to have Marathwada as Ambedkar.


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., pp. 40–41.
Those who were against the move took the following positions.74

1) Why not change Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur University rather than Marathwada?

2) ‘Marathwada’ symbolise the identity of Marathas. This name equips them with a sense of regional solidarity. Therefore, changing the name to Ambedkar is like disregarding the interests of Marathas.

3) No doubt, Dr. Ambedkar is a great personality and his memento should be constructed. Why not establish another University in his name?

4) Who says that by naming it as Ambedkar, one can pay respect or homage to him? It can be dealt with in several other ways. One can build his memorial anywhere in Marathwada.

5) If the university has to be named after great personalities, then why not name it after saint Salivahan, Swami Ramanada and Eknatha?75

Machindre Sakte argues that the caste Hindu Diaspora organised the students, leaders and their society against the naming of Marathwada University as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University. In everyday discourse of life casteist mindsets reproduced casteist remarks. For example they remarked that Milind Mahavidyalaya was called as M.M College to mean Mahar and Mang; Sarwati Bhavan College was called as S.B. College to mean Satji and Bhatji; and Maulana Azad College was called as M college to mean Momadian College. Thus, the first

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
massacre of Marathwada resulted in the death of Pochiram Kamble, Govindrao Bhure and the brutal rape of several Dalit women.

In 1978, Sharad Pawar became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and on 27 July of the same year, he passed a resolution stating that Marathwada University will be named as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University. Within a span of an hour, the whole Marathwada was engulfed in a genocide carried out by the caste Hindus. The genocide lasted around ten days. As Raosaheb Kasbe argues that, 'the genocide at Marathwada is the predecessor to fascism'. Therefore, the Namantar movement revealed the deep-rooted psyche of caste Hindus though their activities.

After the genocide, the Panther became more forceful in their activities. The Panther declared a 'black day' on 14 August 1978 and announced Bharat Bandh. On 6 December 1978 they organised the long march that was a historical event in Maharashtra. Dalits from different parts of Maharashtra participated in it; it was a remarkable point in the Namantar movement. The communist and socialist parties had shared aims on the 'long march' with some minor differences. Caste and class became the central debate between the two ideologies. Naxalites in Maharashtra declared the Namantar agitation as class struggle. Comrade Shrada Patil had an intellectual dialogue with the Marxist communist party leaders for a long time. Since the Marxist communist party was absolutely silence on the caste issue, he formulated a new philosophical stream

Pochiram Kamble belongs to Mang caste. He was a radical Ambedkarite and tried to spread ideology of Ambedkar. This act of his was, however, not tolerated by caste Hindus.

Govindrao Bhure was burned alive by caste Hindus.

I use this word 'here because it was deliberate extermination of a subordinate caste.

Salve, Dalit Movement after 1956, p. 20.

Sakte (2005), Namantar aani Natar, Khayansurya Prakashan, p. 3.

under the name of *Sataysodhka Communist Party*. In 1972, Baba Adhav, a socialist leader started a movement under the slogan ‘One village, one water point’. According to him, the eradication of untouchability should be practically addressed to reinforce the socialist party in which Dalit will be sympathetic. But, N.G. Gore of his party opposed the noble idea and argued that socialists should deal with the economic problems of Dalits rather than their social problems. So, Adhav left the socialist party and established the *Mahatma Phule Pratishtian*. Thus the Communist party of India, Marxist communist party, and Lal Nishan Party did not practically participate in the Namantar movement choosing to keep their solidarity under the carpet of silence on caste. Namdeo Dhasal and RPI leaders R.S. Gavai and B.C. Kamble took a similar position. Three leaders Jogendra Kawade, Ramdas Athwale and Arun Kamble came to the fore during the duration of the ‘long march’. The Namantar movement not only addressed the question of naming a university but also dealt with the problems of Dalits. For instance, Dalit *Yuvak Aaghadi*, an organization of Dalit teachers and students fought against the onslaught of the Gairan land.

From 1980 to 1988, the Namantar movement kept a low profile although the procession and demonstration went on. Vilas Dhone became extremely worried because following the massacre no leader paid adequate attention to the Namantar issue. Hence, in 1982, Dhone wrote to Baba Adhav saying,

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82 Ibid.
83 The idea behind ‘one village, one water point’ was to transform the lives of Dalit women who had to endure tremendous caste discrimination everyday while fetching water. Dalit women were not supposed to touch the well because it would become impure.
84 Salve *Dalit Movement after 1956*, p. 21.
85 The ‘Long March’ was organised twice, in the year 1978 and 1982.
'Namantar movement have to be made militant, otherwise I will self-sacrifice'.

On 25 April, Dhone committed suicide at the Pune railway station.

The 1980s witnessed the emerging leadership of Prakash Ambedkar under the banner of *Samayak Samaj Aandolan*. He was not in favour of the Namantar movement because, according to him, it was a movement based on the emotion of the Dalit community. The agenda of the Dalits should be for social and economic cause.

Prakash Ambedkar attempted to assimilate other Bahujans with the Dalits and took up the issues of other marginal groups in which toiling land, Gairan land, unemployment of Dalit-Bahujan youths and nationalisation of sugar industry were focused. Under his leadership, for first time the problems of Dalit rural women and their day to day struggles were addressed by the Bharatiya Republican Party. He also established a committee that counter-argued those who protested the 'Riddles in Hinduism', and efforts were made to put together the progressive caste on one single platform. Thus, once again the RPI collective consciousness was made to stand against fascist forces.

In 1985, the Shiv Sena emerged as an alternative force to the Congress; the Sena entered into an alliance with BJP and achieved a landmark success in the 1998

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87 Dhone belonged to Maratha caste. He was highly impressed by the Phule, Shahu and Ambedkarite ideology. For details see Sakte (2005), *Namantar aani Natar*, p. 54.

88 Ibid.


90 Salve *Dalit Movement after 1956*, p. 34.

Fragmented RPI groups tried to organise themselves under a single large party to counter the Congress and Shiv Sena. However, it did not last long because within RPI one group was in favour of an alliance with the Congress and other was against it. For instance, in the 9th Lok Sabha election of 1989, some RPI groups entered into alliances with the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party. Hence, Prakash Ambedkar also failed to consolidate the RPI. He ended up joining the NCP with the justification that the most important political rivals of Dalits are parties like Shiv Sena and BJP. And to fight them, the BRP had to join the NCP. Dalit politics had three options before it.

(a) To enter into an alliance with the Congress to challenge the Shiv Sena and BJP alliance.

(b) To enter into an alliance with the Shiv Sena and BJP.

(c) To contest the election independently under the banner of RPI.

However, it was impossible for RPI to contest election independently. It was true that in the larger context of Maharashtra RPI was able to show Dalit strength, mobilisation and demonstrations, but at local/village level it had no strength due to the lack of an organisational structure. Thus, Dalit politics was always constrained with certain limitations, something Dalit leaders could not overcome. For instance, an alliance with the Congress party will make Dalit leaders dependent upon the Congress for every single decision. And if Dalit

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92 Palshikar (2003), Jat aani Maharashtratil Sattakaran, p. 36.
94 Ibid.
95 Palshikar (2003), Jat aani Maharashtratil Sattakaran, p. 36.
leaders decide to ally with the Shiv Sena and BJP, they would have to compromise their goal of overthrowing the Hindutva forces.96

Thus, the representations of Dalit political parties have been a major issue for the Congress, Shiv-Sena and BJP. Since the 1990s onwards the two major parties namely, Shiv Sena and BJP, began a discourse of caste within caste for Hindu Dalits.

According to Palshikar, Dalit castes such as Mang and Chamar were co-opted to oppose Ambedkar in an attempt to create their independent identity. Therefore, these Dalit castes (Mang, Chamar, and Dhor) began critiquing the dominance of Mahars in the RPI and tried to analyse the mobility of Mahars in urban spaces, which was the agenda of the Hindutva forces and parties like the Shiv Sena and BJP.97 This division of Buddhist converted verses non-Buddhist Dalits widened the gap created by castes. The result was that instead of fighting against the situated hierarchy, the ideology of Hindutva was been strengthened among the Mangs and Chamars.98

Meanwhile, the RPI also failed to bring about solidarity among the other Dalit castes. The Mahars were the most deprived in the Balutadari system; they did not have the occupation that Mangs and Chamars engaged in, such as basket, rope, and shoe making. So, they started availing the education and reservation facilities right from the initial stages and began changing themselves. The Shiv Sena and BJP took advantage of the situation by bringing in the Mangs and

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96 Ibid., p. 37.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
Chamars into their ideological fold from the 1990s onwards. In the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election, the Hindu Dalit castes secured a huge victory: 6 members of parliaments from Mang caste, 8 from Chamar and Dhor caste, 3 from Neo-Buddhist, and 1 from Mehatar caste.99

The other ploy used by the Shiv Sena and BJP to bring these Hindu Dalit castes together against the Buddhist Mahar was the mobilisation of the Mang literary leaders, Comrade Annabhau Sathe, Lahuji Vasthd and Saint Ravidas. It was then argued that these castes had a history of their own.100

As Kishor Dhamale argues, the mechanisation process of the 1970s replaced the traditional forms of occupation such as rope, basket making and so on.101 Thus, Mang population began migrating from rural to urban places for their livelihood. And they found that Buddhist Mahar were better in education and economic conditions. Therefore, their traditional caste conflicts came to the fore in the premises of capitalist caste conflict.102 Leaders like Laxman Dobale and Mudhukar Kamble of Mang caste emerged from the Congress and Nationalist Congress parties. Hence, emerged a new middle class among the Mang caste; they took hold of the entire Mang caste politics in which the rural masses of Mang community were left behind.

The year 1995, witnessed the unity of RPI, as demanded by the Ambedkarite masses. One of the reasons for the emergence of this unity was to counter the

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100 Suhas Palshikar (2003), Jat aani Maharashtratil Sattakaran, p. 37.
102 Ibid.
Hindutva forces which attacked the constitution of India drafted by Ambedkar. But, this unity was again criticised by Mang and Chamar leaders who argued that it was the unity of the Neo-Buddhists rather than that of the RPI. However, the RPI continued to deny the existence of Dalit women. Even Neo-Buddhist/Buddhist Mahar women were not accommodated in any of the fragmented groups of RPI. According to Pratima Pardeshi, the entire RPI/Dalit movement had not taken adequate measures against the subjugation of Dalit women. RPI leaders realised that the Dalit women's fight was against caste and patriarchy. Hence, they did not establish any organisational foundation for Dalit women. The alienation of Mang and Chamar in the RPI forced them to join the Hindutva ideological parties, which began to give representation to Mang women. Thus, the caste barrier among the Mahar and Mang widened in political spheres too, in which women from these castes were also victims of patriarchy.

On the other hand, Mang women started getting accommodated in political spheres, which was denied to them by all other political parties in democratic India. This was despite the fact that all fundamentalist parties do believe and maintain the rigid caste system. According to Vidyut Bhagwat, "dalit polities also look at the issues of empowerment of women as non-issues. Women in Dalit politics figure only in number and are caught in a trap of 'our women' framework." The Mahar-Buddhist community in Maharashtra failed to provide true leadership and Dalit women's problems remained as it was. This resulted in further marginalisation of Dalit women. In the year 1995, Dalit

feminists established the National Federation of Dalit women (NFDW). There they argued that Dalit leaders systematically obfuscated Dalit women.

Section VI: Dalit Feminist Critique

NFDW has held the conferences in different parts of Maharashtra since 1995, when they formulated a 12-point agenda. They rearticulate the category of Dalits within the boundaries of the institution of caste. They refuted the claims of upper caste women working for the cause of Dalit women. By reinterpreting the perspectives of Phule and Ambedkar they also broke the shackles of Dalit patriarchy which is the internal factor that prompted Dalit women to claim an identity distinct from that of Dalit male. Dalit leaders suppressed the autonomous assertion of Dalit women in the post-Ambedkarite era by excluding Dalit women from the cultural field of Dalit politics. For instance, in the year 1942 Dalit Mahila federation was a landmark in history of woman in general and Dalit women in particular. The main aim of the federation was to organise Dalit women from different places to make them politically conscious on several issues.

They expressed their solidarity by accepting Dr. Ambedkar as their leader. They elected Shantabai Dani as president of Scheduled caste federation at the Nasik conference. The second conference of scheduled caste federation was held in 1944 at Kanpur and the third at Bombay in which Minambal Shivraj was

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105 See the report of first conference of Dalit Mahila Sanghatana, Maharashtra, 1995, Published by Aalojana Documentation Centre.
Therefore, the post-Ambedkarite epoch was one visualised to be built on the political ideology of Ambedkar, in which the major emphasis was on the independent party of scheduled caste people. The RPI (Republic party of India, which was known earlier as Scheduled Caste Federation) decided to remain a non-communal party keeping a watch on social and economic issues related to untouchability.

Nevertheless, after Dr. Ambedkar's death, due to the lack of effective leadership in RPI the various groups within it differed on policy matters. It is not that Dalit women were not represented in those groups of RPI. Nonetheless, the two groups of RPI had very big differences over many issues leading to the fragmentation and, hence, the decline of the RPI. Also both the groups of RPI were marked by only a minimal representation of Dalit women. For example, in the Awale-Kamble group, Tanabai Bharude and Sakhubai Mohite were active, and in the Khobragade group, Damayanti Desbhrater and Ishwarabai played important members.

The case of Shantabai Dani is illustrative of the lot of women activists. She joined the scheduled caste federation (SCF) and organised the Dalit women's conference. Jayashree Gokhale asserted that "Due to her sex, Shantabai endured great hardship in her activities as a party worker, particularly in rural areas". She was an active member, who also contributed in the Bhumiheen (Landless) Satyagraha of the 1950s; she was a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from

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107 Ibid.
110 Ibid., p. 223.
1968 to 1974, and held various other important positions.\textsuperscript{111} Gitabai and Sitabai Gaikwad, Rikmini Dani, Laxmibai and Indubai Dani, Rani Pagare, Satyabhamabai and others also actively participated in Bhumiheen Satyagrah.\textsuperscript{112} Nonetheless, due to the prevalent internal patriarchy, all these (Dalit) women were never given any leadership roles, but were marginalised in almost every aspect of the political struggle.

When Dalit Panther came into being in the early 1970s in Maharashtra, it was a rigid period of social and economic transaction for the state. The state was confronted with endless problems like joblessness, strikes and demonstration during 1972-1973. The rural Dalit students challenged the state apparatus with the belief that untouchability, caste discrimination, poverty and oppression can be reduced through radical means.\textsuperscript{113} Namdeo Dhasal and Dhale were the first militant activists. They established a distinct political identity, separate from RPI, named Dalit Panther on 15 August 1972 marking it as a black Independent day. It was about the same time that parties like Shiv Sena also emerged.\textsuperscript{114} Two incidents—the B.D.D. riots (Bombay District Development) and the Aurangabad and Sangli violence—provide an insight into the emergence of the panther as a political force. In both of these cases, it was the atrocities on the untouchables that led to the riots.\textsuperscript{115}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 225.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
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In its early stage Panther recognised the atrocities on Dalits including the question of rape on Dalit women. For example, in May 1972, in Brahmangaon in Parbhani, two scheduled caste women were assaulted by high caste Hindus and stripped of their clothes because they had drawn water from a well belonging to caste Hindus. But it was never a central issue for them. Gabriele Dietrich argues that the gender of the Dalit women have been used by Dalit leaders to further their own patriarchal interests, for example in harassment, rape of Dalit women etc. And thus neither dalit leaders nor Women’s movement in India (mainstream feminists) addressed the issues of Dalit women.

Male members in the Panther movement formulated many questions like poverty, literacy, employment etc as the entire Dalit Panther movement was dominated by male members. As Jogdand argued, the Dalit Panther movement did not improve the plight of Dalit women. In the Namantar movement several women had played crucial roles. For instance, Pratibha Taide and Shila Dongre committed suicide demanding that Namantar of Marathwada University be legitimised as soon as possible.

Thus, all these three important struggles were dominated by the RPI, Mahar Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist leaders and women were totally marginalised. Also, we do not have any authentic document of these women’s work because they were treated as secondary figures in the politics of the movement. It was

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116 Ibid., p. 40.
about the same time span that Dalit feminists began to re-articulate their categories of experiences at various forums by attacking their subjection based on caste, class and gender.

The principal cause of Dalit women’s oppression is the caste factor, which correlates with patriarchy. Patriarchy as a concept have been contested on the ground that it is an essentialist, a historical formulation that obfuscates the differences in the range of experiences of women across cultures, classes and ethnicity. Nonetheless, the concept of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of aspects of women’s subordination. It is susceptible to development in a way that it can highlight the different forms of gender inequality across cultures, classes and castes or ethnic groups. For subordination of women in general, rape has been used as a common tool but for Dalit women in particular, rape by upper castes is an instrument that correlates with their caste. Though Dalit movement was assertive on rape issues with its multifaceted relationship between caste and women’s subordination, an issue was never seriously addressed as both women’s movement and Dalit movement were upper caste dominated and patriarchal.

Questioning the multifaceted character of their exploitation including their own community, Dalit feminists argue that the patriarchal domination within family and community needs to be challenged. Their central argument is that there is a distinct version of patriarchy that prevails within the Dalit community. This version of patriarchy partakes some of the elements of patriarchy in general, but

it is also in many ways unique because it operates within a framework of the
culture of poverty and subordination. Therefore, it is important that the
distinctiveness of Dalit patriarchy from its more general version in Indian society
is clearly analysed and understood. Only then can we analyse the situation of
Dalit women. The systematic obfuscation of the Dalit women’s questions in the
post-Ambedkarite period is a direct result of the Dalit patriarchy of the Dalit
leaders. Thus, Dalit patriarchy is responsible for the marginalization of Dalit
women and their political autonomy. Dalit males maintain their dominance and
hegemony in the terrain of culture. Focusing upon a particular notion of Dalit
patriarchy, Dalit feminists have successfully demystified it and questioned the
patriarchal notions of Dalit men. They have suggested that Dalit women should
be in a position to share their experiences at different forums, to which they have
so far been denied by Dalit males. However, caste politics within Mahar and
Mang have followed a trend similar to the one drawn by the Shiv Sena and BJP
for Hindu Dalit castes. On the other hand, RPI also maintained the rigidity of
caste through its domination as Buddhist Mahar.

We conclude this chapter by arguing that RPI failed to address the caste within
caste and Dalit women were deliberately marginalised in all three political
movements due to their gender. Further, the division of caste and the ploy of the
BJP and Shiv Sena to segregate them have weakened Dalit solidarity meant to
fight against Hindutva forces. In this regard, the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj
Party may be the only hope for the young Dalit generation. Hopefully, the party
will provide equal opportunity to all Dalit caste within Dalits.