Chapter-VII

Some Conclusions
People generally believe that human beings are the best creations on earth. However, human society throughout its history has been an exploitative system. The existing social orders around the world are marked by anything other than equality, justice and liberty for all. We always find a section of people, in a given society that faces inhuman discrimination by the upper crust. The reality is no exception to the most powerful democracy and the largest democracy in the world. For hundreds of years, the socio-economic conditions of the American blacks and the Indian Dalits have been marked by poverty, illiteracy, ill treatment and 'exclusion'. The present research has sought to examine the struggle for justice and equality by the American Blacks and Indian downtrodden in a comparative perspective.

An enormous amount of literature is available depicting socio-economic discrimination in the United States and India. Both Black and Dalit literature played a pivotal role in portraying the discrimination faced by the Blacks and Dalits respectively. These literatures also outlined the context against which new agendas for resistance against historic injustice had to be devised. To be fair, though, many White writers in America also made an effort to portray Black life in their writings; these included authors like, Eugene O'Neil and William Faulkner. Despite this, Gene Marine's sympathetic account of Black Panthers negates the notion that a White can never feel for the cause of Blacks in the same the way as a Black would feel for it. However, this is a negation of the possibility of intellectual-literary transcendence of class/race/caste divides, and is not borne out by historical developments. High-caste Hindu writers have, for instance, successfully portrayed the feelings and sufferings of Dalits, and this is clearly evident in the writings of litterateurs like Munshi Premchand, Kamleshwar, Vijay Tendulkar, Nagarjuna, Mahashweta Devi and Rajendra Yadav.

This question of transcendence assumes importance when we look at the actual politics of the Dalit and Black movement. When a comparison of the democratic Dalit movement in India is attempted with the history of strong civil
rights movements by the Blacks in the US, one cannot ignore the more widespread nature of the Black movement. Perhaps their focus on the issues of human rights and civil liberties also succeeded in attracting a wide range of activists from all over the US. On the contrary, Dalit movements have remained confined to literature, with very little being for those actually sitting on the margins and in the villages. Perhaps this was partly because the Black movement in the US, and especially the Black Panthers, emphasised the question of class very strongly, while the Dalit movement in India failed to do so. This is the reason the latter failed to mobilize support from other backward castes who might have been, strictly speaking, outside the category of 'Dalit'; it was also the reason why they failed to garner support from progressive upper-caste organizations or Left progressive forces.

Why was it difficult for the Dalit Panthers to form a broader unity with progressive forces and to align themselves with the left parties? This question has been posed by various analysts and scholars, and Gail Omvedt argues that this was a result of the Dalit's traditional suspicion of the Left, for which the nature of Left politics was responsible to a large extent. Omvedt stresses that these issues provoked a split with the other sections, and has put all blame on non-Dalits and on various shades of the communist movement who are alleged to have been theoretically disarmed by the Marxist denial of caste. Georges Kristoffel Lieten, however, has questioned this critique of an over-emphasis on caste, arguing that caste is a primary marker of identity within Indian society and therefore the question cannot be over-emphasised. He also notes that trying to achieve a more broad-based support could lead to a loss in caste-based unity.

It is also worth asking if a mobilization strategy based on class would have been more effective. In 1960, for example, much before Dalit Panthers emerged, the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti had launched an agitation on the issue of land

and labour under the leadership of an umbrella coalition of different Left parties; the Republican Party had also supported the agitation. The Maharashtra state police, however, fired on the peaceful protestors leading to the death of 105 people, most of whom were Dalits. Similarly, in 1996, nineteen Dalits were massacred by the Ranveer Sena (a militia organised by upper caste Bhumihars) in Bathani Tola, Bhojpur in Bihar. This was a direct attack on those poor and landless Dalits who had got politically organized under the CPI (ML) Liberation and had resisted attempts by the upper castes to evict them from their land. Dalits, thus, become victims even when they are organized on class lines.

In fact one of the major planks of the many popular Dalit movements has been their inclusiveness, be it on the question of class or caste, and this is very evident for example in the movement led by Ambedkar. In fact, Ambedkar's movement was so wide-ranging and so similar in many ways to Martin Luther King's inclusive politics of civil rights that one wonders why the latter borrowed from Gandhi and not from Ambedkar, as both their struggles, their means and their ends were similar to a large extent. Though Ambedkar might have noted on occasion that the fight against oppression, whether violent or non-violent, was equally justified, he never in practise overtly or covertly supported the strategy of violent rebellion. Even in Mahad when the violence spilled over, it was Ambedkar who controlled the people of depressed classes and desisted them from retaliating against the violence initiated by upper castes. On the economic question too, Ambedkar supported the liberal-welfare function of the state—a position which was quite close to that of Martin Luther King.

Ambedkar's inclusive slogan of 'Hate Brahmanism and not Brahmins' in fact, saw several democratic and progressive people from the upper caste aligning with him and helping him in the cause of his struggle for the depressed classes. Sridharpant Tilak, son of Bal Gangadhar Tilak was an admirer and friend of

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Ambedkar and Javalkar and Jedhe who did not belong to Depressed Classes provided whole hearted support to the Mahad Satyagraha. Narhar Vishnu Gadgil, a leader of Congress and a minister in the post-independence cabinet of Nehru enthusiastically participated in the ‘Temple-Entry Satyagraha’. M.B. Chitins became the principal of Milind College which Ambedkar started at Aurangabad. He became the guiding force behind the renaming movement of Marathwada University in the late 1970s. Thus there were many prominent leaders from the upper castes who felt for the Dalit cause.

Ambedkar, in fact, appreciated the gesture of the Left parties and was closely associated with the communists in the late 1930s. In one of his historical speeches, he claimed that considering the amount of effort and time that had gone into winning a success in Russia, India would not take very long at all in achieving an equitable society. Very soon, though, Ambedkar distanced himself from the communists on the plea that Marxism had its theoretical foundation based on class and not caste issues and thus, made a thorough criticism of the theory of the economic base and cultural superstructures. However, he once again realized that such an anti-left position could lead to antagonizing certain progressive forces and therefore sought to create a party that had a bigger mass base and called it the ‘Republican Party of India’.

Martin Luther King, too, was disgruntled with the politics of the Left in the US. He made a through criticism of the communists primarily because of the means of violence which the Marxist suggested for class struggle. King’s leadership also coincided with the period of the Vietnam War, and perhaps his disenchantment with mindless violence grew further when he witnessed the killings of not just the Vietnamese civilians, but also of American soldiers, the majority of whom were

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607 Although the idea of Republican Party of India was conceptualised by Ambedkar, the party was ultimately formed after the demise of Ambedkar in 1956. Today, there are about a dozen factions of Republican Party in Maharashtra.
A Visual by Emory Doughlas

A Visual by Emory Doughlas
Black. Yet another reason for King’s non-engagement with the communists can be attributed to the perpetual absence of any radical Left movement in the United States. It was only towards the end of the Civil Rights movement that a trend of New Left emerged in the United States.

The struggles against discrimination in both the countries were not confined to champions of non-violence. Oppression, suppression and exploitation were often so extreme that a section of American Blacks and Indian Dalits resorted to revenge and retribution. In contrast to the politics of King was the violent and provocative means adopted by the Black Panthers, who came up with the slogan of:

*Off the Pigs!*

*All power to the People!!*

The BPP had begun primarily to resist the atrocities of White policemen (whom the panthers called pigs) targeted against the Black youths in the ghettos of the Bay Area in San Francisco. Black Panthers gradually consolidated their organization and shaped their ideological position, tuning it in line with the spirit of revolutionary internationalism, which is reflected in their second slogan. The politics of the Black Panthers also inspired their compatriots in other parts of the world, for instance the Dalit Panthers, who came into existence in order to resist the growing atrocities on Neo-Buddhist Dalits by upper caste Hindus. The way Dalit Panthers defined the word ‘Dalit’ in their manifesto is vividly reflected by their slogans:

*Bol dalita halla bol!*

*Bol majura halla bol!!*

However, though the Black panthers had organized a mouthpiece of their party, which was called *The Black Panther* newspaper, Dalit Panthers did not have any organized medium to propagate their ideology. Namdeo Dhasal did start editing the *Satyata* but could not continue doing it for long. But though the Dalit Panthers lacked the organisation of their Panthers in America, they used many of the same strategies. For example, in an exact parallel to the way in which Black
Panthers entered the California Assembly with guns, two members of the Dalit Panthers (Gawade and More) entered the Maharashtra Assembly and literally ‘spat fire’ by putting kerosene in their mouths to protest against the atrocities of the upper castes in the state. These incidents attracted the immediate attention of the mass media.

BPP rose as a movement for self-defence. Later it expanded into a political movement in other areas and developed various programmes in the areas of education, health and other areas. The government, in partial retaliation, also built similar programmes in order prevent Blacks from getting closer to the line of BPP and its self-defence objective. Several community programmes of the Black Panthers, although criticized by scholars as serving a reformist rather than revolutionary agenda, were seen as survival programmes by the leadership. These programmes actually allowed them to gain popularity amongst the poor and unemployed youth who were usually vulnerable and often pushed into anti-social activity.

The ‘revolutionary-programme’ of the Black Panthers was even more diluted during latter years upon Elridge Cleaver’s return from political exile in Cuba and France. By the 1980s, Cleaver had managed to achieve a total ideological turnaround—from being an extreme left-wing ideologue, he became a fixture at the Peninsula Bible Church located at Palo Alto in the Bay Area of San Francisco. This church was a spiritual home of Charles Colson, a special counsel of President Richard Nixon. Elridge soon became a conservative Republican and supported and campaigned for Ronald Reagan in the 1980 as well as the 1984 US presidential election. This shift during later years within some ideologues also has a parallel within the Dalit Panthers in India, where leaders like Namdeo Dhasal took a compromising and rightward shift. In 1975, for example, he supported emergency and wrote the ‘Priyadarshini’ in honour of the erstwhile Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In 1997, he allied with Shiv Sena, and in 2006 he appeared on the platform of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh.
Despite these almost eerie parallels not only in the programmes but also in the ‘perversions’ that crept in, there were major differences between the two parties and both had to tackle different questions which arose in different cultural contexts. For example, because Blacks had been brought from different countries to America during the height of slavery, the question of nationality was one of the major questions that needed to be addressed. Dalits, in contrast, had always been the original inhabitants in India. There was, further, the very topical question of separation or integration for the Blacks which had not been clearly defined or addressed by Black Panthers, their ambivalent position being reflected in Elridge Cleaver’s statement issued in 1968, where he noted that the party thought it too premature to decide which side it was on. In the case of Dalit Panthers, except for stray references to a separate ‘Dalitsthana’ at meeting and rallies by Arun Kamble and other Panthers, it was never an agenda to be reckoned with.

Another major point of difference was that Black Panthers upheld the notion of revolutionary internationalism. They did so not just in theory but did in fact open an office in Algiers, the capital of Algeria. On the other hand, though there is no denying the fact that the Dalit Panthers took inspiration from Black Panthers (so much so the name ‘panther’ itself was borrowed from them), a similar stream of internationalism cannot be detected within them. Perhaps this was partly because the communications network during the 1960s and 70s was not the same as today, despite which there was a certain degree of communication and exchange of ideas between leaders like Ambedkar and Dubois. However, it could perhaps be safely said that though the Dalit Panthers were very aware of the existence of Black Panthers, the reverse was not actually true. This is borne out by the fact that Kathleen Cleaver, the former Communication Secretary of the BPP, who teaches at Yale University, recollects that: ‘I do know about the Dalit Panthers, but primarily from reading about them, or hearing their name being discussed. I have never met any Dalit Panthers.’

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608 Kathleen Cleaver on e-mail written on 15 September 2009.
What Panthers failed to achieve was an accurate, or at least faithful, translation of theory into action. Although Huey Newton had written extensively about correct handling of the revolution, revolutionary violence was never used by the Panthers to actually combat or demolish the oppressive White/state institutions and on several occasions spiralled out of control. Huey’s eventual murder in 1989, which was a consequence of involvement in drug-dealing networks, raised serious questions about the Panther leaders’ commitment to using violence towards justified ends. The action of the Panthers, especially in the later years, perhaps validated the position of Marx and Engels on the role of lumpen-proletariat in bringing about (or preventing) a revolution, and not the Fanon on the issue of a ‘cleansing, redemptive violence’.

The manner in which Black Panthers were getting sympathetic support from White-based organizations like the PFP and White Leftists like Gene Marine also led to serious competition and inter-group violent feuds with some Black Nationalist outfits like the US Organization run by Ron Karenga, which was reflected in a shoot-out at UCLA campus. Similarly, though Dalit Panthers partnered with socialist and communist circles during the ‘renaming of the Marathwada University, they were confronted with serious competition from other Dalit organizations like the Dalit Yuva Aghade who criticized Dalit Panther for being an organization restricted to urban Mahars.

Black Panthers used the principles of dialectical materialism to develop their own understanding of their existential struggles. They studied Kim IL Sung (of Korea) whose ideology was heavily influenced by Mao himself and also by Marxism and Leninism. Panthers developed their understanding using these principles. One of the principles that the Black Panther Party took from Sung was the principle of Juche. It is a Korean word which more or less means ‘use what

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you have got to get what you need’. This concept became popular with many panthers who perceived the concept as being integral to their situation.

During the 1950s and early 60s, we find Americans taking inspiration from the non-violent Indian National Movement and it is in fact ironic that whereas in the early 70s Dalit Panthers in India started emulating the Black Panthers of America, the Black Movement within America itself was seeking inspiration from the Indian National Movement. In India, where non-violence had been used as an effective strategy, peasant movements were turning violent in areas such as Tebhaga in West Bengal and Telangana in Andhra during the late 1940s. However, it has been seen that the violent struggles led to more violence from the side of ‘State’ only with the stated purpose of not allowing individuals and group to take law in their hands. As a result, the masses could not lend their support to the both Black and Dalit Panthers.

History is suggestive of the fact that it is always easier to mobilize a greater number of people for a cause when the ‘nonviolent’ mode of protest is adhered to. Moreover, there is always an attempt within a liberal-capitalistic society to project the violent modes of protest as fruitless, and it always ends up inviting greater and more violent repression from the state. It was also, in a way, expected for the Black Panther Party to be confronted with the strategy of ‘COUNTELPRO’, whereby the state attempted to co-opt the leadership of the movement just as it happened in the case of the Dalit Panthers. There were, for instance, more than 350 court cases against the Dalit Panthers relating to speeches, fighting, etc, and the government withdrew all these cases when the Panthers supported the ‘emergency’.

However, in one very significant sense, both the Dalit and Black movements broke completely new ground, and this was in relation to the participation of women within them. The Mahad Satyagraha, for example, saw a participation of over 3000 women of the depressed classes way back in 1927. This was also the period when women in the United States were becoming increasingly
conscious of their rights: for example, they won the right to vote in 1920 with ratification of Nineteenth Amendment. Within the Black movement too, women rose to accept the leadership on many occasions—Rosa Parks, for instance, was the lady behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Coretta Scott King, the wife of Martin Luther King, was also a woman of immense courage and vision; just about four days after Martin Luther's assassination in Memphis, the aggrieved widow led a procession of over 50,000 women.610

The US Black movement though definitely had the advantage of co-existing with the contemporary Feminist movement. The leadership position of Women in the Black Panther Party is also noteworthy, though of course the limitations with respect to feminism within the agenda and speeches of the Black Panther leaders have been noted during the course of this thesis. Elridge Cleaver’s sexiest conduct, for instance, can find no justification, and so is Dhasal’s. Despite these obstacles and road-blocks, Dalit women’s contribution (both literary and otherwise) on the question of both caste and gender has been path-breaking. Baby Kamble’s *Jinne Amuche* and Urmila Pawar’s *Aaidan* are literary masterpieces611; and although there was not a single woman in the ranks of the Dalit Panthers, Namdeo Dhasal’s wife Mallika Amar Sheikh’s autobiography reveals her deep engagement with and critique of the activism of her husband and his party.

The limitations within the Black and Dalit Panther movement show that even the most radical and revolutionary movement will have its limitations: that no society/community/movement can claim to be totally just in itself. It was on the basis of this basis understanding, and keeping in mind the centuries of oppression and deprivation that Dalits had to undergo, that the Indian government came with the notion of Affirmative Action for social justice. Caste-based reservation has no other logic than to say that reservation or affirmative action based on caste is a cure or corrective measure because the disease of discrimination itself was based on the


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It is often argued that caste-based reservation is responsible for the ugly menace of casteism and that it invokes caste-consciousness and deepens caste feelings. This argument can only be valid if there suitable arguments are available for the theory that caste did not have as debilitating an impact as is being proclaimed. Many studies have suggested that there are several benefits of reservation policy, and they do result in improving socio-economic conditions of several disadvantaged groups.

A pertinent question however asked in the context of caste-based reservation is that some better-off people benefit at the cost of economically poor people belonging to the upper castes. This argument definitely holds water. As Gail Omvedt has suggested, there are two major scheduled castes in almost every given region, like the Mahars and Mangs in Maharashtra, Malas and Madigas in Andhra, Chamars and Chuhras in North India, all of whom are competitors claiming higher status and benefits. A recent Gujjar-Meena strike in the state of Rajasthan exposed the animosity of a particular caste against another which was seen as the disproportionate beneficiary of a reservation policy meant for scheduled castes. In the current context, however, the solution must come from educated and economically better-off Dalits who should consider relinquishing benefits of the reservations so that less fortunate from their own category can benefit as suggested by Ambedkar himself.

Such a position will help further the cause of the Dalit movement, which has been looking desperately for sympathisers and open forums. A measure of this desperation was reflected in the amount of attention and importance that was attached to the WCAR conference held at Durban in 2001, where an attempt was made to bring the debate over Caste-based Discrimination, which was till very recently considered to be a domestic affair, to an international platform. The participation of different parties in the conference from Third World Countries,

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612 Yogendra Yadav in a public meeting on “Reservations in Higher Education” at Jawaharlal Nehru University on 24 August 2009.
particularly from Asia and Africa pushed ahead the demand of recognizing
discrimination based on caste and social origin or at least extended the meaning and
purview of descent-based discrimination to cover the former two categories of
discrimination.\footnote{Sukhdeo Thorat and Umakant (ed) \textit{Caste, Race and Discrimination: Discourses in International Context} Rawat Publications, (Jaipur, 2004), p.xxii–xxiii.} The point here is that even if it is agreed upon that race is
categorically different from caste, which it indeed is, one fails to understand what is
wrong in persuading a world body like UN for its interference, since the purpose of
the UN is to promote human rights.

The debate over this conference was matched by the even more shocking
conclusions and developments, from the perspective of the discipline of
International Relations, at the Durban Review Conference which was held from 20
to 24 April 2009 at Geneva. This forum was boycotted by the United States of
America, along with Australia, Canada, Israel and Italy, and the reason cited for
this was reluctance of the review committee to remove a portion from the document
adopted in 2001 which had affirmed ‘the inalienable right of the Palestinian people
to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State’. This has
yet again exposed the retrogressive position adopted by the imperialist United
States and its allies on the question of ‘racism’ and ‘occupation’, and ‘self-
determination’ of developing nations.

International politics has generally been considered a conservative arena
where values do not have a strong hold. Imperialism and the violence inherent in
the essentially western state and the state-system have been highlighted in this
comparative study. Status quo is both preferred and affirmed by mainstream
scholars of international relations. But there are interventions from the scholars to
redefine this discipline. As Achin Vanaik has stated, “International Relations is not
simply about inter-state relations but also about the internationalization of domestic
Portrait of Obama with Martin Luther King on a T-Shirt displayed in Harlem Book Fair; Obama’s Presidential Campaign projected him to be fulfilling King’s Dream
conflicts and the domestication of international conflicts". These tendencies were visible at Durban in 2001 and recently during the Durban Review Conference (of the World Conference Against Racism) held at Geneva from 20 to 24 April 2009. Countries like the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Israel and Italy boycotted the review conference. The reason cited for this was the refusal of the review committee to remove a portion from the document adopted in 2001 which affirmed “the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state.” This has yet again exposed the blatant position of the imperialist United States and its allies on the questions of racism and occupation against claims of self-determination of societies and nationalities in the developing world.

More importantly, perhaps, the incident highlights the iniquitous nature of an international order dominated by powerful countries that resist transformation. That this has happened in a moment of immense global optimism is even more ironical. The election of Barack Hussein Obama as the first Afro-American president of the United States is a symbolic step towards the vision outlined by Martin Luther King Jr. King abhorred violence – domestic and international. He stood against the Vietnam War. Obama too has indicated his preference of diplomacy over war to resolve conflict. He has also sought to reach out to the wider world alienated by the actions of his predecessor. He is yet call troops back from Iraq and Afghanistan. But the density of expectations his intentions have put together is high. This was reflected in the Nobel Prize for Peace awarded to him more for his intentions than achievements.

True, large-scale transformations do not result from acts of any single person. But some personalities leave a lasting impact on public life. Lincoln, Phule, Dubois, Ambedkar and King are examples of individuals who sought to bring revolutionary transformation in the societies they lived. Ironically, in each instance,

the catalyst of change was silenced by concerted action – either of an individual or a reactionary collective. Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth because Booth disliked abolitionist impulses of Lincoln. King tried to emulate Gandhi’s methods of passive resistance and non-violence. He first awarded with a Nobel for peace and then showered with a bullet by James Earl Ray. It would be fitting, then, to conclude on the following note. The argument of mainstream international relations scholars that a more just, equal and less violent international order cannot be forged because the logic of the state-system prevents it needs to be contested. There is a need for the discipline of international relations to become more sensitive to these contingencies of politics.