Review

Admixture of socio-personal history in the biographies of The Black Panthers

Sehgal Srishti

Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India.

Accepted 11 May, 2013

The paper is an endeavour to study the revolution brought about by the Black Panther Party through a detailed study of the two autobiographies: ‘Revolutionary Suicide’ by Huey P. Newton and ‘Seize the Time’ by Bobby Seale. Formed in 1966, in the United States of America, The Black Panther Party for self-defence was a revolutionary organisation that served the community. The Black Panther Party was not only political, but a counter cultural movement which brought about a revolution in art and literature as well. It was an iconic counter cultural movement which became the seat of revolutionary ideas. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale were the founders of the party. The Panthers were such an organization that inspired many following generations to rise in struggle against the oppressive system. They achieved this by systematic resistance through the tools of literature, rewriting history, development of political aesthetics, but above all, a personal commitment to the organization of African-Americans. The autobiographies of the two leaders of the party, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale can provide vital insights into the revolution which strived to bring about a change in the status of African-Americans.

Key words: The Black Panther Party, autobiographies, counter culture, literature as a tool for revolution, African-American Revolution.

INTRODUCTION

The most popular forms of writing with the supplanted Africans were autobiographies and memoirs. These forms of writings could voice their feelings. It was a planned, systematic and conscious decision of the African-Americans to write autobiographies as Histories as they wanted to spread awareness among the black masses who were silently consuming the oriental fabricated histories. Autobiographies can illustrate the relationship between narrative and racial categories such as “colored”, “black” and “African-American”. The advantage with such writing is that being a personal account, it can authenticate and justify the life experiences of people struggling to carve their personal and social identities. Their writing style was heavy with invectives and violent connotations. These abuses became one of the most outstanding features of an known as The Black Literature.

Thus, writing proved to be alternative resistance literature of the blacks and also a form of resistance for Africans. Their words were not only the portraits of self but an introspection of evolution of the self in totality with the social environment and conditions. Every form of writing is in alignment with its social scenario.

Black autobiographical writing had its inception in two hundred years old tradition of ‘Slave Narratives’, but it was tapped in the 1960s and 1970s by the African-Americans, when the air was heavy with the fight for Civil Rights. Capitalizing on this potential art form, the leaders of The Black Panther Party studied the history and nature of the resistant and revolutionary ideas so that they could utilize these epistemological devices to lead their party in the right direction. A study of their autobiographies reveals the works and people who were an inspiration for their
project. The two biographies, ‘Revolutionary Suicide’ by Huey P. Newton and ‘Seize the Time’ by Bobby Seale, stand out as a projection of the ideas and beliefs of the party members who fought for bringing about a change by raising a mutiny against the racial disparity.

The biographies of the Black Panthers are a pertinent choice for critical study because these have been penned by the people who were intimately engaged with the resistance that plagued their very existence ever since the colonialists stepped on their land. The African-Americans ended up as a race without any history because of the epistemological usurpation of their experiences and memories through the colonial process. They were excluded from their identity, space and location. The only proof that they had of their past was the literature that was moulded by the colonialists, that too to their advantage. There was nothing authentic about their histories authored by their former masters as regards the experience of being colonized or of being marginalized or ‘othered’. The dense fog of misappro-riations cleared when Africans also began to pick up the pen. The literature thus produced by Africans themselves held a clearer mirror to the past that was embedded in the eyes of a dislocated and disenfranchised race which had been supplanted forcibly to an alien land. Only autobiographical form of writing could have come to their rescue as it is like an indissoluble marriage between history and literature. It is history in that it has source material; it contains facts, interprets facts, preserves past and draws lessons from it. It is literature as it is written to entertain as well as inform the readers. These literary-historical cross-breeds which select and then narrate their material in a manner that it engages its current readers and generations to come.

The ideology of the Black Panthers was highly influenced by Malcolm X. He was one of the most polemical revolutionary of African-American fight for Civil Rights; an intellectual whose ideas demanded pedagogical attention by the awakened African-Americans (Hughey, 2007). The loopholes in the education system which taught Malcolm to be more realistic about his ambitions, which meant finding a menial job instead of hoping to be a lawyer, was an experience that black students decades after Malcolm’s death experienced in classes.

The African-American activists who made a mark in the American history were the products of non-formal education which they received in the classroom of their experiences. They matured on radical self-education. Malcolm X could empathize with the dislocated black masses. He systematically planned his every speech and sermon so that he could influence the minds of the people to reciprocate his radical activism. He thus attained the role of a non-formal educator who developed an ideology to educate the adults about their rights. He inspired people to come together for collective social movements which would lead them towards positive social change. He advocated community activism in which people unite and debate over their problems and seek solution to the racial prejudice.

Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton modelled the party on the principles preached by Malcolm X and further infused it with discipline and political education espoused in radical Marxism and Maoism (Hughey, 2007). While analyzing the autobiographies of Bobby Seale and Newton, one cannot ignore the repeated mention and allusions to the ideas of Malcolm X. Malcolm X was a hero for a class of people but a problematic hero because the media interpreted him essentially as a man who propagated hatred and violence between the races. He was presumed to be an angry Muslim who was propagating racial hatred amongst the Americans. His messages were misrepresented by both the media and its recipients. Despite these misgivings, Malcolm’s demeanor had a spell-binding effect on those who confronted him because he was the embodiment of undeterred rage and hatred that every African in America possessed but could never express. His qualities of being outspoken and critical regarding the treatment of blacks in America gained him immense attention. Malcolm X’s autobiography titled as ‘The Autobiography of Malcolm X’ was compiled in 1965 with the assistance of Alex Haley and it has been seen as a touchstone for many revolutionaries who have followed it as an example.

Huey P. Newton and Malcolm X came face to face for the first time at McCloyd High School in Oakland, where Malcolm was delivering a speech. Huey P. Newton was highly impressed by his logic and his disciplined and dedicated mind and felt that Malcolm had the political potential that a people’s movement could utilize. What Huey found interesting about Malcolm was that he combined the world of the streets with the world of the scholars. The extensive knowledge that Malcolm possessed was resultant of the vast reading that he had done in the prisons. This voracious reading enabled him to cultivate a politically active attitude towards his social surroundings.

Newton learnt from Malcolm’s approach that the Panthers needed to put their theory to practice and thus show their oppressors that they were neither afraid of arms nor death. Such views gained the confidence of the Panthers as having an outlining of hope around them. The party had the motive of attaining what Malcolm and others like him had struggled to achieve in their lifetime. It was the cause of relieving the society from the prejudices that the state machinery had induced in the minds of the people. Malcolm X’s ideas inspired Huey P. Newton to a great extent towards the founding of the Black Panther Party. To understand this relationship better, the autobiography of Huey P. Newton, which was published in 1973, is very appropriate. In his autobiography, Newton portrays his vision and insights on the party and its desired ends. He mentions that the ideology of Malcolm X was the guiding force behind the inception of the party.
'Revolutionary Suicide'

The autobiography of Huey P. Newton, titled as 'Revolutionary Suicide' (1973), is oft quoted to be a portrait as well as a manifesto of the Black Panther Party. The autobiography is an unrepentant and thought provoking portrayal of the man who inspired a whole revolution in which the blacks and all the colored people of America joined hands for a common cause. It is the life story of a visionary who believed that the power to bring about change was in the hands of the masses. If the people were educated about their rights and their powers as the citizens of a country, then the prejudice at the hands of the unruly government could be controlled. The people were required to be made aware of the political situation of the country to realize that they also had a role to play in the making of the governing body of the country. Elridge Cleaver, the Minister of Information of the party opined about Huey P. Newton in his 1970 pamphlet ‘On the Ideology of The Black Panther Party’:

“One of the great contributions of Huey P. Newton is that he gave The Black Panther Party a firm ideological foundation that frees us from ideological flunkeyism and opens up the path to the future to which we must provide new ideological formulations to fit our ever changing situation.” (3)

The Revolutionary Suicide assuages many of the misattributed stereotypes that exist about the Black Panther Party like the myth that labelled the Black Panthers as ‘cop killers’ (88). Newton critically examines the black social problems of his time including the unjust behaviour and prejudice of the Judicial System. His prison experiences are nightmarish and his survival, through punishment like ‘soul-breaker’, amazes and terrifies the readers. He was a hero for his followers, but the book also reveals his weaknesses, ideologies, evils, memories and mistakes his life. He was an autodidact who taught himself everything, from reading philosophy to being aware about the political scene, and stood up for the issues that no one else had the courage to speak against. The book begins with his childhood days in Oakland. Childhood forms an essential portion of his work because the great transformation in his life from a protective and unified family to being exposed to the harsh reality of the world brought radical changes in his perceptions and views.

He discusses the classroom experiences also, which were mere devices to drill the White-Black dichotomy deeper into the psyche of the black students in their growing years. Their syllabus consisted wholly of such stories in which the black character was the sufferer and the white, the redeemer. Each progressing day was a school system’s assault on the black students. The whole syllabi were the extension of the idea that everything that is white is good and everything black is bad. This message did not leave the children even outside the classroom and they kept sinking deeper into a sense of inferiority. The ignorance and the inferiority, which was the consequence of such education, led the blacks to feel the need to identify with the whites, to be just like them. The whites became the standard of comparison on all fronts for the blacks. The worst was not that the blacks started considering themselves inferior, but that they started thinking that this inferiority was inescapable and inevitable. This feeling was the reason many black students became violent in their behaviour and attitude as it was the only way for them to find some sort of acceptance. All that Newton learnt in the classroom never taught him anything relevant to his life and experiences and never could he question the praxis. He summarizes his school experience in the following words:

“Not one instructor even awoke in me a desire to learn more or question or explore the worlds of literature, science and history. All they did was try to rob me of the sense of my own uniqueness and worth, and in the process they nearly killed my urge to enquire” (20).

He accounts that such state of affairs compelled the inquisitive mind of Newton to turn to self-education. Inspired by his brother Melvin, he started making efforts for self-realization through intellectual growth. He started reading literature and had great admiration for poetry. The richness and complexity of poetry made him a sensitive person who could reason with himself all that was happening around him. He also mentions poems such as Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells” and “The Raven”, Shelley’s “Ozymandias” and “Adonais” and T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, which left a great impression on his mind as he could relate to the emotions of struggle in these to his own tumultuous experiences. It was his love for poetry that led him to an interest in literature and philosophy (33). The questioning attitude that came with his analysis of such reading later allowed him to analyze his own experiences. He admits that it was during his school days that he realized the necessity to rise against all oppression. He concludes the chapter on his high school with the lines:

“My high school diploma was a farce. When my friends and I graduated, we were ill equipped to function in society, except at the bottom, even though the system said we were educated. Maybe they knew what they
were doing, preparing us for the trash heap of society, where we would have to work long hours for low wages. They never realized how much they had actually educated me by teaching the necessity of resistance and the dignity of defiance. I was on my way to becoming a revolutionary" (50).

When he joined college later, he wanted to put his ideas on a more tangible platform. He joined various social fraternities and started attending meetings of Afro-American Association. The purpose of these groups was to develop a sense of pride among black people for their history and heritage. Newton was soon disillusioned by these groups because although they claimed a lot on the exterior but their approach was not practical. They wanted to talk about the past but they were not ready to face the present. When he separated from these associations, he carried with him many lessons which he thought could actually solve the problems of the community. These experiences prepared a blue-print in his mind of the party that he was to initiate.

Newton makes an important revelation about meeting Bobby Seale at the college campus. Both of them were members of various college organizations. The rising consciousness made them hopeful that their time had finally arrived. They began to sit together ‘with the brothers’, as they used to refer to other African-Americans, and discuss the social-political situation along with the social problems. A curiosity to stay in touch with the social developments around them increased through the medium of discussions at the political education classes. They acquainted themselves with the literature of the oppressed to see how their experiences could help them understand their plight. They read the works of Frantz Fanon particularly The Wretched of the Earth, the four volumes of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung, and Che Guevara’s Guerrilla Warfare. These writers were the veterans of people’s wars and had worked out strategies for liberating their people. Newton felt that they shared the same experiences with these writers and if applied to their needs, their ideas could be of immense help. Bobby Seale was particularly interested in the works of Malcolm X. He collected all his speeches and ideas from various papers. The Black Panther Party was made possible because of inspiration from these writers who did not solely profess philosophy but took action in regaining their birth right and dignity, even at gunpoint. They sensed that the only way to achieve their goals was to meet force with force. Instead of labeling it as violence, they called it a response to what was being inflicted upon them. Huey P. Newton quotes in his autobiography: “Sometimes if you want to get rid of the gun, you have to pick the gun up” (72).

This radical stance motivated the party members to on the symbol of a black panther for the party as it connoted the fierceness of a black panther, combined with the particular nature of not attacking unless provoked. Apart from practical application of their theory in the form of carrying weapons, they also jotted down their program into ten points as a formal document of their essential needs. They wanted to inspire the general public that they were not supposed to silently bear the violation of their constitutional rights by the state. They sent out the message that the Blacks should start carrying arms for the purpose of self-defense. Newton had immense interest in the knowledge of law and the constitution and he studied it thoroughly to put it across lucidly to his brothers. He even advised them to carry a law book with them in their cars all the time.

Newton set out to organize the young masses through the tools of education and awareness and attempted to direct all their energy in the right direction which would lead to positive and permanent changes. Many political strategies were employed to make the party stronger but it only lead the party towards division of opinions. Huey, as one, had philosophical goals for the community which not many people understood. The police and the media set out to make people believe that they were nothing more than a bunch of “young toughs” (177) strutting around with guns to shock people.

When Newton was falsely convicted of murder of a police officer, Frey (1969) said, “huge rallies were organized in Oakland and Los Angeles by the masses who believed in his innocence”. False encounters had increased in the last few years of the party, but Newton knew that he would not be acquitted any sooner from the accusations because the whole system had been after him as the main target. The latter half of the book focuses on his trials and never ending series of hearings which never culminated into results. Newton had mentally prepared himself to be incarcerated for many years to come. What brought hope to him during these tough times, was that his conviction culminated into results. Newton set out to organize the young masses through the tools of education and awareness and attempted to direct all their energy in the right direction which would lead to positive and permanent changes. Many political strategies were employed to make the party stronger but it only lead the party towards division of opinions. Huey, as one, had philosophical goals for the community which not many people understood. The police and the media set out to make people believe that they were nothing more than a bunch of “young toughs” (177) strutting around with guns to shock people.

When Newton was falsely convicted of murder of a police officer, Frey (1969) said, “huge rallies were organized in Oakland and Los Angeles by the masses who believed in his innocence”. False encounters had increased in the last few years of the party, but Newton knew that he would not be acquitted any sooner from the accusations because the whole system had been after him as the main target. The latter half of the book focuses on his trials and never ending series of hearings which never culminated into results. Newton had mentally prepared himself to be incarcerated for many years to come. What brought hope to him during these tough times, was that his conviction culminated into results. Newton set out to organize the young masses through the tools of education and awareness and attempted to direct all their energy in the right direction which would lead to positive and permanent changes. Many political strategies were employed to make the party stronger but it only lead the party towards division of opinions. Huey, as one, had philosophical goals for the community which not many people understood. The police and the media set out to make people believe that they were nothing more than a bunch of “young toughs” (177) strutting around with guns to shock people.

When Newton was falsely convicted of murder of a police officer, Frey (1969) said, “huge rallies were organized in Oakland and Los Angeles by the masses who believed in his innocence”. False encounters had increased in the last few years of the party, but Newton knew that he would not be acquitted any sooner from the accusations because the whole system had been after him as the main target. The latter half of the book focuses on his trials and never ending series of hearings which never culminated into results. Newton had mentally prepared himself to be incarcerated for many years to come. What brought hope to him during these tough times, was that his conviction culminated into results. Newton set out to organize the young masses through the tools of education and awareness and attempted to direct all their energy in the right direction which would lead to positive and permanent changes. Many political strategies were employed to make the party stronger but it only lead the party towards division of opinions. Huey, as one, had philosophical goals for the community which not many people understood. The police and the media set out to make people believe that they were nothing more than a bunch of “young toughs” (177) strutting around with guns to shock people.

When Newton was falsely convicted of murder of a police officer, Frey (1969) said, “huge rallies were organized in Oakland and Los Angeles by the masses who believed in his innocence”. False encounters had increased in the last few years of the party, but Newton knew that he would not be acquitted any sooner from the accusations because the whole system had been after him as the main target. The latter half of the book focuses on his trials and never ending series of hearings which never culminated into results. Newton had mentally prepared himself to be incarcerated for many years to come. What brought hope to him during these tough times, was that his conviction culminated into results. Newton set out to organize the young masses through the tools of education and awareness and attempted to direct all their energy in the right direction which would lead to positive and permanent changes. Many political strategies were employed to make the party stronger but it only lead the party towards division of opinions. Huey, as one, had philosophical goals for the community which not many people understood. The police and the media set out to make people believe that they were nothing more than a bunch of “young toughs” (177) strutting around with guns to shock people.

When Newton was falsely convicted of murder of a police officer, Frey (1969) said, “huge rallies were organized in Oakland and Los Angeles by the masses who believed in his innocence”. False encounters had increased in the last few years of the party, but Newton knew that he would not be acquitted any sooner from the accusations because the whole system had been after him as the main target. The latter half of the book focuses on his trials and never ending series of hearings which never culminated into results. Newton had mentally prepared himself to be incarcerated for many years to come. What brought hope to him during these tough times, was that his conviction culminated into results. Newton set out to organize the young masses through the tools of education and awareness and attempted to direct all their energy in the right direction which would lead to positive and permanent changes. Many political strategies were employed to make the party stronger but it only lead the party towards division of opinions. Huey, as one, had philosophical goals for the community which not many people understood. The police and the media set out to make people believe that they were nothing more than a bunch of “young toughs” (177) strutting around with guns to shock people.
moment and got back to the community because he believed that that was a revolutionary place. Huey interestingly quotes that the time of the party members was not measured in hours, days or months, but by dates of hearings, trials and releases. He put it down in the words: "Our lives were regulated, not by ordinary tempo of daily events but by the forced clockwork of judicial process" (330).

Huey P. Newton can be sketched by a reader of his autobiography, as a courageous man who was dedicated towards eradicating social and economic injustices and, if required, sacrificing his life for the cause of the blacks. His zeal towards this cause was apparent from his enthusiasm to learn about the legal aspect of American constitution and willingness to go to prison. His thoughts and emotions are very radical and a little intriguing because immersed so deep into the achievement of his motives, he goes to the extent of calling robbery by the blacks of American property as justified: "We did not feel that stealing a bottle of wine or "cracking" parking meters was wrong. We were getting back at the people who made us feel small and insignificant at a time when we needed to feel important and hopeful, we struck at those who trampled our dreams" (26).

His commentary on the education system shows the bitter resentment that he carried against the system. He was always discouraged and humiliated in front of his classmates only because of his color of skin. The whole American education system was oriented around the white values and it had no scope of accommodating children who were poor and black (25).

Even during his time in prison he never felt the need of rehabilitation because according to him he was being punished because he had risen in support of the blacks in America. It can be said that his rational objectivity was blurred by the political intoxication that the reading of the Red Book had instilled in him. He analyzed every problem from the Marxist point of view and never welcomed suggestions from other more experienced people active in the same field. The Black Panther Party was a group which consisted of most of its members in their twenties. They were the zealous young men who got deluded by the power which they had taken in their hands. If they had sought advice of some mature social workers in the society, the petty scuffles between the members and huge mistakes such as including extremists like Elridge Cleaver and Stokely Charmichael could have been avoided.

‘Seize the Time: A Story of Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton’

The other book which is seminal in the understanding of The Black Panther Party is the work by the co-founder of the party, Bobby Seale, titled, ‘Seize the Time: A Story of Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton’. This work is an influential analysis of the party and Huey P. Newton from the eyes of another Black Panther. Written in 1970, the book adds to the information that is provided by Newton's autobiography.

The book is divided into eight chapters with elaborate sub-headings. The use of vernacular and invectives is rampant. In every chapter, Huey finds a prominent focus. The terminology like 'cats' and 'pigs' is used conspicuously without the consideration of a reader who is new to the Black Panther literature. The forward explicates the motive behind the scripting of the book. The aim stated is to remove all the misconceptions that were always clouding the Black Panther Party. The book aims to take people towards a better understanding of the party, substantiated by the events and experiences coming from the co-founder of the party. The book begins with the first chapter titled 'Who I Am' which is very involving because it firmly asserts what the influence of Malcolm X was on Bobby Seale and every African American of his times. When Malcolm X was killed in 1965, the whole young generation of the blacks was infuriated with the disappointment that that loss brought to their community and a hope that they had envisaged for a free America (Harper, 1971).

Born on 22 October, 1936, he grew up like any other average African in America. He mentions the effect that Huey P. Newton had on him but that came after the deep impressions by the unjust treatment of the society. That explains why he dedicates a significant space in the book to the ideology of Huey P. Newton. Bobby along with Newton started organizing huge rallies in Merritt College in the early sixties. They joined the groups that were already in college including the Soul Student Advisory Council. Eleven months before the party even came into being; Newton had advised the SSAC to begin arming themselves as they were dissatisfied with the doctrine of non-violence as was espoused by the mainstream Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.. Bobby said in this context:

"On the one hand, the guns were there to help capture the imagination of the people. But more important, since we knew that you couldn't observe the police without guns, we took our guns with us to let the police know that we have an equalizer" (45).

At many instances in the book, Bobby Seale quotes from Fanon's 'Wretched of the Earth'. Fanon believed that the first need was to organize the lumpenproletariat because if the downtrodden, unemployed and hustling brothers were not made politically conscious and motivated to unite, then the power structure would unite and stand against them. Added to this was the ideology of Malcolm X, who advocated armed self-defense against the racist power structure to show the whites that they could also defend themselves. As a result, Newton advised the party to incorporate arms in their mission as according to the Second Amendment of the constitution of the US, every citizen had a right to arm himself. The Soul Students
Advisory Council members had inhibitions against Newton as they could not understand his way of working and felt themselves being covered under his shadow. Newton and Seale broke away from the party when it falsely charged them with stealing their money. They then decided to go to the community instead and organize the blacks to lead the Black Liberation Struggle.

Seale along with Newton began with an effort to work out police-community relations. They decided to take the children to the police officers for interactive sessions. The young children from the ghettos faced the policemen and asked such questions that left the miscreant policeman at a loss for words.

In 1966, Newton and Seale sat down to write out a ten point platform and program for the Black Panther Party which Huey articulated word for word. The program had a seminal position in the history of the party as it became a mirror to their desires and needs. Newton had already studied all the gun laws thoroughly. He ensured that the party members acquired a comprehensive knowledge regarding the law and penal code; that is why he devoted a lot of time to the law section of the legal aid service of the poverty center where they worked. To add to his credentials, he began going to law school at night. He even distributed a 'law book' (128), which had in black and white those portions of penal code which were significant for the benefit of the blacks. They used to call this law book their literature and all blacks were advised to carry it along and be well equipped with the knowledge of law. This literature was a part of their efforts to spread political education. Huey made all his party members follow the law to the letter. Bobby mentions in his book that Huey had one principle: “Laws are made by mankind to serve mankind, but once those laws stop serving mankind in any society, anywhere in the world, the people are supposed to move forth to change those laws so those laws will serve them” (245).

The Panthers believed that they were different from the intellectual cultural nationalists who were more of ‘armchair nationalists’ and tried to articulate their revolution on paper by sitting comfortably in their offices while poor people died in the streets. The Counter Culture that the Panthers struggled to achieve meant the overthrow of the dominant culture. Such a task required activism which could not be achieved through sitting in the libraries. They wanted to involve young masses in their mission, who were ready to step up on the streets and call out fearlessly for their nationally democratic civil human rights.

The attitude of the people towards the party is also expressed in the book where it is clearly stated that one of the reasons why so many people believed in the party was because for the first time blacks had united in such an organized manner and stationed themselves up and down the streets so that the lives of the people were guarded against the police brutality on the streets. The people were educated by the Panthers in such a manner that their men always remained organized and disciplined and were aware of their rights concerning arms.

The newspapers sided with the white government and began to collect all information about the Panther activities and publish them in such a manner that it seemed to the people that the Panthers were anti-white and black racists. The police, which the Panthers chose to call pigs as a derogatory term, were shaken by the patrols that the Panthers began and their sadistic instinct was hurt. They became a little apprehensive in the beginning, but soon devised new ways to harass the Panthers by keeping a vigil on their every move and catch them unaware in tight corners. Newton also arranged many press conferences where he talked about the power structure like it had never been talked before. He talked about the significance of the gun which was required to defend themselves against the 400 year old brutality and racial victimization. He said: “The only way you can get rid of guns is to pick up the gun and get rid of the guns of the oppressor” (173).

Newton had been the greatest hurdle in the eyes of the whites for too long and to uproot this leader of the blacks. In September, 1968, he was falsely convicted with the murder of a police officer named John Frey and sentenced to 2-15 years in prison. After he was arrested, the unending string of trials followed. During that time Seale was also serving his time at Big Greystone Jail. The discovery of the bad news left Seale panic-struck. He began counting his days so that he could get out and free Newton. Seale recounts that Newton detested and feared the murder charge where one was on a death row as it was a form of righteous torture. Even when Newton was serving his time at various prisons, he impressed the inmates to the extent that they wanted to get out and be a member of the Panther Party. Newton became the hero of the people who made them believe that they were the real heroes: “When Bobby was released from jail on bail, the only thought on his mind was how to get Huey out of jail. He remembered what Huey always told him: Unite theory with practice. Unite your ideas with practice by applying those ideas” (197).

Bobby Seale along with Elridge Cleaver started arranging rallies thereafter for raising funds for Newton's trial expenses. What followed took the party by storm as each of the party members was put on the radar of the government to be arrested for ‘false’ crimes. Although this claim can always be challenged that all the accusations against them were false as it is admitted by the Panthers themselves in their autobiographies that many party members mistook and abused the powers and funds that they gained through the party, but on the other hand there are accounts of how many Panthers were dragged out of their beds at night and shot on the streets when they were unarmed. Bobby Hutton was arrested for keeping an illegal weapon and a few days later, the youngest member of the party Bobby Hutton was killed in a shoot-out. The party claims that both were innocent.
Elridge Cleaver was also arrested from the scene. They attacked the Panthers because they had a grass-root; theirs was a real people's revolution, complete with the programs, complete with the unity, complete with the working coalitions and it crossed racial lines.

Bobby Seale mentioned in the beginning of his work that he intended to remove all the misconceptions and doubts about the party. He very elaborately takes up social, political, economic and personal aspects of the party life and party members into consideration. He dedicates a chapter to the role of women in the party. The inclusion of the subtitle ‘Women and the Black Panther Party’ in the chapter titled ‘Pigs, Problems, Politics and Panthers’, raises questions on the emphasis the party wished to impart or steal its women counterparts. He presents various arguments against the accusation of ‘male-chauvinism’ that the party brothers had to face. But somehow, his arguments fail to convince the reader that there really was a substantial role for women in the party. He does not deviate from praising Newton even in this context by saying that he believed in equality of both men and women. His words fail in face of the reality where the long list of party members does not include names of many women.

**Conclusion**

A detailed study of the two biographies reveals the truest state of affairs for the Africans in America. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale have poured their hearts out through their writings and despite the differences in style and stories; they had shared experiences in common.

These were the bitter memories of their childhood and youth which converted these innocent youths into revolutionaries who fought for the cause of their people. It is only through the medium of autobiography that we gain a clearer perspective on situations and instances which the African experienced and tolerated in America. The silence of the scared people gained direction and strength on the shoulders of these youths. Although the Black Panther Party had survived only for over a decade, during this time they made many efforts to bring attention to the organization and expose the injustices of the police. They began publishing the Black Panther Party newspaper in 1967, which included articles and poetry by the Panther members. These writings had a close relationship to the Black arts and Black Aesthetic Movements. Through the power of the pen, the Panthers succeeded in ushering a revolution which consisted of the masses. Their revolution was not restricted to the Blacks alone, but existed for all the people who were deprived of their human rights. A reading of these autobiographies provides seminal insights into the revolution which carries potential of igniting many minds.

**REFERENCES**