

Dalit Movements in Contemporary India: Issues and Challenges

Suratha Kumar Malik and Santi Sarkar

Traditional Indian society was founded on Varna and Jati, as is commonly known. This system has a long history and has experienced significant modifications throughout time, yet caste continues to be a prominent institution in our socio-economic, religious, and political structures after 75 years of India's independence. The idea of untouchability has been the most perplexing and troubling aspect of the caste system. While Dalit movements in colonial India attempted to dismantle the upper castes' elite history by concentrating on Dalit history, heritage, epistemology, and worldview; Dalit movements in the postcolonial time attempted to construct and recreate the pan-Indian Dalit identity through a variety of identity politics and social-political movements. With the above backdrop, the article tries to explore some of the contemporary Dalit movements in India and examines its deep relation to the Bhim Army, Rohith Vemula case and Koregaon Bhima incident which not only influenced the contemporary Dalit movements in India but also have contributed for arousing Dalit consciousness for a pan-Indian dalit identity, organisation and movement. The paper also vividly examines the issues and challenges in the path of Dalit movements in the 21st century under the impact of neoliberal globalisation.

Keywords: Dalit movement, BAMCEF, Bhim Army, Rohith Vemula, Koregaon Bhima Incident, Issues and Challenges

1. Prologue

Traditional Indian society was founded on *Varna* and *Jati*, as is commonly known. This system has a long history and has experienced significant modifications throughout time, yet caste continues to be a prominent institution in our socio-economic, religious, and political structures. The idea of untouchability has been the most perplexing and troubling aspect of the caste system. "Those who were engaged in unclean occupation were considered as polluted persons and had to go with this stigma in the prevailing reality and had to accept for themselves the status of untouchables" (Shukla and Verma 1993:3). Dalits have remained at the bottom of the Indian social order due to the caste structure, with no social, economic, or political sway, and are struggling for self-respect, recognition, and dignity.

Various religious and social groups attempted to create a dent in the social structure in favour of the Dalits over time. "Several saints, social reformers and political leaders from both the Dalits and non-Dalits had tried their best for the eradication of untouchability from the social fabric" (Kshirsagar 1994:1). However, their goal was to make it easier for particular caste groups

to rise the caste order by using Sanskritisation(Srinivas 1977:42). In reality, these groups were more concerned with reform than with eradicating the caste system and offering protection from existing social inequity.

Similar to the colonial time, the post-colonial period in India witnessed many movements, organisations, and political parties geared towards ameliorating the social, economic, and political subjugation of Dalits. The Republican Party of India, the Dalit Panthers' movement, the Dalit Soshit Sanghrsh Samiti, BAMCEF, the Bahujan Samaj Party, and other marginalised groups and organisations in modern India are notable examples. While Dalit movements in colonial India attempted to dismantle the upper castes' elite history by concentrating on Dalit history, heritage, epistemology, and worldview, Dalit movements in the post-colonial time attempted to construct and recreate the pan-Indian Dalit identity through a variety of identity politics and social-political movements by various Dalit political parties and organisations. With this backdrop, the paper discusses some of the recent Dalit movements in India and the issues and challenges these movements are facing in contemporary times.

2. Bhim Army and the Dalit Movement in Contemporary India

Bhim Army (Ambedkar Army) or Bheem Army Bharat Ekta Mission (Ambedkar Army Indian Unity Mission) is indeed an Ambedkarite and Dalit rights organisation in India. Satish Kumar, Vijay Ratan Singh, and Chandrashekhar Azad created it in 2015. In the western Uttar Pradesh districts of Saharanpur, Meerut, Shamli, and Muzaffarnagar, the organisation provides around 350 free schools for Dalits and Bahujans.

The claimed objective of the Bhim Army is 'direct action based on confrontation to protect or restore the dignity of Dalit' and it has an estimated 20,000 supporters in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur area, which has a 20% Dalit population. According to Chandrashekar Azad, the organisation's founder, the Bhim Army aims to help underprivileged people like Dalits and farmers, as well as the Bahujan community, which comprises SCs, STs, OBCs, and minorities who have been out of the mainstream for a long time. He has attempted to form a coalition of Dalits and Muslims to oppose the Bharatiya Janata Party, describing himself as a defender of the Indian Constitution and an opponent of theocracy and upper caste ideology.

In 2015, Chandrashekhar Azad formed the Bhim Army as a means to combat caste injustice and violence against Dalits. It was founded in 2015 as a response to the prejudice and caste-based violence that Dalit students at AHP Inter-college in Uttar Pradesh had experienced. After confrontations in Uttar Pradesh, the Bhim Army that symbolises the Bahujan identity based on Kanshiram's philosophy, gained national attention. In the rioting in Saharanpur in 2017, the group protested against prejudice and caste violence against Dalits by the individuals of the higher Thakur caste. A big crowd, around 10,000, attended a Bhim Army's demonstration at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, in 2017. The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force detained Chandrashekhar, the Bhim Army's chief, in June 2017. The Allahabad High Court granted Chandrashekhar Azad bail in November 2017; however, the Uttar Pradesh government headed by Yogi Adityanath kept holding him under the National Security Act until it was withdrawn in September 2018 and finally he was

freed.

The Bhim Army joined nationwide Dalit protests in August 2019 against the destruction of Shri Guru Ravidas Gurughar, a temple dedicated to Sant Ravidas in Tughlaqabad, Delhi. The Bhim Army demanded the release of dozens of persons, notably Chandrashekhar Azad and Vinay Ratan, who were arrested by police.

Chandrashekhar said in December 2019 that the Bhim Army will formally pursue political politics. Previously, the organisation was a quasi-political force. We sought to join hands and work together with the Bahujan Samaj Party, but its leader was hesitant to do so. Chandrashekhar stated that the new political group will establish a presence in Lucknow and will attempt to destabilise the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Chandrashekhar has referred to the BJP as his main political foe, although he has also faced off against Mayawati, the Bahujan Samaj Party's leader. Chandrashekhar's new political party, the 'Azad Samaj Party', was officially declared on March 15, 2020. The newly formed party has 98 former leaders from the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Congress, and Rashtriya Lok Dal.

The Bhim Army opposes the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019 (CAA) proposed by the BJP. The Bhim Army protested against CAA and demanded that it should be repealed in January and February 2020. Concerning the North East Delhi riots, street fights between pro-CAA BJP supporters and Bhim Army supporters occurred in February 2020, with both sides engaging in stone-pelting. Recently, in November 2021, Azad expressed that his party will fight the BJP in the legislative election in Uttar Pradesh in 2022.

2.1. Bhim Army and the Rise of Aggressive Dalit Political Movement

In western Uttar Pradesh, the BSP's failure to define Dalit issues has spawned a sort of aggressive Dalit activism. The Bhim Army, which was founded in 2015 to combat caste prejudice against Dalits, has effectively appealed its uncompromising position among the Dalits in the region, signalling the rise of a new type of Ambedkarite organisation.

We were working on the ideals of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Apart from stopping caste oppression, we started Bhim Army pathshalas, schools, where senior Dalit students helped out their juniors in order to overcome the poor quality of teaching in government schools. Chandrashekhar was not afraid of anyone and uses the nickname 'Raavan', the antagonist of the Hindu epic Ramayana – a name thick with symbolism in a state where the epic's protagonist Ram is a major religio-political figure. Raavan respected woman. He never laid a finger on Sita and waged war to avenge his sister Surpanakha's insult. That's why Chandrashekhar used that name. He wanted to be like Raavan and respect women, explained Vinay Ratan (Daniyal 2017:1).

The Bhim Army, which is fighting against the BJP for Dalit-Muslim unity, has become a target of the upper caste ruling party in Uttar Pradesh. According to Saharanpur's senior superintendent of police, Subhash Dubey, an inquiry would be conducted to see if the Bhim Army has any ties to Naxal organisations. The harsh National Security Act will be used against the Bhim Army, according to the Uttar Pradesh police.

We raised our voice against caste atrocities and walked on the path of Babasaheb, and for that we get termed as terrorists? Asks Kamal Singh Waliya. Waliya is the Saharanpur district head of the Bhim Army and is now in hiding in fear of police (Daniyal 2017:1).

While the authorities have provided scant proof to support significant claims such as Naxal ties, the Bhim Army does represent a new, more militant era in Dalit politics. The Dalits are despondent since no one, not even the BSP, has raised their concerns. After having lack of response from mainstream political parties, in Saharanpur, the Dalits have turned up to form organisations such as the Bhim Army to address caste atrocities.

There is bubbling resentment against Mayawati for her lack of strong response after the Shabbirpur assault too. There is anger in Dalit society since there has been no concrete statement by Mayawati. She is more interested in her vote bank than Dalit welfare, says Praveen Gautam, head of the Bhim Army in Saharanpur town (Daniyal 2017:2).

Sushil Gautam, a Ph.D. holder from Meerut University, is a supporter of belligerent attempts to demand Dalit rights in places like Saharanpur and Meerut.

The Bhim Army is doing the right thing, argues Gautam. The Dalits here have political consciousness but that's not enough – we also need to pick up a stick (Daniyal 2017:2).

Chandrashekhar Azad is attempting to develop a new type of Dalit movement with the support of his Bhim Army, utilising techniques that are popular with politicians close to or in power. He has risen to prominence at a time when Dalit politicians, even those who play a significant part in today's politics are still subjected to derogatory remarks and other sorts of prejudice. The state and the majority of the local media portray Bhim Army and Chandrashekhar as a formidable threat to law and order. Some people believe Chandrashekhar and the Bhim Army are traitors or are aided by traitors. Dalit-bahujans, on the other hand, consider Bhim Army as a ray of hope, and Chandrashekhar as their messiah; someone who would deliver justice to them, establishes social fairness, and fulfills Dr. Ambedkar's goals. The fact that the organisation's name implies it is Dr. Ambedkar's army, is one of the reasons for optimism. This hope was reflected in the wider range of people that gathered at Jantar-Mantar on May 2021. Beyond the Bhim Army and its leadership, no one could have predicted that thousands of people would converge at Jantar-Mantar on the call of an unknown group – and exclusively on social media with the risk of their lives. The large crowd at Jantar-Mantar was a show of support for the Bhim Army and Chandrashekhar, as well as grief for the Dalit victims of Shabbirpur. Although the Bhim Army had called for the rally, the crowds gathered on their own, which shows the open support of Dalits for the Bhim Army and Chandrashekhar Azad which is beyond any doubt.

The posters and banners, placard slogans, hats, T-shirts, people's attitudes, and Chandrashekhar and Vinay Singh's speeches all pointed to the fact that the Dalit worldview has shifted dramatically in North India, notably in Uttar Pradesh (specifically in its western regions).

In Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati and her BSP has been the only political option for

Dalits, because other major political players are either openly or tacitly anti-Dalit. But it is equally true that the BSP and its leadership have failed to fulfil the social, cultural and economic aspirations of the Dalits. To satiate its lust for power, the BSP has given a go-by to these issues. It was the BSP that aroused Dalit aspirations but its conduct has left a vast section of the community disillusioned (Siddharth 2017:1).

Those who assembled at Jantar-Mantar hoped that the Bhim Army would be able to provide for their social and cultural needs. The Dalits are uneasy and terrified as a result of the BJP's victory in the national and Uttar Pradesh elections. They are concerned that the country is heading towards becoming a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). They see the BJP's triumph as the RSS's success. The majority of enlightened Dalits feel that a Hindu Rashtra will result in the revival of Brahmanism and non-Dalit dominance over Dalits. The chants and placards at Jantar-Mantar, as well as Chandrashekhar's speech also demonstrated this. "End Manuvad" "Down with Brahmanism", "Down with Hinduism" and "End Saffron Terror" were among the slogans on the posters(Siddharth 2017:1).

The crowd erupted in applause when Chandrashekhar said that he would not rest until Brahmanism was eradicated and Ambedkarism was established in the country. "Some people claim I am connected to the Sangh, he explained. I declare that I despise the Sangh. Brahmanism is protected by it. I identify as an Ambedkarite. We don't have anything in common(Siddharth 2017:2).The Jantar-Mantar demonstrators were between the ages of 15 and 35. They belonged to the third generation of educated Dalits, who are unconcerned with caste-based social stratification. They didn't have any feelings of inadequacy. They were boldly proclaiming themselves as 'The Great Chamar' with their hats and banners. According to Chandrashekhar;

It is often asked, If we do not believe in caste system, why do we describe ourselves as Great Chamar? Why do we feel proud of our caste? Ambedkar had taught us that till the caste system is completely eliminated, we should feel proud of our caste and embarrass those who believe that their caste is superior. Moreover, when the government and the administration consider us Chamars, what is wrong in describing ourselves as such? Our caste certificates describe us as SC they also mention our sub-caste, Chamar(Siddharth 2017:2).

In addition to Dalit-Bahujan concerns, Chandrashekhar included women in his speech:

Some persons are spreading the rumor that Bhim Army wants to avenge the humiliation of Dalit women by the Savarnas, by molesting Savarna women. This is a white lie and a conspiracy to defame Bhim Army. Bhim Army considers protecting the respect and dignity of every woman – no matter which religion, caste or region she belongs to – its bounden duty. In this respect, Ambedkar and the fictional character of Ravana are our ideals. Babasaheb fought all his life for equal rights for women and with that objective, he introduced Hindu Code Bill in Parliament. When he could not get the legislation passed, he resigned as law minister. I have added 'Ravana' to my name to honour Ravana's respect for women.

While Ram had mutilated a woman (Shoorpnakha) and humiliated her, Ravana gave full respect to Sita despite the fact that he had abducted her as an act of revenge and being the king, he could have behaved with her in any manner he liked (Siddharth 2017:3).

On the 86th birth anniversary of Kanshi Ram, the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Bhim Army declared the creation of the 'Azad Samaj Party' during a spectacular celebration at a farm house in Basai hamlet of Sector 70 in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, accompanied by hundreds of activists around the nation. In the following lines, Mr. Azad, the party's national president, explains the rationale for the formation of the party.

Hum yahan naukar nahin, shasakbanne aye hain (we are not here to be servants; we are here to rule the country). Every time we used to hit the streets to save the Constitution, I was put behind bars. It used to stop our work. With political power in hand, nobody would be able to stop us from implementing the ideals of Kanshi Ram. We will start with Bihar Assembly elections and Uttar Pradesh Panchayat polls to be held later this year (Kumar 2020:1).

Mr. Azad also established a social organisation called 'Mission 78' modelled after Kanshi Ram's All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF), which has lost relevance in recent years. Mission 78, like BAMCEF, would bring together bureaucrats and technocrats from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minority communities, known as the Bahujan Samaj, to strive for the elevation of the community's marginalised. Many believe that the party will eat into the Bahujan Samaj Party's vote bank. Indeed, some have urged that the newly created party build its basis in states where the BSP has yet to make an impact.

Our fight with the BSP is ideological. Under its current leadership, the BSP has wavered from the principles of Kanshi Ram. We had observed the Arvind Kejriwal model of crowd-funding. The Bahujan Samaj constitutes 85% of the population. If each one contributes one rupee, there would not be any lack of funds. Also, 'Mission 78' would work towards financial contribution to the party mentioned Mr. Azad (Kumar 2020:2).

Currently, the Bhim Army is clearly expressing Dalits' desire for justice and equality. Dalits and OBCs are included in his squad, which was announced at Jantar-Mantar. Other communities, particularly minorities in western Uttar Pradesh, are placing their hopes in him because the perpetrators of crimes against minorities and Dalits are the same. Muslims made up a sizable portion of the Jantar-Mantar crowd. With their posters and shouts, supporters of the leftist group, New Democracy were also there. The Bhim Army began active politics with the foundation of the new party, creating political awareness and movements among the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh. Only time will prove how effective it will be in realising the objectives and aspirations of the Dalits.

3. Rohit Vemula Suicide Case and Its Impact on Contemporary Dalit Movement

The suicide of Rohith Vemula on 17th January 2016 symbolises the institutionalised discrimination, systemic oppression, and criminal activities by the University of Hyderabad. His death sparked a

countrywide movement seeking 'Justice for Rohith' bringing to light the indifference, hostility, and injustice that Dalit students experience in higher education. Dalit students have testified at several universities that non-Dalit academic members, officials, and other representatives of the institutions discriminate against and humiliate them. For example, a non-Dalit member refusing to share his or her dorm room with a Dalit, giving Dalit students minimal scores in viva-voce exams, failing to assign a supervisor to a Dalit student on time, and flinging nasty caste slurs are all examples of commonplace prejudice of universities. Furthermore, Dalit political and social activities are labelled with derogatory terms and threats of retaliation.

Dalits do not have access to the university's famed concept of free and democratic space. Even the presence of Dalit scholars, intellectual debates, and public spaces are viewed as threat to the social elites' dominance. Dalits are not only penalised and persecuted for speaking out against the ruling elites in different spheres, but they are also viewed as objects of hatred and disdain in everyday life. Due to his or her impoverished social identity, a Dalit is perceived as a polluted body; his or her language abilities are recognised as unclean; his or her articulation is interpreted as undercooked, and his or her academic qualifications are rated as non-meritorious. The social elites' degrading and prejudiced stare deprives him/her of all human agencies, and he/she becomes 'a walking cadaver or mobile dirt' as political philosopher Gopal Guru characterises it. In modern times, Rohith's death has become a symbol of Dalit indignity, exploitation and marginalisation.

The killings have left a trail; between 2008 and 2016, five Dalit students at Hyderabad Central University (HCU) committed suicides. The Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) had maintained track of the names; Senthil Kumar, Balaraj, Madari Venkatesh, and Puliya Raju, despite university administrators' attempts to remove them from the public memory. Hundreds of people have been 'institutionally killed' before Rohith Vemula, and there have been numerous more since then. However, there will always be a pre-Rohith Vemula period and a post-Rohith Vemula period in history. The suicide of Rohith Vemula exposed the flaws in India's educational system. It demonstrated to the rest of the world that modern India is operating on caste ideas, and caste is the reality of educational institutions including higher education after seventy five years of India's independence.

4. The Koregaon Bhima Incident (2018): Celebrating the Historicity of Dalit Warriorship

One means for the Dalits to restore honour for the bodies that the upper caste degrades and declares untouchable is via war. The Mahar and Mang warriors of western India have a long history of resisting a social structure that restricts the right to bear arms to so-called Kshatriyas and forbids body-to-body contact. This history of Dalits is also a history of individuals who appear to be born to serve and never to rule acquiring authority and closeness to power. To comprehend the incident, we must first review the occurrence's two-hundred-year-old history.

On 1st January 2018, the disturbances ignited in the village of Koregaon Bhima (Pune, Maharashtra) during the 200th anniversary celebration of the Anglo-Maratha War of 1st January 1818 fought between the Army of Peshwa Bajirao II which was dominated by upper-caste and a small force of the British East India Company that consisted of a large number of Mahar Dalits.

After the British victory in the Koregaon Bhima war, the East India Company commissioned a victory obelisk in Koregaon to commemorate its fallen soldiers. 22 of the 49 names of the slain soldiers on the pillar are that of Mahar caste. Thus, Koregaon Bhimahas emerged as a symbol for celebrating Dalit pride in Maharashtra. The gathering largely comprises Mahars and stone-pelting by anti-social elements on the gathering caused the death of a 28-year boy named Rahul Patangale. What followed were the various protests across India that ended up in one death, 30 policemen being injured and over 300 people being detained. On 3rd January 2018, Prakash Ambedkar (Grandson of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar) and his party Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh called for Maharashtra *bandh* (strike).

With the instruction from the state government, the police have arrested five Dalit activists as Left-Wing activists in reaction to the incident and badging them as urban Naxal, and also alleged that they have intended to assassinate Prime Minister Narendra Modi. P. Varavara Rao, a poet, lawyer Sudha Bhardwaj, Arun Ferreira, Vernon Gonzalves, and Goutam Navalakha are among those detained. The police also claimed to have sponsored an Elgar Parishad conclave on December 31st in order to hold a conference commemorating the 200th anniversary of the battle of Koregaon Bhima. While hearing a petition from well-known historian Romila Thapar, and also Devika Jain, Prabhat Patnaik, Satish Deshpande, and Maja Dharuwala, the Supreme Court ordered that the five campaigners be held under house arrest. Aruna Roy, a human rights activist, Arundhati Roy, a literary personality, and lawyer Prashant Bhushan joined other activists in speaking out against the government for stifling the voice of opposition.

Koregaon Bhima is only one of several Mahar warriors who have recently been trapped in a deceptive double bind. Ultra-nationalists believe that Dalits and Ambedkarites commemorating Koregaon Bhima are anti-national since the Mahars fought against the Marathas and for the East India Company. Ambedkarites argue that the rule of Peshwa was an unabashedly Brahmanical administration that punished low castes and untouchables, and hence was hardly symbolic of a country or nation. Here is another instance from that period. Sidnak Mahar was a hero in his own right. Sidnak organised a Mahar army on his own when Shambhaji died fighting Aurangzeb's forces in 1688, fought heroically with Shambhaji's son, and became a highly renowned patil.

These and many such stories have been written down in history and are part of Dalit folklore. These tales harken back to a time when the untouchables might amass money, rank, and reputation. According to historian Philip Constable, the Kshatriya was an open-status caste in those days. Shivaji himself persuaded Brahmans to consecrate him as king despite his low caste background - whoever triumphed in combat and gained political significance was a Kshatriya. In reality, in his 1869 Ballad of Raja Chhatrapati Shivaji, Jyotiba Phule attributed Shivaji's success to the latter's decision to enlist peasants and untouchables into his royal military. The Deccan Sultanates, the early Peshwa administration, and even the East India Company in its early days revered the custom of untouchable soldiers.

In the late 1800s, things began to shift. The colonial administration decided in 1892 to remove untouchables from the official list of 'martial races' claiming that they couldn't be expected to command or be followed. The English had bought into a solely Brahmanical interpretation of

Indian society. Indians were classified into martial and non-martial races in the late nineteenth century, to the detriment of lower castes and outcasts, based on so-called biological or ethnic features rather than previous military practices. The name Aryan evolved to have racial connotations as well. Middle castes such as the Marathas claimed to be Kshatriyas because they were Aryans, establishing themselves in opposition to non-Aryans such as the untouchables and low castes. Shivaji went from being a monarch who allowed anybody to join the army to being a Marathi Kshatriya ruler.

Ex-military Mahars, such as Ramji Shinde, who documented prior Mahar military exploits, and Shivram Kamble, who became a pillar in Maharashtra's legislative politics, were at the vanguard of the Dalit struggle in early 20th century Maharashtra. It is also not a coincidence that B. R. Ambedkar's father was an ex-military officer. If Ambedkar championed the cause of Dalit enlistment in the army, it was not just for the sake of a right to work, but also to restore Dalits' political and military importance. The lack of the ability to bear arms to Shudras and untouchables rendered political protests against caste. Earlier kinds of Mahar *naukari*, such as *metenaiks* who patrolled mountain passages, *kiledars* in charge of fort defense, and *vatandars* in control of villages, were degraded to forms of slavery in later period as mentioned by Kamble.

As a contemporary emblem, Koregaon Bhima encapsulates a longstanding experience of untouchable warriors. It also represents the modern threshold moment when untouchable soldiers were reduced to slaves as a result of the fusion of Brahminical caste and colonial administrative systems.

5. Issues and Challenges

It is a cruel irony that presently Koregaon Bhima is relegated in public discourse to an awful choice between Brahminical control and colonial tyranny, not only for Dalits but for the whole nation. In today's India, Dalits are concerned with good life, self-image, social justice, and dignity. To exist in today's political society, Dalits must have their own culture, worldview, an ideological perspective and they must articulate their identity effectively. Dalits must constantly dismantle formed conceptions that regulate the critical perception of social interaction in order to question accepted assumptions about caste and class ties in contemporary society.

Recent Dalit rallies across the nation might usher in a new age of Dalit activism, as youngsters disillusioned with existing political structures attempt to express their rights on the streets under the banner of Bhim Army. The vandalism of Dr. Ambedkar's statue, the Khairlanji event, and the Rohith Vemula case are all significant indications that the Dalits of this country now have to unite. The political system failed to see the symptoms of Dalit youth's rage, and the outburst in the form of violent protests, the result of years of dissatisfaction with the state's and upper castes' apathy to Dalits where Bhima Koregaon as a contemporary icon, encapsulates the lengthy history of untouchable warriors. Dalit youngsters who became educated are disillusioned with the current political leadership and are seeking ways to show their discontent in the streets to express their rage in this manner where their disenchantment with the system had already reached boiling point.

Dalit may not develop just only through asserting Dalit identity and Dalit unity, it must construct a Bahujan Samaj with all marginalised sections including the minorities in its fold, which is a difficult endeavour. The mechanics of Bahujan Samaj must be understood. Dalits must come together under a single umbrella. They should create their own identity, claim their rights, and remember their heroic history that they are the original inhabitants of this great land. They had a magnificent culture, civilization, and literature. So, should be unite, and create their own culture, identity, literature and worldview to fight under a single umbrella with their own organic intellectuals in both social and political front.

But there are some hindrances in the way of achieving Dalit unity and all-India movement. In today's India, when the Dalits think about a pan-Indian-Dalit identity, movement, and culture; it is regrettable that urban middle-class educated Dalits represent a Brahminical character in terms of the urban-rural divide. This class represents a new way of life, a new ways of thinking, and new passions. Many Dalits in the second and third generations have never interacted with a typical Dalit in the village. Their relationship is limited to their own family; the majority are from the same social class. Villagers who are left behind are understandably forgotten. These Dalits are a separate class from the Dalit people whose investments they represent.

Therefore, it is desire that the urban educated Dalits should free from the Brahminical bourgeois character and lead the Dalit masses, as both groups were oppressed by caste. They should aid the rural Dalits and bridge the class divide. Middle-class Dalits who have profited from the affirmative system should follow Ambedkar's ideas – 'educate, agitate, and organise'. As a result, it is the obligation of the educated and established Dalit community to organise the Dalits for a bigger social-political movement so that they might live a life full of freedom, dignity, and self-respect. By doing so, a broader inclusive Dalit identity and culture may be developed; otherwise, Dalits would be separated into urban-rural, rich-poor, caste and sub-castes, and an all-India pan-Dalit identity will remain a day dream despite of the sacrifices made by Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar, and others.

The Dalit movement is at a fork in the road today, and the greater themes of liberation and Dalit oppression, both of which are intertwined, appear to have been overlooked. Internal tensions and disintegration within the Dalit movement, as well as its incapacity to shape public policy, can be seen everywhere. As a result, a Dalit unification that encompasses the whole community remains a definite possibility. Furthermore, the Dalit movement has yet to form ties with the Marxists, women, tribals, backwards, revolutionary groups, as well as agricultural labourers, construction workers, and other people's movements. This encapsulated a greater discussion over class vs. caste, as well as the concurrent dilemma of how to conduct class struggle while also eliminating castes. The battle must be conducted simultaneously along both poles of exploitation, namely caste, and class. As the most proletarianised population, the Dalits will have to lead both of these conflicts. Women's role and leadership is seen negatively within the Dalit movement historically, and women's involvement and liberation politics are not prioritised. The future Dalit movement should care of women question along both the line of caste and class where women are the common victim. Further, the ruling class by its divisive and electoral politics, however, could simply

manufacture Dalit leaders' secession from the Dalit popular movement at the cross road, and exacerbated this separation, putting an end to Dalit unification hopes. Dalits have to be very careful of falling to this trap though it is not surprising that Dalits have fought the deliberate conspiracy of the dominating powers throughout history. Aside from that, whenever Dalit movements take a firm stance during elections, the government and the ruling caste file fake charges against them and impose brutal control on them. They are arrested and charges are filed against them if they oppose the government. This has been used as a means of suffocating the Dalit struggle.

The greatest challenge for the contemporary Dalit movement in India is that the Dalit groups are experiencing a leadership crisis, with each Dalit leader attempting to position him as a junior Ambedkar. As a result, the Dalit movement lacks discipline and coherence and has remained fractured and episodic, lacking a pan-Indian Dalit identity and ideology. Therefore, Dalit movement must emerge as a movement for true emancipation, partnering with all social action organisations engaged in transformational politics and mobilising them all in the fight against Brahmanical social political system.

6. Epilogue

Dalit movement must reconsider its stance on problems like the state, religion, and other forms of exploitation, as well as culture. It has to define its goal in more concrete terms: to create a society founded on liberty, equality, and fraternity. In this setting, it will have to reconsider its allies and adversaries. The era of globalisation is forcing diverse kinds of people to take more assertive positions. It already looks to be devoid of energy and has been severely stagnant in the past. The Dalit masses have already felt the effects of this deterioration. It requires a lot of self-reflection.

Dalits have succeeded in claiming resources like language, religion, symbols, traditions, and have endeavoured to carve out a separate cultural autonomy and identity for their future on this foundation. Furthermore, Dalits have created their own cultural resources as a result of their campaign. Many challenges raised by the Dalit social movement are intimately related to their desire for a self that can be recognised and rooted in an egalitarian community. However, a disjointed Dalit movement has been unable to make good use of these resources. Internal tensions and disintegration within the Dalit movement, as well as its incapacity to shape public policy, can be seen all over.

Therefore, to organise and mobilise all Dalit-marginalised people under a single pan-Indian Dalit identity, Dalits need to celebrate Dalit culture (Dravidian culture), Dalit civilisation (Indus civilisation), Dalit spirituality (Buddhism), Dalit writings (protest literatures), and Dalit philosophy (Charvak-Lokayat philosophy) through social, theological, and cultural transformation of this caste-ridden society. Then, the Dalits will be able to develop an alternative epistemological worldview model based on alternative culture, philosophy, identities, psychology, and outlook to fight the prevailing Brahmanical caste-based Aryan Hindu culture and way of life. Dalit movement needs to keep this in mind. The main task of Dalit movement is to bring about social change by putting pressure on the state to fulfil its Constitutional obligations. We live in the age of globalisation

and coalition. It is the moral responsibility of the Dalit leaders to enable Dalit movement to face the new challenges of this era.

References

1. Daniyal Shoaib (2017). *Ambedkarite 2.0: Saharanpur's Bhim Army signals the rise of a new, aggressive Dalit politics*, 13 May, 2017, p.1-5. <https://scroll.in/article/837494/ambedkarite-2-0-saharanpurs-bhim-army-signals-the-rise-of-a-new-aggressive-dalit-politics>.
2. Kshirsagar R.K., (1994). *Dalit Movements in India and its Leaders*, M.D. Publishers, New Delhi.
3. Kumar Anuj (2020). *Bhim Army chief launches Azad Samaj Party*, *The Hindu*, March 15, 2020, p.1. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bhim-army-chief-launches-azad-samaj-party/article31075629.ece>.
4. Shukla K.S. and Verma B.M., (1993). *Development of Scheduled Castes and Administration*, Upper Publishing House, New Delhi.
5. Siddharth (2017). *Bhim Army gives a new dimension to the Dalit movement*, Forward Press, 25th May, 2017, p.1. <https://www.forwardpress.in/2017/05/bhim-army-gives-a-new-dimension-to-dalit-movement/>.
6. Srinivas, M. N. (1977). *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Asia Publication house, New Delhi.