



## CHALLENGES AMONG DALIT LEADERSHIP IN PRESENT POLITICS OF INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (A CASE STUDY OF AGRA CITY)

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### Abstract:

The word 'Politics' is derived from the Greek word 'Polis' which means City and State. Politics is a collective activity. Politics is situated in all contexts where there is a power structure and a power struggle to obtain or maintain leadership. In the Indian context, a major part of politics is known as Dalit Politics. Dalit leaders have played a significant role in the lives of lower caste people. They have created a meaningful political identity for Dalits and inspired them in the collective movement for social change. The work of integrating Dalits into the mainstream was done by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. He demanded a separate representation for Dalits, which was a strong demand for the political participation of Dalits. On September 24, 1932, an agreement was signed between Dr Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi which is known as Poona Pact. In this agreement, the separate electorate for the Dalit class was abolished and the place of the untouchables in the Legislative Assembly was reserved as the Hindu class. The Puna pact increased the political, ideological, cultural and religious degradation of Dalits which destroyed the real and independent leadership of Dalits to oppose the Brahmanical social system. Kanshi Ram is the one of the Dalit leaders who creating a consciousness among the Dalit community members as a collectivity. The collectivity among the Dalit group showed the meaningfulness of their identity. This seems to be possible due to the active engagement of leaders representing the identity of the followers and directing them to the living standard filled with pride. It was observed that Dalits identify with their leader like Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram as role models who started a creative Dalit movement and consciousness, leading to the hope for social change and make our own identity. Due to the lack of effective leadership, Dalit politics currently faces many challenges, including untouchability, social discrimination and economic disparities. The main objective of this research paper is to explore the challenges faced by Dalit leadership in the present politics in India.

**Key Words:** Indian Politics, Dalits community, Dalit leadership, Challenges, Constitutional Provisions.

### Introduction:

The Dalits formerly known as untouchables. The word Dalit means "Crushed" or "Crushed in to a mass". The Dalits also called as Atishudra, Panchama or Outcastes. The word Dalit was first used in late 1880s by Jyotirao Phule to describe the oppressed, broken outcastes and untouchables in Hindu society. The term Dalit comes from the Sanskrit word 'Dalita' which means "divided, split, broken, scattered. At present constitute one of the most depressed and marginalized sections of Indian society. Socio-cultural exclusion, economic deprivation and political exploitation of centuries made them to break out of such kinds of age-old prejudices. Dalits are the socially, economically, culturally, and politically marginalised groups in India. They also face a lot of discrimination (Agarwal, 2016). They aren't given the opportunity to live among humans. Because they are regarded as being at the bottom of society, they are forced to live miserable lives. They make up the fifth category known as Panchama's and are exempt from the caste system. They have become an unhealthy and despised part of society and are socially isolated. The high caste folks constantly took advantage of them. They were the targets of untouchability and other forms of prejudice. They weren't accorded the same standing as other caste groups. Due to their illiteracy, ignorance, and backwardness, they were unable to fight against exploitation and improve their situation. According to the 2011 census, there are some 250 million Dalits in India alone, though there are tens of million in other south Asian countries as well. Dalits comprise more than one-fourth of the Indian population. Despite their large numbers and the constitutional safeguards, the Dalit community continues to suffer from social and economic oppression. It is seen that in cases where the dependency relations of Dalits on non-Dalits are more pronounced and have economic implications atrocities on Dalits have been greater (Dhankhar, 2022).

### Meaning and Definitions of Politics:

The word politics derived from the Greek words 'Polis' which means community and 'poli' means many. In broad sense politics is the activity through which populace make, conserve and revise the general rules under which they live. Politics is an exercise of power, public allocation of values, resolution of conflict and competition among person, groups or states pursuing their interest. Politics means is the route of who gets what, when and how.

David Easton, "A political system can be designated as those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society" (Tarsariya & Patel, 2020)

Max Weber, "A Political association exists if ...the enforcement of its order is carried out continually within a given territorial area by the application and threat of physical force" (Tarsariya & Patel, 2020).

### Dalit Leadership:

Dalit leaders have played a significant role in the lives of lower caste people. They have created a meaningful political identity for Dalits (oppressed) and inspired them in the collective movement for social change. The political mobilization of the Dalits on the national scene can also be traced back to the late 1920s when the British Government initiated a series of Round Table Conference to provide political safeguards and representation to various minority communities including the Depressed Classes (Dalit) as they were known by that time. Therefore, the 1920's can be taken as the culmination point for analysing the

nature, social composition and crisis of the Dalit leadership in different parts of the country (Agarwal, 2016). Dalits have begun to form their independent political and social organisations in the 1920s. The first Independent Dalit political movement in India Depressed Classes Federation was established in Maharashtra under the encouragement of the Bombay Presidency Social Reform Association. Its initial purpose was to pressurize the Indian National Congress to include in its main planks the removal of untouchability. Over the years the political climate in the country changed substantially. The government of India Act, 1919 explicitly provided for communicable representations in the Indian Parliament. This has stimulated the formation of new Dalit organizations, which aimed not only to secure benefits for the Depressed Classes or the Dalits but also to organize them into coherent political blocks. No doubt, there grew general concerns among the Untouchables or the Depressed Classes for forming their separate autonomous political organization throughout India during the early 1920s (Yadav, 2018).

#### **Review of Literature:**

- Srinivas (1966) his book 'Caste and Other Essays in Modern India' It is presented that the fundamental concept of Sanskritization has been a major analytical tool for understanding the changing dynamics of caste in India. However, he mainly focuses on the process by which lower castes attempt to move up the social hierarchy by imitating the customs and lifestyle of higher castes, His principles are often applied to Dalit leadership.
- Kothari (1970) in his book 'Caste in Indian Politics' a prominent political analyst, recognized the significance of Dalit leadership but warned about the divisive nature of caste-based politics. He believed that while Dalit leadership could represent marginalized groups, it needed to transcend identity politics to build a cohesive national politics.
- Kanshi Ram (1995) in his book 'The Chamcha Age' Kanshi Ram critiques the lack of true Dalit representation and leadership in mainstream politics, calling out the political class for serving the interests of the upper castes.
- Omvedt (2004) his book 'Caste, Class and Social Change' presented that caste and politics focuses on the historical roots of Dalit struggles and the strategies of empowerment adopted by Dalit communities. Where political leadership among Dalits is an important tool for change, Whereas Dalits, Social movements rooted in broad grounds of solidarity among tribals and lower castes are equally important in shaping the political landscape.
- Oman (2004) in his article 'Dalit Leadership and Social Mobilization' presented in that social movements, work especially on caste-based mobilization, Provides an important perspective on the dynamics of Dalit political leadership. In his book he emphasized the importance of collective action for Dalit communities, arguing that political representation alone is insufficient to achieve concrete social change.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

- To study the Socio-Political background of Dalit Leadership in India.
- To study the Political challenges of Dalit Leadership in Agra City.
- To study the Probabilities of Dalit Leadership in Future.

#### **Methodology:**

Descriptive and explanatory method has been used in the research study. It is based on primary and secondary sources. This includes interview schedule, books, articles, published and unpublished magazines and research papers.

#### **Area of the Study:**

Agra city has been selected for the presented research. According to 2011 census, Agra city has a population of approximately 1,585,704. The study has been made successful by selecting a total number of 50 respondents from Agra city through purposeful method.

#### **Socio-Political background of Dalit Leadership in India:**

Throughout the 19th century, various reformers, both Hindu and non-Hindu, began to challenge the oppressive practices of the caste system. Figures like Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal emphasized social equality and education as tools for uplifting Dalits and other backward castes. British missionary William Carey and Christian missionaries also played a role in educating Dalits and offering an alternative to the caste system, though often their efforts were met with resistance. The most prominent figure in Dalit leadership is Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, who played a pivotal role in fighting for the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities. Ambedkar was born into a Mahar family, considered one of the lowest castes, and faced severe discrimination throughout his life. Ambedkar is the central figure in the history of Dalit leadership in modern India. After India's independence in 1947, Dalit leadership continued to evolve. The Indian state created affirmative action policies, including reservations (quotas) in education and government jobs, to uplift historically marginalized communities (Borah, 2020). The Republican Party of India was established after the death of Dr B.R. Ambedkar in 1956. Ambedkar had been a pivotal figure in the political representation of Dalits in India, especially through his leadership in framing the Indian Constitution, which included protections for Dalits (Scheduled Castes) through provisions like reservation in education and government jobs. The Republican Party of India has played a foundational role in the political leadership of Dalits, continuing Ambedkar's legacy of advocating for caste abolition, social justice, and political empowerment.<sup>1</sup> Though it has faced several challenges-such as internal divisions, factionalism, and competition from other Dalit political forces-the RPI remains a significant player in the broader Dalit political movement in India. This gave rise to Dalit political leaders such as 'Kanshi Ram', who founded the 'Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)' in 1984, a political party focused on the rights of Dalits, OBCs, and other marginalized communities. Kanshiram's BSP became a major political force, especially in Uttar Pradesh, and he helped forge a pan-Indian Dalit identity that transcended regional and caste divisions. His focus on "social transformation" and "political power" as essential components of Dalit upliftment remains a cornerstone of contemporary Dalit politics. In the late 20th century, Mayawati, a leader of the BSP, emerged as a prominent Dalit political figure. She became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh several times and is known for her focus on social justice, empowerment of Dalits, and the creation of political alliances that emphasized the rights of backward communities. Mayawati's leadership brought Dalit politics into the mainstream, and her tenure as Chief Minister symbolized the power of Dalit-

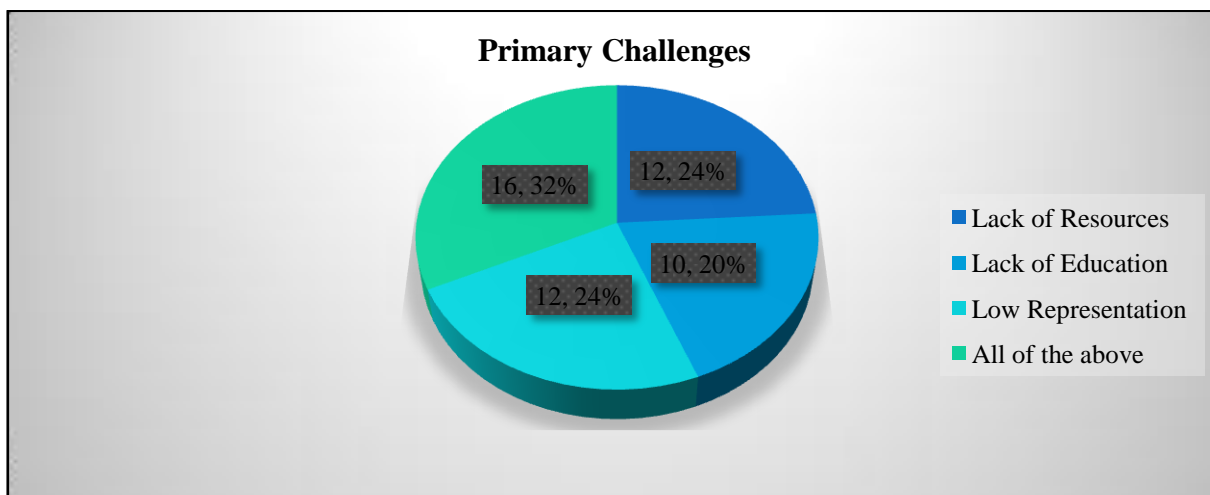
led political mobilization. She is one of the most significant Dalit leaders in India today, known for her strong political presence and focus on social justice, affirmative action, and the protection of Dalit rights. Dalit leaders today are involved in legal battles, social media campaigns, and grassroots mobilization to push for reforms and awareness. In recent Chandrashekhar Azad "Ravan" was a prominent Dalit leader and activist, known for his leadership of the 'Bhim Army', an organization committed to the rights and empowerment of Dalits. Azad's activism focused on combating caste-based violence and promoting Dalit pride. He became a vocal critic of the caste system and a symbol of Dalit resistance against oppression. His focus on education, legal rights, and social justice resonated with young Dalits, and his activism continues to influence the Dalit political landscape (Borah, 2020).

**Political Challenges Faced by Dalit Leaders in Agra:**

The Socio-Political challenges faced by Dalit leaders in Agra are multi-dimensional and complex, shaped by a combination of caste-based discrimination, political marginalization, economic inequities, and internal divisions. Despite these challenges, Dalit leadership in Agra continues to evolve, aided by increasing awareness, mobilization, and the emergence of new leadership models, particularly among Dalit youth and women.

Table 1: Challenges faced by Dalit Leaders

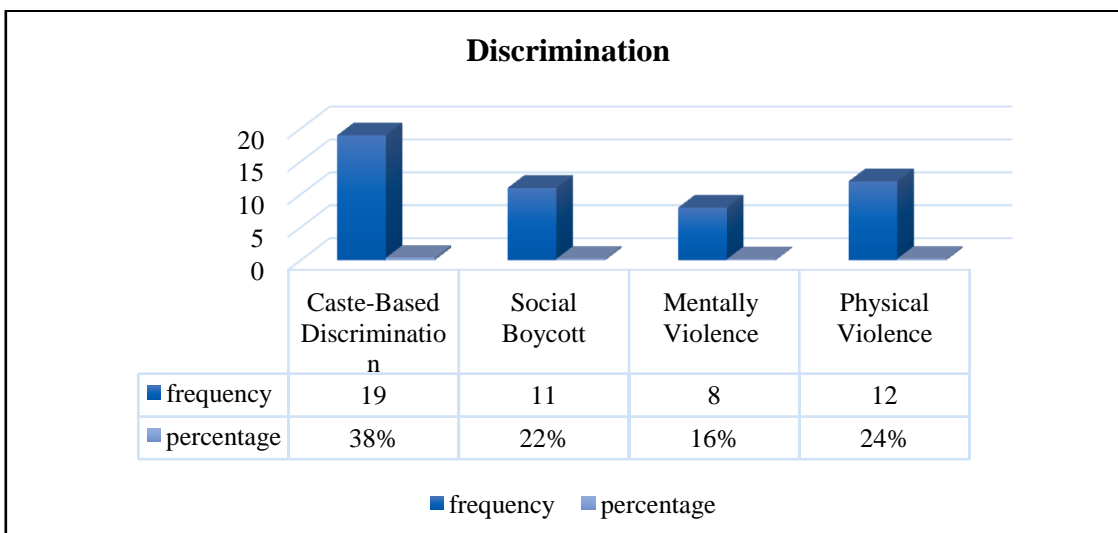
| S.No  | Primary Challenges | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1     | Lack of Resources  | 12        | 24%        |
| 2     | Lack of Education  | 10        | 20%        |
| 3     | Low Representation | 12        | 24%        |
| 4     | All of the above   | 16        | 32%        |
| Total |                    | 50        | 100%       |



It is clear from the presented table that the percentage of respondents answering about lack of resources is 24%. The percentage of respondents admitting lack of education is 20%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with lack of representation is 24% and 32% respondents accept all the challenges.

Table 2: Discrimination and Social Exclusion

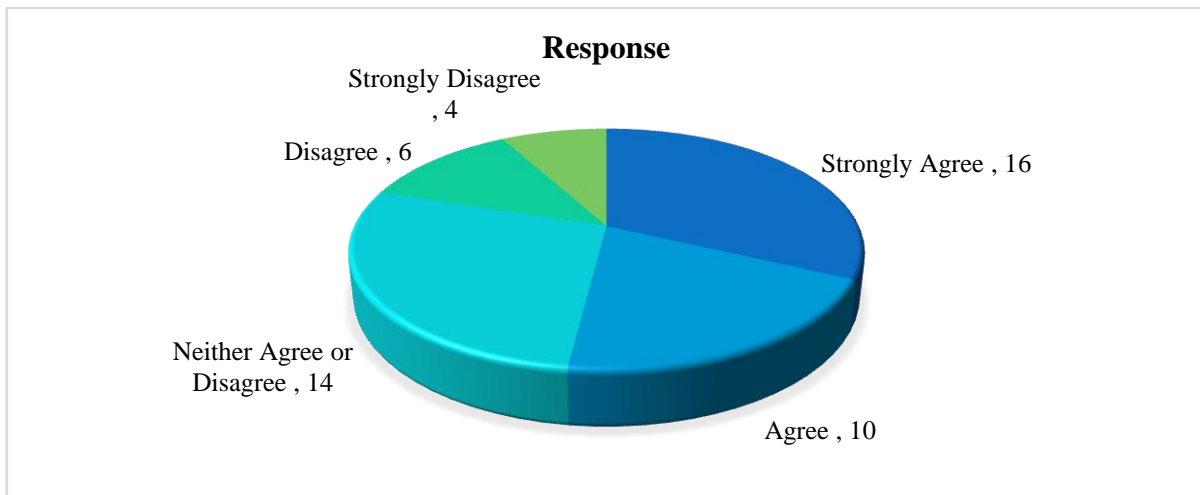
| S.No  | Discrimination             | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1     | Caste-Based Discrimination | 19        | 38%        |
| 2     | Social Boycott             | 11        | 22%        |
| 3     | Mentally Violence          | 08        | 16%        |
| 4     | Physical Violence          | 12        | 24%        |
| Total |                            | 50        | 100%       |



It is clear from the presented table that the percentage of respondents answering about caste-based discrimination is 38%. The percentage of respondents admitting social boycott is 22%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with Mentally violence is 16% and 24% respondents agreeing with Physical violence.

Table 3: Political Marginalization

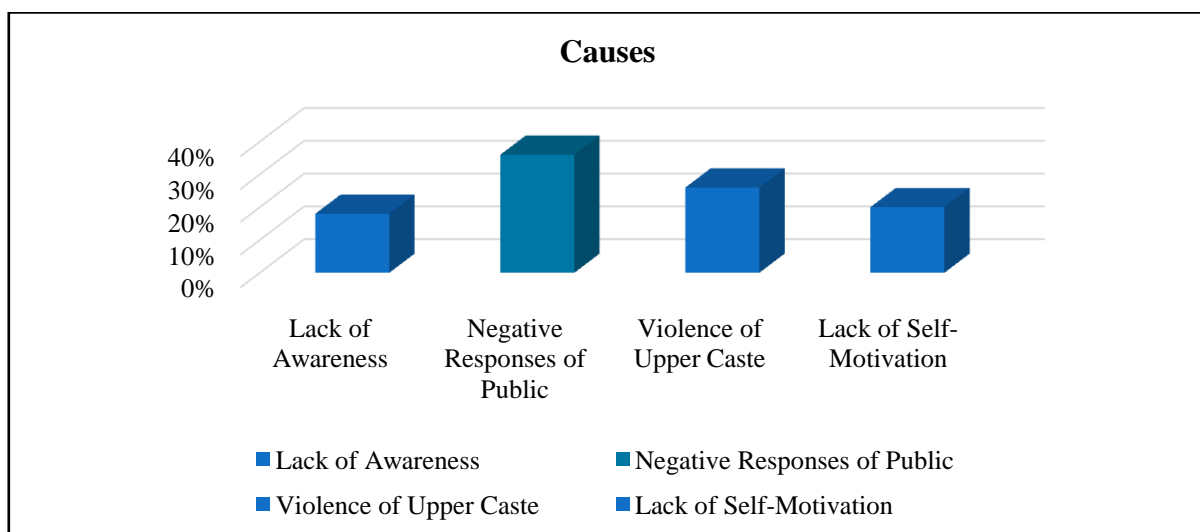
| S.No  | Response                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1     | Strongly Agree            | 16        | 32%        |
| 2     | Agree                     | 10        | 20%        |
| 3     | Neither Agree or Disagree | 14        | 24%        |
| 4     | Disagree                  | 06        | 12%        |
| 5     | Strongly Disagree         | 04        | 8%         |
| Total |                           | 50        | 100%       |



It is clear from the above table that the percentage of Strongly Agree respondents is 32%. The percentage of Agree respondents is 20%. The percentage of Neither Agree or Disagree respondents is 24%. The percentage of Disagree respondents is 12% and the percentage of Strongly Disagree respondents is 8%.

Table 4: Lack of Representation

| S.No  | Causes                       | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1     | Lack of Awareness            | 09        | 18%        |
| 2     | Negative Responses of Public | 18        | 36%        |
| 3     | Violence of Upper Caste      | 13        | 26%        |
| 4     | Lack of Self-Motivation      | 10        | 20%        |
| Total |                              | 50        | 100%       |

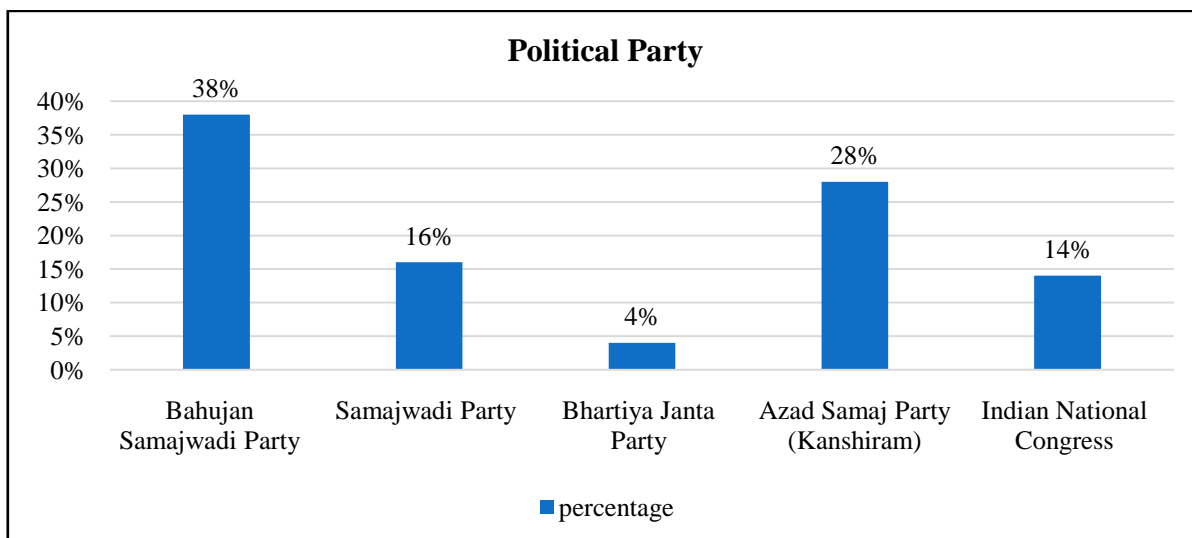


It is clear from the presented table that the percentage of respondents answering about lack of awareness is 18%. The percentage of respondents admitting Negative responses of public is 36%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with Violence of upper caste is 26% and 20% respondents accept Lack of self-motivation.

Table 5: Role of Political Parties in Dalit Leadership

| S.No | Political Party         | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1    | Bahujan Samajwadi Party | 19        | 38%        |
| 2    | Samajwadi Party         | 08        | 16%        |
| 3    | Bhartiya Janta Party    | 02        | 4%         |

|       |                              |    |      |
|-------|------------------------------|----|------|
| 4     | Azad Samaj Party (Kanshiram) | 14 | 28%  |
| 5     | Indian National Congress     | 07 | 14%  |
| Total |                              | 50 | 100% |



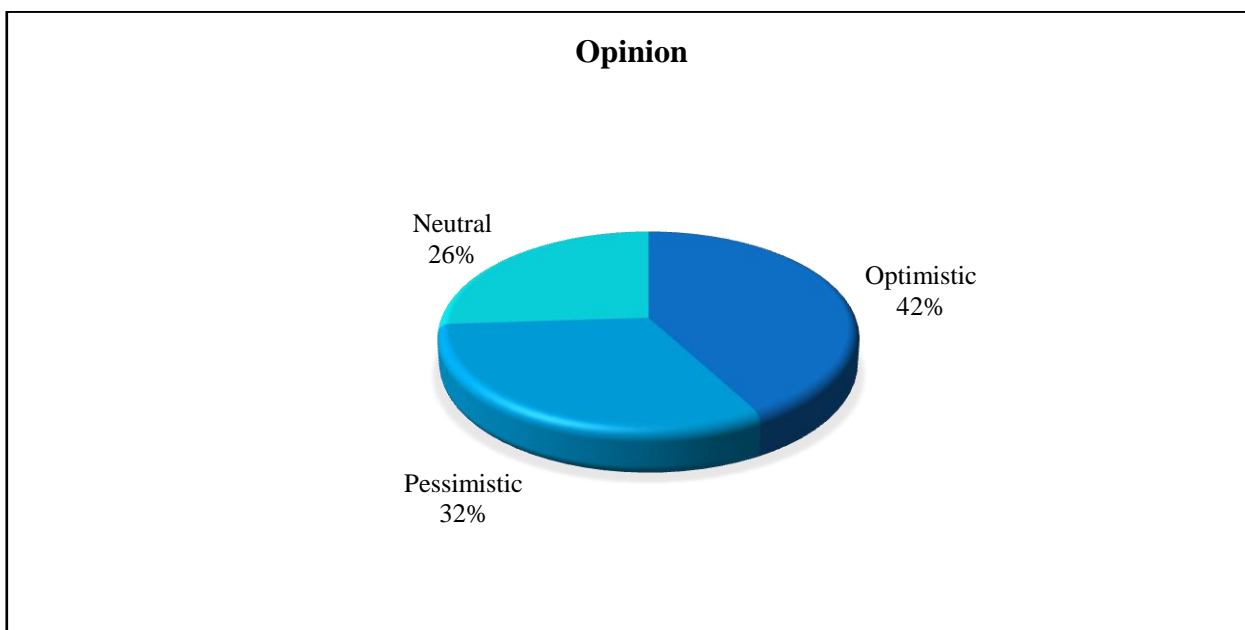
It is clear from the presented table that the percentage of respondents answering about Bahujan Samajwadi Party is 38%. The percentage of respondents admitting Samajwadi Party is 16%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with Bhartiya Janta Party is 4% and 28% respondents accept Azad Samaj Party (Kanshiram). The percentage of respondents admitting Indian National Congress is 14%.

**Probabilities of Dalit Leadership in Future:**

Dalit politics in India has been shaped by the emergence of various independent Dalit political parties like the Republican Party of India (RPI), The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Azad Samaj Party (Kanshiram). While these parties have played a significant role in empowering Dalits and fostering political consciousness, their decline in organizational strength and electoral performance is evident. The changing aspirations and identity quest among Dalit communities necessitate a re-evaluation of political strategies. Independent Dalit political parties must adapt by weaving identity politics with the economics of identity.

Table 6: Respondents' opinion on possibilities of Dalit leadership in future

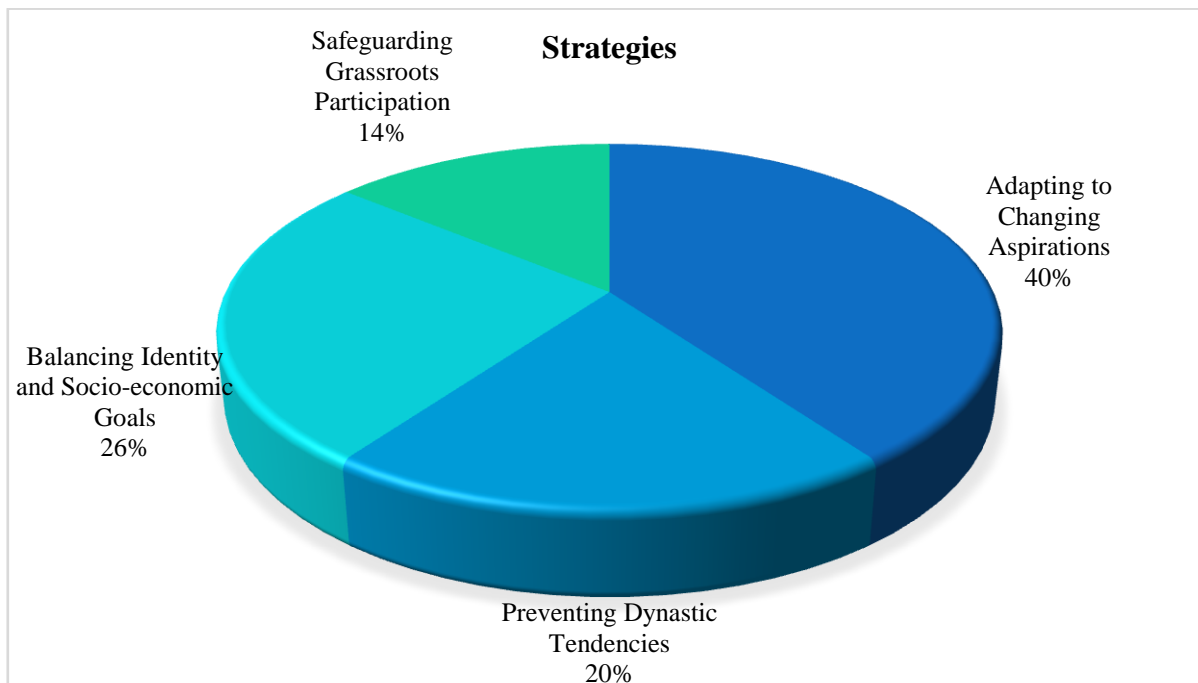
| S.No  | Opinion/Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1     | Optimistic       | 16        | 42%        |
| 2     | Pessimistic      | 21        | 32%        |
| 3     | Neutral          | 13        | 26%        |
| Total |                  | 50        | 100%       |



It is clear from the presented table that the percentage of respondents answering about Optimistic is 32%. The percentage of respondents admitting Pessimistic is 42%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with Neutral is 26%

Table 7: Respondents' opinion on Adaption Strategies

| S.No  | Strategies                                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|---------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1     | Adapting to Changing Aspirations            | 20        | 40%        |
| 2     | Preventing Dynastic Tendencies              | 10        | 20%        |
| 3     | Balancing Identity and Socio-Economic Goals | 13        | 26%        |
| 4     | Safeguarding Grassroots Participation       | 07        | 14%        |
| Total |                                             | 50        | 100%       |



It is clear from the presented table that the percentage of respondents answering about Adapting to Changing Aspirations is 40%. The percentage of respondents admitting Preventing Dynastic Tendencies is 20%. The percentage of respondents agreeing with Balancing Identity and Socio-economic Goals is 26% and 14% respondents accept Safeguarding Grassroots Participation.

**Constitutional Provisions:**

India's Constitution, adopted in 1950, provides several safeguards for the protection and empowerment of Scheduled Castes (SCs), which predominantly include Dalits. These provisions aim to ensure equality and justice in all spheres of life, including political participation. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, which implies that Dalits should have the same legal rights and protection as other citizens. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. This lays the foundation for ensuring that Dalits are not excluded from political, economic, or social participation based on caste. Article 17 specifically abolishes "untouchability" and forbids its practice in any form. This provision is central to breaking the barriers of caste-based discrimination, which continues to impact Dalit participation in political processes. Article 46, Promotion of the Educational and Economic Interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The Indian Constitution provides for reservation of seats for Dalits in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and State Assemblies (Articles 330 and 332), as well as in local bodies (Articles 243D and 243T). These provisions ensure political representation of Dalits at various levels of government.

**Conclusion:**

Dalit leadership in India has evolved from individual acts of resistance and social reform in the 19th century to the formation of powerful political movements and intellectual expressions in the 20th and 21st centuries. Figures like Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, and Mayawati have shaped the trajectory of Dalit rights and representation in India, but the struggle for equality and justice continues, with new leaders emerging from various sectors of society. In conclusion it is said that therefore, it is clear from the data compiled through the interview schedule that the percentage of respondents considering lack of education as a challenge among the challenges faced by Dalit leaders is 20%. lack of resources, lack of education, the percentage of respondents considering under-representation etc. as a challenge is 32%. Similarly, the percentage of respondents considering caste-based discrimination as the reason for discrimination and social exclusion is 38%. The percentage of respondents who strongly agreed regarding the political marginalization of Dalit politics is 32%. The percentage of respondents who consider the negative reaction of the public as the reason for lack of representation in Dalit politics is 36%. The study has found that political parties have played a special role in Dalit leadership. In which the percentage of respondents considering BSP as the main one is 38%. Dalit leadership plays a very important role in Dalit politics. To better realize the future potential of Dalit leadership and ensure political participation of Dalits, the percentage of respondents selecting 'Adopting the changing aspirations' is 40%. Strengthening Dalit leadership requires addressing the fragmentation within the community, promoting education and political awareness, and enhancing solidarity between Dalit and other marginalized groups.

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