

Black Lives Matter

Rhea Chaudri

Student

Humanities

Sophia College, Mumbai, Maharashtra

Abstract- Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a movement that has both, a political and social perspective in addressing racism, discrimination, and racial inequality faced by black people. In essence, the phrase "Black Lives Matter" can be associated with a Twitter hashtag, a slogan, a social movement, a political action committee, or a loose confederation of groups fighting for racial justice. Most importantly, the importance of local organizing over national leadership is the distinguishable characteristic of this movement.

Index Terms – racism, discrimination, inequality, black people, India, BLM

INTRODUCTION

HOW DID THE MOVEMENT GROW OVER THE YEARS?

The movement has gained recognition from the brutal killing of black people like Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Rekia Boyd, among others. The purpose of this revolution is clear- the liberation of black people and equality in treatment.

WHAT TYPE OF PROTESTS DOES BLM STAGE-VIOLENT OR PEACEFUL?

Most of the public demonstration stages by this decentralized movement are peaceful in nature. BLM generally believes in direct action tactics through protests and rallies. BLM has also tried die-ins and executed one during the 2015 Twin Cities Marathon.

Some of the slogans used by BLM are as follows-"Black Lives Matter", "Hands up, don't shoot", "I can't breathe", "White silence is violence", "No justice, no peace", "Is my son next?"

WHEN DID THE MOVEMENT ACTUALLY BEGIN AND THROUGH WHICH MEDIA?

The movement began in July 2013, with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin 17 months earlier in February 2012.

HOW POPULAR IS THE BLM MOVEMENT?

A June 2020 Pew Research Center poll asserted that 67% of adult Americans supported the Black Lives Matter movement and by September 2020, another poll stated that the support among American adults had dropped to 55%. Thereafter, by May 2022, support for Black Lives Matter decreased significantly among all racial demographics.

Regardless of the figures stated by such surveys, the movement continues to be an integral part of newspapers and the lives of blacks.

I. PREVALENCE OF RACISM IN THE WORLD WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE USA

A prevailing belief states that people belonging to diverse races have different physical traits in terms of personality, intellect, morality, and behavioral aspects. This notion extends to a situation wherein some races assume superiority and this, in turn, leads to various forms of discrimination, violence, cruelty and mental torture. Simply put, this phenomenon is called racism and is widespread even today all over the world, especially in the USA (Coates, 2015).

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF RACISM THAT ARE PREVALENT?

- a. **INTERPERSONAL RACISM-** Any judgments based on the color of skin, caste, or creed at a personal level fall in this category. A jury found a Virginia man guilty for a hate the victims refused to allow the perpetrator use a power washer, he picked up a construction tool with a sharp metal blade, and injured the victims while screaming racial epithets. This is a perfect example of interpersonal racism that is so deeply ingrained in most black vs white interactions that with the slightest of provocation, the same takes the shape of a heinous crime.
- b. **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM-** Some policies, practices, procedures, and cultures of institutions or systems are more in favor of the whites. A Florida man pled guilty to threatening a member of the U.S. House of Representatives on July 16, 2019. He sent an email to U.S. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar threatening to kill her. The subject line of his email read, "[You're] dead, you radical Muslim." Ironically, the House of Representatives houses many biased representatives it seems. This is a classic example to institutional racism.

- c. **STRUCTURAL RACISM** - Implicit and explicit social narratives about race, such as those perpetuated by the media or people in power have been circulating for ages. For example, repeatedly narrating stories where a certain black criminal killed a white individual tends to encourage a generalized bias towards all blacks. A jury found three Georgia men guilty of hate crimes and attempted kidnapping in the pursuit and killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a young Black man who was jogging on a public road in 2021. With no personal history of rivalry, the only reason for such brutality can be the programming of young minds through negative narratives. This is an example of structural racism.
- d. **INTERNALIZED RACISM** - Another type of racism that grows through the wrong upbringing is internalized racism. Children are the best illustration in this regard. A study conducted by the University of North Hampshire states that for 1997 through 1999, 38% of hate crimes by juveniles had anti-Black motivations and 22% had anti-white motivations. Hate is being served on the dinner table in most homes and children are consuming that day-in and day-out. This is nothing short of internalized racism.

II. HISTORY OF ANTI-RACISM PROTESTS IN THE USA

Protests are just a start to ending racism. Laws like the Qualified Immunity Act are one of the many avenues through which racism thrives; hence, cutting the roots would require addressing every nitty gritty. Unfortunately, the roots go deeper than law; therefore, a thorough understanding of its history is mandatory (**Wilkerson, 2021**).

AFTER WORLD WAR I

To elaborate, when the country was recovering from World War I, racial and gender tensions grew exponentially. In at least 25 places including small towns, several African Americans moved north in what came to be known as the ‘Great Migration’, fleeing the oppression.

Subsequently, in 1921, white people torched Tulsa, Oklahoma’s black business district, known as “Black Wall Street”. In the process, 300 blacks were killed.

Consequently, African Americans built up civil rights organizations in the 1920s and 1930s. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909 and the United Negro Improvement Association, led by Marcus Garvey are some of the few organizations that did notable work in this direction. Shortly, African Americans in northern cities began to exercise their electoral clout.

DURING THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II

In 1941, a civil rights and labor leader A. Philip Randolph succeeded in opening up defense jobs to African Americans; President Franklin Roosevelt signed an order creating the Committee on Fair Employment Practices. Moreover, newspapers serving African American communities launched the “Double V” campaign against white supremacy.

In progression, in 1943, in some areas, whites attacked black workers; 240 race riots broke out that year throughout the United States. Alongside, in Los Angeles, white mobs attacked young Mexican American men. Sadly, the police unfairly sided with the white rioters. In August 1943, after a white police officer shot Private Robert Bandy, an African American soldier, a violent protest broke out. Simultaneously, civil rights activists in Chicago staged sit-ins at restaurants that refused to serve blacks. Those protests escalated into a nationwide movement in the mid-1960s.

In progression, in 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. demanded the desegregation of department stores, restaurants, public restrooms, and drinking fountains. In response, Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene “Bull” Connor ordered police officers and firefighters to turn guard dogs and fire hoses on nonviolent protestors. This act of brutality led to further violence by the angry local blacks eventually culminating in the “Long Hot Summer” of July 1967, when 163 cities erupted in collective violence.

Subsequently, in April 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s led to uprisings in which more than 100 cities were burned. The Kerner Commission was then formed to investigate. Shortly, the NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins, published a bestselling report that concluded that for many blacks, “police have come to symbolize white power, white racism, and white repression.”

III. THE BIRTH OF BLM

The various stories of atrocities continued till activists around the country loosely banded together in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013; this initiative was woven together by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in response to the acquittal of a Florida man who fatally shot an unarmed 17-year-old black student, Trayvon Martin.

Protests now have spread to wealthy downtowns and suburban shopping malls. Looters have gone after local shops and global chains in wealthy neighborhoods such as Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, Soho in New York, and Buckhead in Atlanta. Demonstrators are spraying graffiti that says both “Black Lives Matter” and “Eat the Rich”.

George Floyd’s death has sparked a global movement, which in turn has led to the debate of whether to defund or rebuild the US police forces.

What happen next will be noteworthy to see...

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF 'BLACK LIVES MATTER' MOVEMENT

The significance of this movement goes much beyond just words. It is the harbinger of sunshine amid stormy oppression. It is also a testimony to solidarity, motivation, courage, resilience, positive change, and hope (Brown, 2018).

SYMBOL OF SOLIDARITY- Black Lives Matter is much more than just a phrase. People have united against the racism and police brutality under this banner. Many black football players have extended their support to this movement as they have been repeatedly 'booed' by the audience. In essence, this phrase is an attempt to fight racism, discrimination and inequality experienced by black people. The usage of this phrase grew in the US after high-profile killings by police. In a nutshell, BLM is a loosely organized group that works outside of the institutions where Black social movements have traditionally been organized.

SYMBOL OF MOTIVATION AND PURPOSEFUL PROGRESS - The 13 general principles on which this movement stands are: Empathy, Loving Engagement, Restorative Justice, Diversity, Globalism, Black Families, Black Villages, Intergenerational, Trans affirming, Queer affirming, Collective value, Black Women.

SYMBOL OF COURAGE TO FIGHT INJUSTICE - The slogan became prevalent after the death of Trayvon Martin in Florida, in 2012. When this innocent black 17-year-old was shot by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, the anger of the black community broke loose. What added more vigor to this resentment of the black was the other police killings; Eric Garner and Michael Brown are some of the many victims of such police attacks. Thereupon, the killing of George Floyd in 2020 by a police officer who cruelly knelt on his neck was what shook the black community to the core. Protests using the #BLM slogan became a common sight worldwide and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter gained momentum.

SYMBOL OF RESILIENCE TO STAND UP AGAINST CRITICISM AND STILL NOT LOSE ITS FOCUS - The fundamental objectives of BLM are as follows:

- Stop police brutality.
- Fight for courts to treat black people equally.
- Advocate mental health.
- BLM activists work on voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns in Black communities.
- BLM programs celebrate Black artists and writers.

However, former US secretary of housing and developments Ben Carson, believes that people are being fooled by a "Marxist-driven organization" that supports "taking down the model of Western family structures". Moreover, Carol Swain, a political commentator and former professor, asserted "They are using black people to advance a Marxist agenda."

Replying to critics, Patrice Cullors stated "I do believe in Marxism", but added: "I'm working on making sure people don't suffer". Opal Tometi, on the other hand, felt that some people are trying to discredit BLM by putting out fake information "to distract, confuse and give people any excuse to not support this movement".

SYMBOL OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE LIVES AND THE ENVIRONMENT, AS A WHOLE, OF BLACK PEOPLE - Thanks to the efforts of the BLM, many measures have been taken to tackle police violence and change the way laws are applied.

- After the tragic death of Mr. Floyd, the term "defund the police" gained strength. So much so that cities including Minneapolis, Portland, Philadelphia and Seattle have started shifting budgets away from police and into areas like schools and housing.
- People all around the globe are being made aware of the atrocities faced by the black people especially after the coronavirus.
- It is also said that black history lessons will be mandatory in all Welsh schools from 2022.
- In the past decades, books about issues affecting black people also became best sellers.
- For some people, Black Lives Matter meant starting to have difficult conversations about racism with people they know.

SYMBOL OF HOPE - Overall, this movement marks the beginning of a new age in which unjust killings of Black people by police is condemned. Here it is mandatory to add that black people are far more likely to be killed by police in the United States than white people and this has been proven time and again. With such movements gaining grounds, the sun shall certainly shine brighter in the lives of the blacks soon; so is hoped!

V. WHAT AND HOW CAN INDIA IMBIBE FROM THE MOVEMENT?

What can India learn from the Black Lives Matter movement? A thought-stimulating question indeed! Discrimination based on caste, creed, color, sex, and other such factors is not alien in India. By adopting some elements from movements like Black Lives Matter, we can certainly fight these evils in a better way.

Treatment towards dark-skinned girls- Since childhood, I have heard stories of dark-skinned Indian girls being rejected for marriage and even for sales and marketing jobs as they seemed less presentable to prospective clients. This is the bitter truth! From this movement, Indians, can work towards a better society wherein only talent and temperament can speak and skin color becomes irrelevant. This is not a one-day job and would require changing the mindset of society as a whole.

How? - Through enlightening and progressive TV programs and proper education in schools, this mission can be accomplished slowly yet steadily, if addressed responsibly. Discouraging fairness creams is also vital as the mere availability of such creams endorses this discriminatory behavior towards dark-skinned individuals.

Attitude of the Police Force- Another important aspect of the Indian society that can be addressed by taking cues from the Black Lives Matter movement is the prejudiced attitude of the police force. In India as well, the police force has been accused of being unfair to minority groups. Instances of injustice and misuse of power are not uncommon sights in the daily newspapers in India.

How? - Accountability of the police force is the need of the hour now and this should be addressed urgently. This can be done through various legislative tools. Strict laws should be implemented to address and expedite complaints against police in such cases and severe punishments should be meted out to officers who are found guilty of such discriminatory behavior. NGOs should take up such cases to help individuals reach the authorities and the media should responsibly focus on these incidents without unnecessarily sensationalizing them for personal gains. A fair society will benefit everybody and since India is known for its 'Unity in Diversity' stand, these problems should be solved at their roots.

Equality in treatment at public places and institutions- Yet another aspect that can be taken as a lesson from the Black Lives Matter movement is making entry at all public places fair and universal. In India, several eating joints and schools have unsaid restrictions on visitors and students respectively in terms of financial stature and clothing. Such discriminations as these practices later manifest in a mindset that encourages greater damage.

How? - In this regard, as long as these organizations and institutions are not incurring any losses in terms of revenue, such restrictions should be abolished. Charges and fees, as the case may be, should be equal, and how a person dresses or what he/she earns, or the car he/she uses should not be considered as parameters of entry. Authorities should take such complaints on discriminatory behavior seriously and through severe punishments discourage such practices.

Most importantly, the education system should be molded to adapt to the learnings of empathy and equality that the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted. Closing our eyes to the evils does not change the history and the outcomes of evil practices. Hence, children should be told the history of such movements in all honesty and the outcomes and suffering of the victims should be laid before them with clarity. These children are the future policymakers of our nation and stimulating their minds in the right direction at a young age is immensely important. The importance of diversity and equality is a vital part of every education system and its high-time that people stop playing hide-n-seek with these principles in our history books. All said and done, education is the most powerful torch that can lighten the darkness caused by discrimination and citizens should start working on it immediately.

To encapsulate, The BLM movement has several explicit and implicit messages for every country, and for India, in particular, a country that has people from several religions, this movement can be the best cornerstone of progress if taken in the right spirit.

REFERENCES-

1. **Interpersonal Racism-** USA Attorney, "*Hate/Bias-Related Crimes*", 2022, July. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/hatebias-related-crimes>
2. **Institutional Racism-** The United States Department of Justice, "*Florida Man Pleads Guilty to Federal Charges for Hate-Motivated Threats Against a U.S. Member of Congress*" 2022, April. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/florida-man-pleads-guilty-federal-charges-hate-motivated-threats-against-us-member-congress>.
3. **Structural Racism-** The United States Department of Justice, "*Three Georgia Men Charged with Federal Hate Crimes and Attempted Kidnapping in Connection with the Death of Ahmaud Arbery*" 2021, April. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/three-georgia-men-charged-federal-hate-crimes-and-attempted-kidnapping-connection-death>
4. Menakem, R, "*My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts*", Central Recovery Press, 2017, pp 44.
5. Brown, A.C, "*I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*", New York, Convergent Books, 2018.
6. Wilkerson, I, "*Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*", Waterville, ME, Thorndick Press, 2021.
7. Coates, T, "*Between the World and Me*", New York, Spiegel & Grau, 2015.