

Dalit movement in India post independence

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Post independence many anti-discrimination laws came into force. But even today, in the civilised society dalits suffer from social stigma and discrimination. This article throws light on different stages of Dalit movement in India and contributions of leaders for the movement.

In news: Dalit issues are submerged in the broader discussions on economic vulnerabilities highlighted by COVID-19.

Placing it in syllabus: History – Dalit movements

Dimensions

1. Causes for Dalit movement
2. Dynamics of Dalit movement
3. Ambedkar's work in post independence period
4. Dalit panthers movement
5. Role of Kanshi ram In Bahujan politics
6. Dalit literary movement
7. Power as a means to attain dignity

Content:

Causes for Dalit movement:

- It is the result of the constant hatred being generated from centuries from the barbaric activities of the upper castes of India.
- They were deprived of higher training of mind and were denied social-economic and political status.
- The division of labour led to their **inequality and exploitation.**
- The **caste system degenerated Dalit life into pathogenic condition** where occupations changed into castes.

- For centuries, Dalits were **excluded from the mainstream society** and were only allowed to pursue menial occupations.
- They were pushed to the outer areas of villages whereas the mainland was occupied by the upper castes.
- Many of the **atrocities were committed in the name of religion** like system of Devadasi, pouring of molten lead into the ears of a Dalit who happened to listen to some mantra.
- To retain the stronghold on people, education was monopolized.
- This made the Dalits rise and protest against the inhuman practices demand for basic rights of equality.
- With the introduction of western language, and with the influence of the Christian missionaries, the Dalits began to come across the ideals of equality and liberty and thus began the Dalit Movement in modern times.
- Educated Dalits began to talk about the problems of the poor and about exploitation and humiliations from the upper castes.
- They also got a fillip through British policy of divide and rule.
- Improved communication network, new system of education, new administrative system, rule of law threw open equal opportunities for all dismantling social barriers.

Dynamics of Dalit movement:

Sanskritization:

- Some Dalit leaders followed the process of 'Sanskritization' to elevate themselves to the higher position in caste hierarchy.
- They tried to **adopt established cultural norms and practices of the higher castes.**
- They adopted Brahman manners, including vegetarianism, putting sandalwood paste on forehead, wearing sacred thread, etc.

- Imitation of the high caste manners by Dalits was an assertion of their right to equality.

Adi-Hindu movement:

- Treating Dalits as outside the fourfold Varna system, and describing them as 'outcastes' or 'Panchama' gave rise to a movement called Adi-Hindu movement.
- Certain section of Dalit leadership believed that **Dalits were the original inhabitants of India and they were not Hindus.**
- Aryans or Brahmins who invaded this country forcibly imposed untouchability on the original inhabitants of this land.
- They believed that **if Hinduism was discarded, untouchability would automatically come to an end.**
- That Dalits began to call themselves Adi-Andhras in Andhra, Adi- Karnataka in Karnataka, Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, Adi-Hindus in Uttar Pradesh and Adi-Dharmis in Punjab.

Conversions:

- Dalits also followed the route of conversion with a purpose of getting rid of untouchability and to develop their moral and financial conditions.
- A good number of Dalits were converted to Christianity, especially in Kerala.
- Some of the Dalits, especially in Punjab were converted to Sikhism (known as Mahabis, Namdharis, Kabir Panthis etc...)
- Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with his millions of followers at Nagpur in 1956.

Finding Sects:

- As a protest against Hinduism some of the Dalit leaders founded their own sects or religions.
- Guru Ghasi Das (MP) founded **Satnami Sect.**

- Gurtichand Thakur (Bengal) founded **Matua Sect.**
- Ayyan Kali (Kerala) founded **SJPY (Sadhu Jana Paripalan Yogam).**
- Mangu Ram (Panjab) founded **Adi Dharam.**

Ambedkar's activism:

- Attempts were also made to organize Dalits politically in order to fight against socio-economic problems.
- Dr. Ambedkar formed the **Independent Labour Party** in 1936.
- He tried to abolish the exploitative Khoti system prevailing in Kokan part of Maharashtra, and the Vetti system (a wage free hereditary service to the caste Hindus in the local administration).
- He tried to convince the Government to recruit the Mahars in the Military.
- In 1941 the first Mahar Regiment was formed.
- Dr. Ambedkar demanded adequate representation for Dalits in the legislatures and the Government of India Act, 1919, provided for one seat to the depressed classes in the central Legislative Assembly.
- **Poona Pact** of September 1932 provided for reservation of seats for depressed classes out of general electorates sets.

Ambedkar's work in post independence period:

- Post independence Ambedkar was invited to serve as the nation's first Law Minister, which he accepted.
- On 29 August, he was appointed **Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee**, charged by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution.
- The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination.

- He argued for extensive economic and social rights for women and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of SCs and STs.
- Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet in 1951 following the stalling in parliament of his draft of the Hindu Code Bill.
- He was appointed to the Rajya Sabha in March 1952 and remained as a member till death.
- Around 1950, he turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Ceylon to attend a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists.
- In 1955, he founded the **Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha**.
- He completed his work, '**The Buddha and His Dhamma**' in 1956.
- In 1956, in a formal public ceremony at Nagpur, he along with his wife and around 5,00,000 supporters got converted into Buddhism.

Dalit panthers movement:

- Dalit Panthers is a **social organization founded by Namdev Dhasal** in April 1972 in Mumbai.
- It was inspired by Black Panther Party, a revolutionary movement amongst African-Americans, which emerged in the United States and functioned from 1966-1982.
- They called themselves "Panthers" because **they were supposed to fight for their rights like panthers and not get suppressed by the strength and might of their oppressors.**
- The members were **young men belonging to Neo-Buddhists and Scheduled Castes.**
- The controversy over the article "Kala Swatantrata Din" (Black Independence Day) by Dhale which was published in "Sadhana" in 1972 created a great sensation and publicised the Dalit Panthers through Maharashtra.

- Many Panther branches sprang up spontaneously in parts of Maharashtra.
- The movement was a radical departure from earlier Dalit movements as its **initial thrust on militancy through the use of rustic arms and threats, gave the movement a revolutionary colour.**
- They linked their struggles to the struggles of all oppressed people over the globe.
- The clear cut leftist stand reflected by this document ran counter to the accepted legacy of Ambedkar as projected .
- The Naxalite movement saw a potential ally in the Panthers and tried to forge a bond right at the level of formulation of policies and programmes of the latter.
- The Panthers' militancy by and large remained confined to their speeches and writings.

Role of Kanshi ram In Bahujan politics:

- In 1971 Kansiram quit his job in DRDO and together with his colleagues established the SCs, STs, OBCs and Minorities Employees Welfare Association.
- Through this association, attempts were made to look into the problems and harassment of the above-mentioned employees and bring out an effective solution for the same.
- Another main objective was to educate and create awareness about the caste system.
- In 1973, Kanshi Ram again with his colleagues established the BAMCEF: Backward And Minority Communities Employees Federation.
- The first operating office was opened in Delhi in 1976 with the motto – “Educate Organize and Agitate”.
- This served as a base to spread the ideas of Ambedkar and his beliefs.
- In 1980 he created a road show named **“Ambedkar MeLa”** which showed the life of Ambedkar and his views through

pictures and narrations.

- In 1981 he founded the **Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS4)** to fight against the attacks on the workers who were spreading awareness on the caste system.
- In **1984, he established a full-fledged political party known as the Bahujan Samaj Party.**
- Later he converted to Buddhism.
- The 'Bahujan' identity encompassed all the SCs, STs, BCs, OBCs and religious minorities than 'dalit', which practically represented only the scheduled castes.
- The obsession with capturing power robbed him of certain fundamental values that Ambedkar never compromised.
- Ambedkar pointed at capitalism and Brahminism as the twin enemies for his movement but Kanshiram enthusiastically embraced them.

Dalit literary movement:

- Given that the Brahmins would never allow the Dalits' voice to be expressed, the Dalits began their own magazine and began to express their own experiences.
- With the formation of the Dalit Panthers, a series of Dalit poetry and stories depicting the miseries of the Dalits were released.
- All these literature argued that Dalit Movement fights not only against the Brahmins but all those people whoever practices exploitation.
- New revolutionary songs, poems, stories and autobiographies were written by Dalit writers.
- Educated Dalit and intellectuals explained to the other illiterate brothers about the required change in the society.
- Dalit literature tried to compare the past situation of Dalits to the present and future generation not to create hatred, but to make them aware of their pitiable condition.

Power as a means to attain dignity:

- As **power can be cut by only power**, Phule and Ambedkar gave the main emphasis on the education of the Dalits, as it will bestow them with reason and judgement capacity, political power, socio-economic status and a life of dignity.
- They knew that the political strategy of gaining power is either an end in itself or a means to other ends.
- If the Dalits have power, then they do not have to go begging to the upper castes.
- The Dalits require power to control the economic scenario and thereby the politics of the country.
- Ambedkar contested with Gandhi to give the Dalits their right to equality.
- He gave the call “Educate, Organize and agitate”.
- Education would help to know the truth of Brahmanism in Indian society, and will make them agitate against caste based inhuman practices.
- Only when agitation begin, can the Dalit be able to attain power and win the movement against exploitation.

Mould your thought:

1. Explain the dynamics of dalit movement in India. How Ambedkar carried forward the struggle for dalits post independence?

Approach to the answer:

- In introduction brief about the causes for dalit movement
- Write the dynamics of the movement
- Explain Ambedkar’s work post independence
- Conclude with his policy of power as a means to attain dignity