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Q7(a)

Discuss the contribution of the Dalit struggle to establish egalitarianism in Indian society during the freedom movement.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Equality

Equality: Social, political and economic; relationship between equality and freedom; Affirmative action.

Core demand of the question

- **Define egalitarianism in the Indian social setting:** caste as graded inequality (20 marks)
- **Show Dalit struggle during the freedom movement:** organisations, methods, and demands
- **Discuss contribution:** separate electorates debate, temple and water rights, labour, and the constitutional settlement
- Name **Ambedkar**, **Gandhi**, and Congress; keep the contribution specific

Revision summary

Egalitarianism in India had to mean equal personhood against caste as graded inequality, not only against colonial rule.

Dalit movements, from **Phule's** legacy to Mahad, temple entry, and the Scheduled Castes Federation, made water, roads, worship, schools, and representation into national issues.

Ambedkar and **Gandhi** clashed over separate electorates and the Poona Pact, which is itself part of the contribution: two models of equality entered public argument.

The Constituent Assembly's abolition of untouchability and equality articles are institutional fruits of that struggle.

The contribution is the establishment of equal citizenship as a founding principle; social egalitarianism remained an unfinished task at Independence.

Introduction

Egalitarianism in modern political theory is the claim that persons are equals in status and in basic rights. In Indian society that claim had to confront caste as **Ambedkar** described it: graded inequality, not only rich and poor. During the freedom movement, Dalit struggle did not wait for Swaraj to dissolve caste. It made equality of persons a condition of the nation itself.

Body

The problem the struggle named

Nationalist talk of a united people often assumed a Hindu social order that could be reformed later. **Jyotirao Phule** had already denied that story. Dalit publicists, Adi movements, **Iyothee Thass**, Namasudra politics in Bengal, and later the Independent Labour Party and the Scheduled Castes Federation treated caste humiliation as political domination. Egalitarianism here meant the right to draw water, to enter streets and temples, to wear dignity in clothing, to have schools, and to have a share of power, not only a share of anti-British feeling.

Methods and campaigns

Mahad Satyagraha (1927) and the burning of the Manusmriti claimed public water and rejected duty-by-birth. Temple-entry movements, including Vaikom and later campaigns, forced the national movement to see worship and roads as political. The Round Table Conferences and the Communal Award raised separate electorates. **Gandhi's** fast and the **Poona Pact (1932)** replaced separate electorates with reserved seats in a joint electorate. **Ambedkar** accepted a tactical settlement and did not accept that Congress paternalism was emancipation.

Dalit soldiers, labourers, and peasants also entered the anti-colonial story through work and through left parties. The struggle was never only **Ambedkar's**, and it was never only Congress Harijan work. Those two, however, structured the all-India argument.

Contribution to egalitarianism

First, the struggle placed caste on the national agenda so that independence could not honestly mean only transfer of power to caste Hindus. Second, it produced a leadership and a literature of equal personhood that entered the Constituent Assembly. **Ambedkar** as chair of the **Drafting Committee**, **Article 17** abolishing untouchability, **Articles 14** to **16**, and later reservations are institutional outcomes of that pressure, not gifts from a unanimous elite. Third, it forced **Gandhi's** constructive programme to treat untouchability as a sin, even while **Gandhi** rejected a separate political body of the Depressed Classes. That disagreement itself educated the public in two models of equality: moral reform of Hinduism, and rights plus political power for the excluded.

Limits belong in a discussion. The Poona Pact is still debated as a loss of autonomous power. Congress mass movements did not abolish village hierarchy. Economic landlessness remained. Egalitarianism was established as a constitutional principle and as a public claim, not as a completed social fact in 1947. That is still a contribution: without the Dalit struggle, the freedom movement's equality would have been thinner, and the Preamble's justice would have lacked its sharpest Indian meaning.

Flow diagram

Dalit struggle -> Caste as political domination
Dalit struggle -> Mahad temple labour
Dalit struggle -> Poona Pact / representation
Dalit struggle -> Article 17 and equal citizenship
Gandhi -> Reform of Hinduism
Ambedkar -> Rights and power

Conclusion

Dalit struggle during the freedom movement made egalitarianism mean the abolition of untouchability and a share of political power, not only anti-colonial unity. Mahad, temple entry, labour organisation, and the constitutional settlement are its record. **Ambedkar** and his opponents together forced the nation to write equality into law. The social structure was not thereby equalised; the principle of equal citizenship was.

Facts & figures

Mahad, 1927

Ambedkar led the claim to public water at the Chavdar tank and followed it with a rejection of Manusmriti as the law of graded inequality.

Poona Pact, 1932

Reserved seats in a joint electorate replaced the Communal Award's separate electorates after **Gandhi's** fast and **Ambedkar's** constrained agreement.

Article 17

The Constitution abolishes untouchability and makes its practice an offence, translating the struggle into justiciable law.

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