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Q5(b)

Write a note on the Dalit perspective of Indian National Movement

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- **State what a Dalit perspective is:** caste as a political structure, not only a social evil
- **Show how this reads the Indian National Movement:** Congress, **Gandhi**, **Ambedkar**, and separate electorates
- Note both participation and critique
- Keep the note on perspective, not a biography

Revision summary

A Dalit perspective treats caste as graded political inequality, so nationalism is judged by whether it dismantles that structure.

Phule, Adi movements, **Periyar**, and **Ambedkar** warned that anti-colonial unity could become a caste-Hindu Raj.

The Poona Pact crystallised the clash between separate electorates and **Gandhi's** joint Hindu body politic.

Gandhi moralised untouchability; **Ambedkar** sought the **annihilation of caste** and autonomous political power.

The constitutional settlement is read as the valuable yield of the movement, not as proof that the caste question was solved in 1947.

Introduction

A Dalit perspective on the Indian National Movement asks who the 'nation' was for. It treats caste as a system of graded inequality, as **Dr B. R. Ambedkar** named it, not as a side custom that Swaraj would automatically dissolve. From that standpoint the freedom struggle is both a resource - rights, the vote, the Constitution - and a site of unfinished liberation.

Body

Participation without illusion

Dalit groups were not absent from anti-colonial politics. Soldiering, labour, and later organised movements in Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil country, and the United Provinces produced their own public. **Jyotirao Phule's** earlier critique of Brahmanical nationalism already warned that a mere transfer of power could be a transfer to caste Hindus. **Iyothee Thass**, the Adi movements, and **Periyar's** hostility to a Hindu Raj belong on this map even when they did not wear a Congress badge.

Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party and Scheduled Castes Federation fought Raj paternalism and Congress monopoly. Mahad and temple-entry claimed equal personhood as the meaning of swaraj.

The clash inside the nation

The **Poona Pact** (1932) is the hinge. **Ambedkar** wanted separate electorates; **Gandhi's** fast treated that as vivisection of Hindu society. Reserved seats in a joint electorate remain, for many Dalit critics, a loss of autonomous representation. **Gandhi** moralised untouchability; **Ambedkar** wanted the **annihilation of caste** as power. A class-only nationalism, this perspective says, leaves the village Hindu in charge. **Ambedkar** still chaired the **Drafting Committee**: the fruit of the INM is constitutional equality, not a closed file in 1947.

Flow diagram

Dalit perspective -> Caste as power
Dalit perspective -> National movement
National movement -> Gandhi / Congress unity
National movement -> Ambedkar / safeguards
Ambedkar / safeguards -> Constitutional equality

Conclusion

From a Dalit standpoint the national movement was necessary and insufficient. It broke the Raj and, through **Ambedkar's** constitutional labour, opened legal equality. It also repeatedly asked Dalits to postpone caste for unity. The note is that swaraj without the **annihilation of caste** would have been a change of guard, not a change of principle.

Facts & figures

Poona Pact, 1932

Reserved seats for the depressed classes in a joint electorate, replacing the separate electorates of the Communal Award after **Gandhi's** fast.

Mahad, 1927

Ambedkar's satyagraha for water rights asserted equal public personhood, a national claim in Dalit politics.

Annihilation of Caste

Ambedkar's 1936 text argued that political reform without religious and social destruction of caste would leave swaraj hollow.