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Q6(c)

Examine the role of protest movements in changing the status of Dalits in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Sociological theories of power; Power elite, bureaucracy, pressure groups, and political parties; Nation, state, citizenship, democracy, civil society, ideology; Protest, agitation, social movements, collective action, revolution.

Core demand of the question

- Examine the role of protest movements in changing the status of Dalits in India
- Keep the examination within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

Movements turned ranked humiliation into a political public (**Ambedkar** and after).

They won law, **reservations**, and some office; they recast the generalised other.

- **Weber**: party changed more than status honour.

Class splits and gender gaps remain.

- **Role**: central and unfinished.

Introduction

Dalit status is a compound of ritual rank, labour, and civic honour. Protest movements have been a principal, not a sole, force in changing that status. Law and development mattered; they were often won or made real by protest.

Body

What movements did

- **Phule**, **Ambedkar**, and later Dalit Panthers and many regional assertions turned a ranked identity into a political public.
- **Karl Marx's class-for-itself is an imperfect analogue**: caste is not only class, yet organisation and an account of injustice were required.
- **Reservations**, **atrocities law**, and temple-entry struggles show movement pressure on the state.
- George Herbert Mead's generalised other shifted for many from a humiliating caste gaze toward a civic and Ambedkarite other.

Status in Weber's three orders

- **Party**: votes and associations, which Rajni Kothari noted as caste-in-politics, here as a counter-hegemonic use.
- **Class**: some occupational shift through education and urban work; informal labour still holds many.

- **Status honour:** endogamy and everyday discrimination change slowest. Protest names them; it does not instantly dissolve them.

Limits

- **Emile Durkheim's** civic cult remains incomplete while atrocities continue.
- A new Dalit middle class can leave agricultural labourers behind, a class split inside the movement field.
- Co-optation and symbolic inclusion without land and safety are Robert K. Merton's latent cooling of protest.
- **Gender:** Dalit women's issues were often secondary, which feminist critique after Oakley and intersectional work names.

Examination

- Role is historically central in converting stigma into rights-talk and office-holding.
- Change of status is uneven across honour, property, and safety.

Flow diagram

Dalit protest movements -> Law office education
Dalit protest movements -> New civic self
Honour endogamy violence -> Uneven status change
Law office education -> Uneven status change

Conclusion

Protest movements changed Dalit status by organising a public, forcing law, and recasting the self. **Weber's** party axis moved more than honour. **Marx's** class split and continuing violence mark the unfinished change. Movements remain necessary because status is still a social fact of domination.

Facts & figures

Ambedkar

Organised constitutional, religious, and political protest against caste as a system of graded inequality.

Atrocities law

A legal recognition, pushed by struggle, that caste violence is a public crime.

Reservations

State-sponsored mobility channel fought for by movements, not a gift from above alone.

Weber status

Honour and restricted interaction; the slowest of the three orders to change.

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