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Q2(a)

What is identity politics? Discuss the main trends in Dalit movements in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Social Movements in Modern India

Social Movements in Modern India: Peasants and farmers movements; Women's movement; Backward classes and Dalit movement; Environmental movements; Ethnicity and Identity movements.

Core demand of the question

- What is identity politics? Discuss the main trends in Dalit movements in India
- Cover Ambedkarite, electoral, and cultural strands

Revision summary

Identity politics organises a named injured group to claim rights and honour.

Dalit movements begin in anti-disability struggles and **Ambedkar**'s annihilation path.

Electoral trends include Republican politics and the **BSP**-Bahujan project.

Cultural and campus assertion made dignity a public language.

Class and land questions remain, so identity is necessary and not the whole.

Introduction

Identity politics is the organisation of people around a named social location-caste, faith, language, gender to claim dignity, resources, and voice. In India it is not a late import. Dalit movements have long made a stigmatised identity into a public force.

Body

Identity politics

- It turns a shared injury into a we that can bargain with the state, unlike a class that may not share a name.
- **Andre Beteille's disharmonic order is its soil:** equality is the official value, ranked honour is the daily fact.
- The risk is that identity can freeze groups and sideline class, which A. R. Desai would stress. The gain is that invisible people become a constituency.

Early and Ambedkarite trends

- Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century protests against disability, temple exclusion, and degraded labour prefigure the modern movement.
- **Ambedkar**'s annihilation programme, independent labour politics, and later **Navayana** Buddhism made Dalit identity a moral and political project, not a request for Sanskritization.
- **Republican politics after independence kept the constitutional path:** reservation, law, and representation.

Electoral and organisational trends

- BAMCEF, DS4, and the Bahujan Samaj Party turned a census category into a north Indian electoral bloc.
- Regional parties and Dalit-led outfits in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab show no single national script.
- Alliances with OBCs, and later splits, show identity as a coalition craft, not a fixed essence.

Cultural and new trends

- Literature, **Buddha** Jayanti public culture, and anti-atrocity agitation after the Prevention of Atrocities law made dignity a street language.
- Campus movements and digital networks after events such as institutional deaths of Dalit students widened the public.
- Land, sanitation labour, and manual scavenging remain material cores; identity without land is incomplete, as agrarian class analysis insists.

Limit

- Identity politics can win office and still leave graded inequality in marriage and work. **Ambedkar** would not call that annihilation.

Flow diagram

Identity politics -> Ambedkar annihilation
Ambedkar annihilation -> BSP Republican electoral
Ambedkar annihilation -> Culture campus anti-atrocity
BSP Republican electoral -> State resources
Culture campus anti-atrocity -> Dignity

Conclusion

Identity politics names the conversion of stigma into a claim. Dalit movements have moved from anti-untouchability and Ambedkarite conversion, through Republican and **BSP** electoral projects, to cultural and campus assertion. The trend is toward public dignity; the unfinished work is still graded inequality.

Facts & figures

Annihilation of Caste

Ambedkar's programme that identity must end the ladder, not climb it.

BSP

Electoral vehicle that turned Dalit-Bahujan identity into government in Uttar Pradesh.

PoA Act

Atrocity law that gave movements a legal grammar for everyday violence.

Navayana

Ambedkar's Buddhist turn as a collective exit from sacred hierarchy.

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