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Q7(c)

Trace the social and historical origins of Dalit movements in modern India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 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

- **Trace origins:** caste structure, colonial public sphere, and named movements
- Cover **Phule**, Ad Dharm, **Ambedkar**, temple entry, Depressed Classes, non-Brahmin, Dalit Panthers, and later electoral forms
- Keep it historical and social, not a list of dates only

Revision summary

Dalit movements arise from untouchability as a social structure and from modern public institutions.

Phule's anti-caste education is an early modern origin.

Ambedkar joined agitation, law and Navayana Buddhism.

Regional Adi and temple-entry struggles are parallel origins.

Panthers and electoral parties are later forms of the same historical line.

Introduction

Dalit movements in modern India did not begin with a party symbol. They began from the **social fact of untouchability**-excluded wells, schools, temples and honour-and from a modern chance to speak in print, law and the census. **Phule**, **Ambedkar**, regional Adi traditions, and later Panthers and electoral parties are chapters of one long refusal of hereditary humiliation.

Body

Social origins

Caste as endogamy and pollution (**Ambedkar**, **Ghurye's disabilities**) produced a shared injury across regions, with local names: Mahar, Pulaya, Paraiyar, Chamar, and many others. Colonial courts, missions, army and municipalities opened small exits. The census named 'Depressed Classes' and made numbers a political resource. That is the historical opening of a modern Dalit public.

Historical line

Jotirao and Savitribai Phule's Satyashodhak work and schools attacked Brahmanical monopoly of knowledge. Non-Brahmin movements in Madras and elsewhere were related but not identical; Dalit streams often had to fight both Brahmin and intermediate-caste

dominance. **Ad Dharm** in Punjab, **Namashudra** organising in Bengal, and temple-entry struggles (Vaikom, Guruvayur, later temple laws) made dignity a public demand. **Ambedkar** unified a national programme: Mahad water, Nashik temple, Independent Labour Party, the Poona Pact conflict with **Gandhi**, conversion to Buddhism in 1956, and the constitutional abolition of untouchability. That is the hinge of modern origins.

Post-Independence Republican currents, the **Dalit Panthers** in 1970s Maharashtra (literature plus street), BAMCEF and **BSP** in the north, and many regional manch continued the line into electoral and cultural politics. Origins remain social: landlessness, stigmatised labour, and the insult of touch. Origins are also historical: without colony, print and the Constitution, the movement would not have this shape.

Print, night schools, and the Depressed Classes press in several languages created a **counter-public** in which origins became a story people could share across regions. Without that historical infrastructure, **Phule** and **Ambedkar** would remain local teachers. With it, Dalit movement origins are national and still unfinished.

Tracing origins therefore means joining **structure (caste) + colonial modernity + named organic intellectuals and organisations**.

Flow diagram

Untouchability and endogamy -> Colonial public census missions
Colonial public census missions -> Phule schools Satyashodhak
Colonial public census missions -> Ambedkar Mahad Constitution
Ambedkar Mahad Constitution -> Panthers BSP cultural politics

Conclusion

Dalit movements originate in the caste structure of humiliation and in modern opportunities to organise. **Phule** and **Ambedkar** are the principal architects; regional Adi and temple-entry struggles and later Panthers and parties extend the same origin story into the present.

Facts & figures

Mahad 1927

Ambedkar's satyagraha for water rights; a founding public event.

Poona Pact 1932

Agreement on Depressed Classes representation after conflict over separate electorates.

Dalit Panthers 1970s

Maharashtra movement mixing literature, youth and a radical caste-class idiom.