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Q7(c)

How Dalit movements in India have facilitated their Identity formation? Analyze

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- **Show how Dalit movements produced identity:** naming, history, religion, parties, literature
- Use **Phule**, **Ambedkar**, Republican tradition, **Dalit Panthers**, **BSP**, conversion, bahunjan
- Identity as political, not only cultural

Revision summary

Dalit identity was produced by movements, not merely discovered by the census.

Phule and **Ambedkar** supplied counter-history, a political name and Buddhist conversion.

Panthers, literature, **BSP** and campus groups nationalised that public.

Law and commemoration keep the identity visible.

Internal splits exist; they do not cancel the movement-made we.

Introduction

- **Dalit identity was not a census leftover waiting to be found.** Movements made it: a name instead of a slur, a history instead of a karma story, and a public instead of a quarter outside the village. Identity formation here is **political self-making**.

Body

From stigma to subject

Phule offered shudra-atishudra as a counter-genealogy. **Ambedkar** turned untouchable into a **rights-bearing minority**, then **Dalit** (broken) as a chosen political name, and conversion to **Navayana Buddhism** (1956) as exit from Hindu hierarchy. Journals, mahila sabhas, and temple-entry satyagrahas taught people to speak as a **we**. The Mahad tank and Kalaram temple struggles were identity lessons in public space: we will take water and gods that were closed.

Post-Independence **Republican** politics, **Dalit Panthers** (1970s Maharashtra) with literature of rage, **BSP** and bahunjan arithmetic, and campus Ambedkarite groups spread a **national Dalit public**. Autobiography (Pawar, Valmiki, Bama) and commemorations of Bhima-Koregaon or **Ambedkar** Jayanti are identity technologies. **PoA cases** and reservation struggles keep the identity legally alive. Film, hip-hop and social media now carry the same we into youth cultures that village studies never saw.

Identity is not frozen. Sub-caste, class, region and gender split the we. Hindu majoritarian offers of incorporation compete with Ambedkarite autonomy. Women's Dalit writing insisted that the movement's we had been male. Still, without movements there would be scheduled castes as an administrative heap, not a **political identity**. Naming, history-telling, religious exit, and party symbols are the four workshops of that identity. Without the movement, the schedule is a file; with it, the schedule becomes a people.

Flow diagram

Phule Ambedkar -> Name and dhamma

Panthers literature -> Dalit public

Parties and campuses -> Dalit public

Name and dhamma -> Dalit public

Conclusion

Dalit movements formed identity by renaming, converting, writing and organising for power. The identity is a project-contested, internally diverse, and still necessary against stigma.

Facts & figures

1956 conversion

Ambedkar's mass conversion to Buddhism as a collective identity exit from caste Hinduism.

Dalit Panthers

1970s Maharashtra movement mixing **Ambedkar**, **Marx** and a new literary voice.

BSP

Bahujan Samaj Party; electoral form of Dalit-Bahujan identity in the Hindi belt.

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