UNIT 10: DALIT MOVEMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Obtain an overall understanding about the Dalit movement in India,
- Know the primary causes, rise, issues, leadership and implications of the Dalit movement in India.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

Social movements of different kinds and nature emerge due to issues and problems faced by the society. The Dalit movement emerged owing to specific social hurdles faced by particularly the so-called Dalit community of the country. In this unit, emphasis shall be laid on a holistic understanding of the idea of Dalit movements in India.

10.3 CONCEPTUALIZING THE TERM 'DALIT'

The term "Dalit" is considered to have been derived from Sanskrit. The term in its simplest form implies "crushed", or "broken to pieces". Historically it is believed that the term was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the 19th century, in the milieu of the subjugation met by the former "untouchable"

castes among the Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi espoused the expression "Harijan," (when loosely translated the term implies "Children of God"), to locate the former castaways. As per the Indian Constitution, the Dalits are the people who are listed in the schedule caste category. In the contemporary time, several Dalits make use of the word to shift afar from the more deprecating terms of their caste names, or even the term "untouchable." In the present times the usage of "Dalit" is positioned on the notion that as a people, the assemblage may have been fragmented by subjugation, but they subsist and even flourish by finding significance in the fight of their existence. Dalit in modern India,is thus a political identity.

It has to be also understood that Dalits are a group of people who are placed at the last category of caste system in the Chaturvarna Theory. With minor modifications, nonetheless, the term Dalit would imply not a single category of caste, it is also inclusive of people who are subjugated economically, socially, administratively and from all the compasses of life, by the customs of the country. There are varied terminologies in addition to Dalits, by which people of the lower caste are referred to. Some terms are Dasyu, Dasa, Atisudra, Adikarnataka, Panchama, Tirukulattar, Adi Dravida.

10.4 DALIT MOVEMENT: EMERGENCE,CAUSES, OBJECTIVES

In simple words, Dalit movement is a movement of people and assemblages to terminate the caste based discriminations and subjugations. It is also seen as a struggle for securing the human rights of the Dalits and other beleaguered segments of the Indian society. Dalit movement strives to construct both a national and global union and consensus against the caste system, inhuman subjugation and discernments.

An established fact of the Indian society is that it is categorically fragmented on the foundation of caste. The position of person is reliant on the caste in which he is born. In the traditional caste system prevalent in India, the bottom castes were placed at the lowest of the social hierarchy. The Dalits were also not permitted to alter their caste profession. The

magnitude of the incapacities was such that they were compelled to live on the fringes of villages and townships. The browbeaten Dalits upraised numerous struggles to fight their social mistreatment from all quarters. There were two major factors that made profound influence on caste system, which were further responsible for ushering in a social turmoil and an awakening amongst the Dalits. First, the western ideologies of progressiveness of thought, individual liberty and equality began making headway into the traditional milieu of the Hindu social system, the caste matrix and other institutions. Secondly, the British administration introduced the concepts of equality before law and modem technology which paved the way for the creation of the much needed intellectual and emotional milieu for the development of social transformation movements.

Dalit movements are a consequence of centuries of oppression and exploitation that have systematically evolved along with the caste system. The factors that have triggered these movements are therefore complex and have multitude origins. The Dalit Movement is an upshot of the continuous abhorrence that has been spawned for centuries from the ferocious undertakings of the upper castes of India. Ever since Dalits were allocated the task of serving people belonging to the other three Varnas, they were dispossessed of higher training of mind and were repudiated from social, economic and political necessities and privileges.

The division of the labour was based on the ground of inequality and mistreatment. The caste system deteriorated Dalit lines into pathogenic circumstance where professions changed into castes.

Since times immemorial, the Dalits were barred from the mainstream society and were only permitted to pursue menial jobs like manual scavenging, sweeping and many such lowly jobs, for which their wages also meagre.

Owing to the fact that they dwelled on the fringes of the Hindu villages, they did not have benefit of geographical isolation. They were banned from venturing into those mainland areas in every respect. They were forbidden to wear proper clothing and adornments, besides being untouchable. Many of the atrocities were meted out in the name of religion. To maintain the

monopoly on people, education was not made accessible to the lower caste. Also, in many places they had to go on sweeping the road they walked, to make it pure for the upper caste people to walk again on it. So, most lower caste people tied brooms on their waist. Women of lower caste were prohibited from covering their upper body which led to an uprising from 1813 to 1859 in Travancore. The Channar Lahala or Channar revolt, also known as the Maru Marakkal Samara is the crusade of Nadar climber women in Travancore kingdom for their right to wear upper-body garments. Prior to the movement the right to cover the breasts was reserved for Nair women, who were upper caste Hindu women.

The practice of untouchability was one of the discriminatory practices which compelled the Dalits to live in extreme unpitying circumstances, which prompted them to rise and fight for equality.

The Dalit movement that gathered impetus in the post-independence era. With the familiarity of western language, and under the sway of the Christian missionaries, the Dalits started to come across the principles of equality and liberty and therefore, began the Dalit Movement in contemporary times. The exasperated Dalit minds after its amalgamation with reason began the opposition against the carnages of Brahmanism.

The objectives of Dalit movements across history has been predominantly to put an end to caste discriminations, eradicat caste based ferocity against the people of oppressed castes, exterminat bonded child labour which is a delinquency against humankind, reject gender based domination and trafficking of girls, refuse cultural nationalism of the Hindu right, campaign of full time alteration and empowerment of Dalits, and devouring the oppression of caste pyramid to end the domination of Dalits.

Therefore, the Dalit movement is the systematized confrontation of the prolonged caste oppression that has plagued the Indian society.It is a crusade or fight of lower castes counter to the hegemony of Brahmanism. Dalit movement is also a movement of the grassroots that desires justice through the speeches, dramas, songs, literary works, cultural institutions and all the other conceivable measurers. Several scholars also see this movement as a movement which has been commanded by Dalits to pursue

equality with all other castes of the Hindu society. The primary objective of the Dalit movement has been to institute a society in India founded on social equality.

10.5 DALIT MOVEMENT: ISSUES, LEADERSHIP AND IMPLICATIONS

Years of subjugation led to the rise of intellectuals who led the Dalit movement, one of whom was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the illustrious intellectual who fought for securing the social acknowledgement and human rights for the oppressed caste. All India Depressed Association and the All India Depressed Classes Federation were the primary establishments under the aegis of which the Dalit movement blossomed.They targeted at civilizing their miserable economic situations, and also disseminate education among them. The organisations also function for securing basic rights like the right to take water from public wells, the right to admittance to the schools, the right to use common public roads and the right to enter the public temples. For example, the Mahad Satyagrah (1927) which crusaded for the right of water,commanded by Dr. Ambedkar, was one of the prominent movements of the Dalits to win equality in social rights.

All India Harijans Sevak Sangh was also instituted by M.K. Gandhi in 1923. The organisation started several schools for the Harijan including residential vocational schools. The Dalit crusade also facilitated the process of providing free education to the Harijans starting from the primary class up to the university level and many more such policies. Besides, to empower the Harijans to get rid of their backwardness, they were provided with special educational amenities

To implement the provisions of law more severely, the Untouchability (Offences) Act (1955) was approved to fix consequences for not following the law. As stated earlier, a major and significant segment of the anti-untouchability crusade was propelled by Dr Ambedkar in the 1920s in Maharashtra. He understood the prospect and possibility of a progression for the untouchables through the usage of political resources to accomplish

social and economic egalitarianism with the highest classes in modern civilization. He systematized the autonomous labour party on secular lines for defending the welfare of the laboring classesThe year 1930 was a landmark year for the Dalit movement when they demanded a separate electorate which steered a conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi. In the early 1930s Ambedkar determined that the only way of humanizing the status of the untouchables was to relinquish the Hindu religion.. Dirks (2000) argues that the failure of secular institution to bring transformation led Dr. Ambedkar to take resort to (another) religion to escape the oppression in one. He established that Buddhism was a suitable substitute religion for the untouchables. He favored Buddhism because it was a native Indian religion of egalitarianism; a religion which was anti caste and anti-Brahmin..

As early as 1873 Jyotiba Phule established the Sayta Shodak Mandal with the objective of redeeming the non-Brahmins from the controls of Brahmanism. Following the line of Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur started Satya Shodak Mandal in 1912 and carried on the movement for the liberation of the lower caste people. In the pre- independence era, the Dalit movement was inclusive of a resilient non-Brahman movement against Brahmanism in Maharashtra. In similar vein many such movements emerged namely the Adi Dravidas movement in Tamil Nadu, Adi Andhras movement in Coastal Andhra, Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalan movement in Kerala and many more.

The Dalits of Maharashtra propelled the Dalit Panther Movement in the early 1970s.Originally it was limited to the urban areas of Maharashtra and had not spread to Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and other states. The social organisation Dalit Panther seeks to fight caste discrimination. It was established by Namdeo Dhasal and J. V. Pawar on 29 May 1972 in the Indian state of Maharashtra. The crusade saw it's zenith in the 1970s and through the 1980s.

The proclamation for Dalit identity has practically become the central subject of Dalit movement. Dalit movement comprises of local level cooperative action against discernment and carnages. There are numerous local movements in which Dalits in large groups travel from their villages

opposing caste based discrimination and mayhems. One incident took place in condemnation against the suffering and whipping of the Dalits of the village Sambarda. It was the mass migration of people like expatriates from their native village who camped in the open infront of the district collectors office for 131 days in 1989.They asked for alternative areas for dwelling where their life and self-respect will be protected. They would not settle unless a permanent solution to protect their land and dignity was provided.

Dalit movement was and is a reaction against the social, cultural and economic dominance and elitism of other classes over them. The contemporary Dalit literature precisely is an endeavour to break the socio-cultural hegemony. At present times, developed communication system made wider associations and amalgamation conceivable, while new structure of education provided chance for socio-economic upliftment. All the above mentioned factors, amongst others, enabled the process of realigning the position of untouchables.

Today, accomplishments of the members of the Dalit community is considered to be a way of consolidating the Dalit movement not only from the socio-cultural front but also from the economic front Other than securing prominent positions in politics, a significant political matter is over the affirmative action procedures taken by the government for the upliftment of Dalits through quotas or reservations in government jobs and admissions in colleges or universities. For example, the seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies are earmarked for Scheduled Caste and Tribe candidates, a system pursued by B. R. Ambedkar and other Dalit campaigners in order to guarantee that Dalits would get a proportional political voice.

However, despite centuries of struggle, even today anti-Dalit biases exist in fringe groups. Many anti- Dalit crusaders oppose equal or special behavior for the Dalits and have adopted violent methods to overpower the Dalits.Even though antidiscrimination laws are in place, many Dalits continue to suffer from social dishonor and discrimination. Ethnic rigidities and caste based violence between Dalit and non-Dalits have become a regular phenomenon. Many also argue that only securing political mileage and economic privileges cannot uplift the Dalits. Holistic change is needed

whereby transformation takes place at grassroots in terms of educational rights, rights to practice one's religion without any fear, the right to read religious scriptures and the right to communicate about Dalit situation through Dalit literature. It has to be acknowledged that caste is deeply rooted ideology in the minds of the people and so, social change would imply not only the eradication of discriminatory practices, but also the creation of an open-minded society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What is Dalit movement?

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Q2. What are the Objectives of Dalit movement?

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Q3. What is understood by Dalit literature?

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10.6 LET US SUM UP

- The Dalit movement has been seen as a crusader to attain better mobility on part of the community that was at the social periphery.
- Dalit movement was and is a reaction against the social, cultural and economic dominance and elitism of other classes over them. The contemporary Dalit literature precisely is an endeavour to break the socio-cultural hegemony.
- The erudite Dalits, progressively began to talk about the difficulties of poor and about mistreatment and mortifications meted out by the upper castes. They also got a boost owing to the British policy of divide and rule in which census played an adequate role of classifying caste. This paved the way for making claims for social ascendancy through caste mobilisation.

- Developed communication system made wider associations and amalgamation conceivable, while new structure of education provided chance for socio-economic upliftment.
- All the above mentioned factors, amongst others, enabled the process of realigning the position of untouchables. Social transformation crusadesled by the likes of Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Sri Narayan Guru in Kerala also began to be critical of caste inequality.
- Gandhi assimilated the issue of elimination of untouchability into the national movement for independence and momentous crusade and struggles such as Varkom and Guruvayur Satyagraha were planned. His efforts were directed at making the upper caste realise the harshness of discrimination carried out through the practice of untouchability.
- Other components also developed in different parts of India. For example, in Punjab, the Adi Dharm, in Uttar Pradesh the Adi Hindi and in Bengal the Namashvedsas, etc. In Bihar, Jagjivan Ram arose as the most prominent Congress leader, formed Khet majoor Sabha and Depressed Class League.In North India, Bahujan Samaj party (BSP) was formed in 1980's under Kanshi Ram and later, Mayawati, who belongs to the Dalit community and also a member of BSP became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Also, Acharya Ishvardatt Medharthi (1900–1971) of Kanpur reinforced the crusade of the Dalits.
- Today, accomplishments of the members of the Dalit community is considered to be a way of consolidating the Dalit movement not only from the socio-cultural front but also from the economic front.
- Other than securing prominent positions in politics, a significant political matter is over the affirmative-action procedures taken by the government for the upliftment of Dalits through quotas or reservations in government jobs and admissions in colleges or universities. For example the seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies are earmarked for Scheduled Caste and Tribe