
UNIT 9 DALIT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Who is a Dalit ?
- 9.3 Dalit Mobilization/Dalit Consciousness
- 9.4 Dalit Movement in Pre-Independence India
 - 9.4.1 Bhakti Movement
 - 9.4.2 Neo-Vedantik Movements
 - 9.4.3 Sanskritization Movement
 - 9.4.4 Gandhiji's Contribution to Dalit Movement
 - 9.4.5 Ambedkar's Contribution to Dalit Movement
- 9.5 Dalit Literary Movement
- 9.6 Post-Independence Dalit Movements
 - 9.6.1 B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhist Dalit Movement
 - 9.6.2 Dalit Panthers
 - 9.6.3 Contribution of Kanshi Ram
 - 9.6.4 Mayawati's Contribution to Dalit Movement
- 9.7 Dalit Women's Movement
- 9.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.9 References
- 9.10 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of 'dalit' in India;
- To identify the issues/problems involved in the dalit movement;
- To know phases through which the dalit movement has passed; and
- Analyze the role of dalits and their organisations in the electoral politics

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The Dalit movement began as a protest movement to bring socio-political transformation in the status of dalits in India. Dalits have been ruthlessly exploited and inhumanly subjugated by the upper castes for centuries. They have been isolated, fragmented and oppressed by the hegemony of Brahmin culture. The new polity, the post modern administrative framework, the rational judicial system, the current forms of land tenure and taxation, the new patterns of trade, the liberal education system, and the network of communications emphasized the spirit of liberty, equality and social justice for Dalits. The Dalit movement asserts rights and privileges to the Dalits. Ruman Sutradhar (2014) writes that the Dalit

*Contributed by Manas Nanda

Movement is a social revolution aimed for social change, replacing the age old hierarchical Indian society, and is based on the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and social justice. He also explains that the socio-cultural exclusion, economic deprivation and political exploitation of centuries made the Dalits break out of such kinds of age-old prejudices. Hence, they began to protest with the help of literature, or forming organizations like the Dalit Panthers, and this protest movement came to be recognized as the Dalit Movement.

The post modern researchers, social scientists and academia have developed their interest to study the dalit movement as it is one of the important social movements in India. Different dalit leaders through their organization and political parties have mobilized and motivated the dalit mass to achieve the overall objectives of creating an inclusive society. Due to stronger mobilization by the Bahujan Samaj Party, the dalits could participate in the democratic electoral process in the country and create a separate identity for themselves. The dalit leaders unleashed the movement for maintaining or increasing reservations in political offices, government jobs and welfare programmes. It is called the new political movements of dalits. Dalit movement brought a transformation in the caste structure of Indian society and emphasized the fight for self dignity. The present reservation system is the outcome of dalit movement.

9.2 WHO IS A DALIT ?

Dalits have different names in different parts of our country. They are called Holaya, Panchama, Chandala, Samagara, Chammar, Adikarnataka, and Adidravida etc. The word “Dalit” is derived from the Sanskrit word *Dal*, means “ground”, “suppressed”, “crushed”, or “broken to pieces”. It was first used by Jyotiba Phule, the founder of the Satya Shodak Samaj, a non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. He used the term to refer to the outcastes and untouchables as the victims of the caste-based social division of the Indian society in the nineteenth century. Victor Premasagar writes that the term expresses the Dalits’ “weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of the upper castes in the Indian society.” The term *Dalit* has become a political identity, similar to the way African Americans in the United States moved away from the use of the term “Negro”, to the use of “Black” or “African-American.” Dalits today use the term “Dalit” as they believe the term is more than being broken and is in fact an identity born of struggle and assertion. The word dalit is a degraded term which was replaced by the British rulers who named it as depressed class in 1919. Gandhij lovingly called them Harijan. The British administration defined them as Scheduled castes in 1935. Again the term Dalit was popularized by the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra in 1970.

In Varna Vyavastha, untouchables are placed as Panchama Varna. They occupy the lowest position in Indian society. They are the members of the menial caste and they are considered as impure and polluted and they have been regularly facing discrimination and violence which prevents them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India. They were denied access to roads, temples, schools, etc. to avoid “pollution” of other castes. They are forced to accept polluting occupations like disposing dead bodies, working with leather, cleaning toilets and sewage, etc.

The total percentage of Dalits is 16.6 percent in India. They are highly concentrated in states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and Maharashtra. Dalits are mainly poor peasants, share-croppers and agricultural labourers in the rural economy. In the urban economy they basically form the bulk of the labouring population. Sutrdhar (2014) writes that Dalits began their movement against the exploitation by Brahmins, and that they have not succeeded even now. There are varied reasons why the movement could not be successful and one of the most important is that Brahmanism is deep rooted in the social structure of India. The Arya-Brahmins, the originators of the Vedas have actually institutionalized discrimination through the institution of caste. The majority are accepting caste system because the dominant ideology is inflicted in the people's minds by the process of hegemony. Brahmanism, in order to continue discrimination has made use of Gramscian hegemony through social institutions like schools, and temples, to maintain their hegemonic status.

The Brahmins have very systematically deprived the Dalits of their own land and resources. The dominant Brahmanical ideology of caste is being resisted by a small group that took the shape of the Dalit Movement. A few educated Dalits organized the majority to begin the movement.

As Gail Omvedt (1976) perceptibly observes, the autonomous Dalit movement had to engage with three forces in colonial society:

- 1) It developed in opposition to the socially and culturally pervasive and historically deep-rooted hegemony of Brahminical Hinduism.
- 2) It had to contend with the hegemony of the nationalist movement, which under the leadership of the Congress, strove to take over the agendas of several subaltern movements while restraining their democratic and egalitarian potential.
- 3) It had to face a difficult relationship with the communist movement.

9.3 DALIT MOBILISATION/DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS

Mobilization' means the process of preparing the actors for collective action. Collective action can simply be defined as people acting together in pursuit of interests they share, for example, gathering to demonstrate in support of their cause. Neil Smelser (1962) in his *Theory of Collective Behaviour* and Charles Tilly in his book *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978) included mobilization as one important component of collective action. Collective behaviour begins when mobilization for action takes place.

Ghurye in '*Caste and Race in India*' (1969) has explained the type of discriminations associated with untouchables in traditional Indian society which includes banning of women of untouchable caste from covering the upper part of their body, wearing gold ornaments having sexual proximity beyond the caste and the men from wearing dhoti below their knees, using public facilities and going for occupations beyond their caste, prescriptions. Untouchables at large were supposed to carry a thorny branch of a tree to remove their footsteps from

the road; they were supposed to hang an earthen pot around their neck to spit in, which may otherwise fall on the ground making higher castes impure.

S.C Dube (1958) advocates that for the emergence of class consciousness, ideology of dalit becomes essential. He advocates that Dalit consciousness in contemporary India is the manifestation of Dalit's search for modernization whereas Dalit consciousness in traditional India was a challenge to orthodox Brahmanism and Hindu values. Dalit mobilization in case of India should be studied from time perspective" indicating and explaining how various kinds of ideology have supported Dalit mobilization in India. During 1920s -1950s Dalit mobilization was greatly concerned about forcible entry into Hindu temples, burning copies of the Manusmriti, abandoning the services of indigenous priests governed by brahmanic values, production and the circulation of caste literatures etc, but in contemporary India, Dalit identity is more a matter of search for rights, justice and equality rather than just being concerned with rebellion against Hinduism. Therefore different stages of Dalit consciousness are driven by different ideologies and interests and must be addressed by sociology.

Andre Betielle (1969, 1991) writes that Dalit mobilization in contemporary India is greatly driven by political interest rather than by discriminatory cultural past. The practice of untouchability is losing its ground in contemporary India because of growth of caste free occupations resulting in the mutual co-presence of Brahmins and Dalits in same occupation sphere. The Constitution of India guarantees to protect untouchables from all possible forms of discrimination in schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions of public importance. Development of transportation and communication have facilitated the inflow and the outflow of ideologies from one part of the society to another which results in least practice of discrimination and exploitation of dalits in contemporary India and credit for that must go to the structured pattern of social change.

Gail Omvedt (1999) emphasised that Dalit mobilization in India should be studied from a multidimensional perspective. She advocates that every movement is having initiation stage, consolidation stage; crystallization stage;-maturity stage and disintegration stage. Multiple factors like economic discrimination, lack of social dignity, cultural isolation and alienation from decision-making process were responsible for initiation of Dalit mobilization prior to India's Independence. She narrates that the emergence of Republican Justice Party and emergence of Dr B R Ambedkar who said that Dalits need an Ambedkar rather than a Gandhi for their liberation gave rise to the consolidation of Dalit movement in India.

M. S. A. Rao in 'Social Movements in India' (1979) equates Dalit movement with the movements of Blacks in America. He concludes by saying that ideology for Dalit movement was imported from the west that bore fruit in Indian social soil.

Yogendra Singh advocates that Dalit mobilization in India sufficiently exemplifies how modernization has broken the backbone of caste and he equates Dalit consciousness with class consciousness to bring forward the view that Dalit mobilization in India is driving Indian society in the direction of modernization giving importance to the principles of equality against the principle of hierarchy. The sociologists have differences in their viewpoints pertaining to Dalit mobilization. Despite variations in their standpoint they all accept that Dalit

mobilization in India is an empirical fact. It has spoken on the one hand about the Dalit’s search for self-identity with dignity, their search for rights and equality, and on the other hand that Dalit mobilization has given way to the glorification of caste or class identity within which caste is hidden. Such consequences of Dalit mobilization have stood against the basic objective of Indian Constitution that pledged to make India a casteless and classless society.

The main thrust of the Dalit movements has been centered in the Pre-Independent and Post Independent periods on the problem of untouchability. Dalits supported the movements for maintaining or increasing reservations in political offices, government jobs and welfare programmes.

Ghanshyam Shah (2004) classifies the Dalit movements into reformative and alternative movements. The former tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of untouchability. That latter i.e. the alternative movement attempts to create an alternative socio-cultural structure by conversion to some other religion or by acquiring education, economic status and political power. Both types of movements use political means to attain their objectives. The reformative movements are further divided into Bhakti movements, neo-Vedantik movements and Sanskritisation movements.

The alternative movements are divided into the conversion movement and the religious or secular movement. The latter includes the movement related to economic issues. In the context of dalit identity and ideology Shah has classified dalit movements into movements within cultural consensus, competing ideology and non Hindu identity, Buddhist dalits, counter ideology and dalit identity. The first three are based around religious ideologies whereas the last is based on class.

The reformative movements are further divided into (1) Bhakti Movement, (2) Neo-Vedantik Movements and (3) Sanskritization movements. The alternative movements are divided into (1) the conversion movement and (2) the religious or secular movement. The latter includes the movement related to economic issues. In the context of dalit identity and ideology Shah has classified dalit movements into (1) movements within cultural consensus, (2) competing ideology and non-Hindu identity, (3) Buddhists dalits and (4) counter ideology and dalit identity

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the question
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

1) Explain the concept of 'Dalit'

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Write an essay on Dalit Mobilization/ Dalit Consciousness

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

9.4 DALIT MOVEMENT IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

9.4.1 Bhakti Movement

This movement in 15th century was a popular movement which treated all sections of society equally and it developed two traditions of Saguna and Nirguna. The first one believed in the form of God Vishnu or Shiv relating to the Vaishnavite or Shaivaite traditions. It advocated equality among all the castes though it subscribed to the Varnashram dharma and the caste social order. The followers of Nirguna believed in formless universal God. Ravidas and Kabir were the major figures of this tradition. It became more popular among the dalits in urban areas in the early 20th century as it provided the possibility of salvation for all. It promised social equality. Through these movements Fuller argues devotionalist ethic came to be widely reinterpreted as a charter of egalitarianism. No doubt the teachings of Bhakti movement inspired and motivated scheduled castes for the beginning of dalit movement. These provided the means to protest against orthodox Hinduism for future generations of Dalits.

9.4.2 Neo-Vedantik Movements

These movements were initiated by Hindu religious and social reformers. These movements attempted to remove untouchability by taking the dalits into the fold of the caste system. According to the pioneers of these movements, untouchability was not an essential part of Hinduism and, for that matter, of the caste system. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, believed that the caste system was a political institution created by the rulers 'for the common good of society, and not a natural or religious distinction'. He said, 'in fact, any Brahman, who is disqualified for his work, becomes at once a Sudra de jure, and a Sudra, who qualifies for it, becomes at once a Brahmana de jure; though neither can become so de facto also either by his own will or the will of others, as long as the state does not make him so' (Jordens 1978: 62).

The neo-Vedantic movements and non-Brahmin movements played an important catalytic role in developing anti-caste or anti Hinduism dalit movements in some parts of the country. The Satyashodhak Samaj and the self-respect movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Adhi Dharma and Adi Andhra movement in Bengal and Adi-Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh are important anti-untouchability movements which were launched in the last quarter of the 19th and the early part of 20th century.

Nandini Gooptu (1993) in her study in Uttar Pradesh in the early twentieth century briefly analyses the emergence of the *Adi-Hindu Movement* in the urban areas of

the region (2001). Like Adi-Dharma, the leaders of the Adi-Hindu movement believed that the present form of Hinduism was imposed on them by the Aryan invaders. The movement did not pose a direct threat to the caste system. It was 'in essence, conceived as and remained a protest against the attribution of "low" roles and functions to the untouchables by means of a claim not to be Aryan Hindus; it was not developed into a full-blown, direct attack on the caste system' (Gooptu 1993: 298). The Dalits began to call themselves Adi-Andhras in Andhra, Adi-Karnatakas in Karnataka, Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, Adi-Hindus in Uttar Pradesh and Adi-Dharmis in Punjab. Dalits also followed the route of conversion with a purpose of getting rid of untouchability and to develop their social and financial conditions.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule formed the Satya Shodak Mandal in 1873 with the aim of liberating non-Brahmins from the clutches of Brahminism. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur started Satya Shodak Mandal in 1912 and carried forward the movement started by Phule. In the pre-independence period, the Dalit movements comprised of a strong non-Brahman movement against Brahmanism in Maharashtra, Adi-Dravidas movement in Tamil Nadu, Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalan movement in Kerala, Adi-Andhras movement in Coastal Andhra and the like. Phule tried to formulate a new theistic religion.

9.4.3 Sanskritisation Movement

M.N. Srinivas (1955) defined Sanskritization as a process by which "a low or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently *twice-born* caste.

Kumar (1991) writes that Dalit leaders followed the process of 'Sanskritization' to elevate themselves to the higher position in caste hierarchy. They adopted Brahman manners, including vegetarianism, putting sandalwood paste on forehead, wearing sacred thread, etc. Thus Dalit leaders like Swami Thykkad (Kerala), Pandi Sunder Lai Sagar (UP), Muldas Vaishya (Gujarat), Moon Vithoba Raoji Pande (Maharashtra) and others tried to adopt established cultural norms and practices of the higher castes. Imitation of the high caste manners by Dalits was an assertion of their right to equality.

Some of the dalit leaders advocated that by following Brahmanic culture and manners like vegetarianism, putting sandalwood paste on the forehead, using sacred thread around the neck and accepting Brahmanic dialects, dress, manners, ceremonies and rituals will enable them to elevate their position in the society. Some of the dalits were attracted towards Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Mahanubhav Sect.

It was in the 1920s, however, that Dalits began to organize strongly and independently throughout many regions of India. The most important of the early Dalit movements were the Adi-Dharm movement in the Punjab (organized 1926); the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra, mainly based among Mahars which had its organizational beginnings in 1924; the Namashudra movement in Bengal; the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamilnadu; the Adi-Karnataka movement; the Adi-Hindu movement mainly centered around Kanpur in U.P; and the organizing of the Pulayas and Cherumans in Kerala.

Kshîrasâgara (1994) writes that the phenomenon of Sanskritization had been apparently explained long ago by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in his *Castes in India* (1916) by the term imitation in the context of formation of castes. He had categorically stated that almost all the castes in pre-caste society followed the priestly Brahmin class in their attempt to upgrade their social status by way of imitation of certain Brahmanic manners and customs and by differentiation from other groups. This process led to the formation of the castes. He says the laws of imitation flows from the higher to the lower. The extent of intensity of imitation varies inversely in proportion to social distance from the superior castes and source of imitation must enjoy prestige in the group.

9.4.4 Gandhi's Contribution to Dalit Movement

When Mahatma Gandhi was in South Africa, he realized the problem of social discrimination. Gandhiji advocated that the construction of the life of the Nation was of utmost importance. This could be achieved by alleviating the social status of the untouchables. He always thought of untouchability as a cruel and inhuman institution. During his course of interaction with Harijan's at Ahmedabad, he examined, "this is a movement for the purification of Hinduism". According to Gandhiji, "If we are the children of the same God how can there be any rank among us"? He stressed the problem of untouchability and its removal from its roots. To boost up the work for the upliftment of Harijans, Gandhiji laid the foundation of the *Harijan Sevak Sang* in 1932 when he was in jail. This organisation was not a part of the Congress. It was the outcome of the fast Gandhiji undertook in 1932 in jail.

9.4.5 Ambedkar's Contribution to Dalit Movement

Ambedkar started a Marathi fortnightly, the "*Bahiskrit Bharat*", in April 1927 and a weekly, the "*Janta*" in November 1930. In September 1927 he started the "*Samaj Samta Sang*" for advocating social equality among the untouchables and the caste Hindus. He supported inter-caste dinner and inter-caste marriage. He also published another paper, the "Samata" in March 1929. In December 1927 he led a Satyagrah to establish the civic rights of the untouchables to draw water from a public tank, 'Chavadar Talen', at Mahad district Kolaba. Hindus claimed the tank as a private property and a prolonged litigation followed. Ambedkar won the case in the Bombay High Court in March 1937.

Ambedkar conducted another Satyagrah in March 1930 to establish the rights of the untouchables to enter the famous temple of Kalaram at Nasik. The Satyagrah was withdrawn in 1934. From April 1942 to 1946, he spread his activities and formed the *Scheduled Castes Federation* as an all India political party. From 1942 to 1946 he was a member of the Governor General's Executive Council and took advantage of this opportunity to promote the interest of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. He secured funds from the central Government for their education and reservation in posts in the central and provincial services for them.

9.5 DALIT LITERARY MOVEMENT

Dalit writings became an all India phenomenon. Dadawala (2016) writes that even prior to the 1960s, writers like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Shankarao Kharat, Narayan Surve, Anna Bhau Sathe were expressing Dalit concerns and issues in their literature. Baburao Bagul (1930–2008) is considered as a pioneer

of Marathi Dalit writings in Marathi. His collection of short stories titled *Jevha Mijat Choral* (When I Concealed My Caste) published in 1963 shook the traditional foundations of Marathi literature with its radical depiction of social exploitation. Subsequently, Namdeo Dhasal (who founded an organization called Dalit Panthers) further consolidated and expanded the Dalit literature movement in India.

Literateurs like Laxman Gaekwad, Laxman Pawar, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Tryambak Sapkale, Arun Dangle, Umakant Randhir, J. V. Pawar, Tarachandra Khandekar, Yogi Raj Waghmare, Avinash Dolas, Kishore Shantabai Kale, Narendra Jadhav, Yogendra Meshram, Bhimrao Shirvale etc. became prominent voices of Dalit writing in Marathi. Many of the Dalit writings have also been translated into English and published as part of the anthologies of Dalit writings.

9.6 POST-INDEPENDENCE DALIT MOVEMENTS

9.6.1 B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhist Dalit Movement

Babasaheb Ambedkar has been the pioneering figure in the dalit movement. Ambedkar devoted and sacrificed every moment of his life thinking about and struggling for the emancipation of Dalits. Ambedkar became the nation's first Law Minister on 15 August 1947. On 29 August 1947, he was appointed as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, charged by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution. Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar fought for extensive economic and social rights for women, and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a system akin to affirmative action. India's lawmakers hoped to eradicate the socio-economic inequalities and lack of opportunities for India's depressed classes through these measures.

Conversion to Buddhism

Ambedkar favoured Buddhist religion. He studied Buddhism all his life. In 1950, he turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to attend a meeting of the *World Fellowship of Buddhists*. He advocated for conversion to Buddhism. Ambedkar twice visited Burma in 1954; the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955, he formed the *Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha*. Ambedkar organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporters in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Ambedkar completed his own conversion to Buddhism along with his wife. He then proceeded to convert some 500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. He then travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. Ambedkar was convinced that Buddhism possessed a moral doctrine with two major objectives to perform. Firstly, in the political domain, it would be helpful for the dalits in creating a non-communal political ideology and identity against other existing perspectives of violent politics. During the Mahar Conference at Bombay Presidency in 1936, Ambedkar was convinced that conversion is the powerful weapon for Dalits to emancipate themselves. He realised that the "caste system among the Hindus has the

foundation of religion”. And so long as the Dalits “remain Hindus, Dalits will have to struggle hard for social intercourse for food and water, and for inter-caste marriages if they continue as Hindus. Ambedkar converted himself to Buddhism in 1956 in Nagpur. His able leadership could mobilize four lakh Dalits to convert themselves to Buddhism. In 1981, for example, responding to caste atrocities, more than 1,000 Dalits in Tamil Nadu converted to Islam. In 2002, in Jhajjar, Haryana, after five Dalits were lynched by a mob on the suspicion that they had killed a cow, the area saw mass conversions. In 2014, in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, four Dalits angered by caste discrimination converted to Islam. Earlier this year, 180 Dalits converted to Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh to protest against the arrest of activists from the Bhim Army, a Dalit rights organisation.

Ambedkar was the chief architect for the foundation of the movement. He left the movement with a mission to fulfill its goal, even though leadership changes over time. Ambedkar chalked out a consolidated economic development plan without being influenced by the socialist approach of the radical Marxist thinking that he once found suitable to describe the depressed classes in India. Ambedkar was very concerned about the economics of the deprivation of oppressed classes in India. In *State and Minorities* Ambedkar laid down the strategy of India's economic development without closing every avenue of private enterprise and also providing for the equal distribution of wealth. He advocated an economic framework aimed at providing protection to the vulnerable sections of society against economic exploitation (Jadhav, 1993).

According to the 2001 census, there are currently 7.95 million Buddhists in India, at least 5.83 million of whom are Buddhists in Maharashtra. This makes Buddhism the fifth-largest religion in India and 6% of the population of Maharashtra, but less than 1% of the overall population of India. The Buddhist revival remains concentrated in two states: Ambedkar's native Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh — the land of Acharya Medharthi and their associates. Bhoj Dev Mudit, converted to Buddhism in 1968 and set up a school of his own. Rajendranath Aherwar appeared as an important Dalit leader in Kanpur. He joined the Republican Party of India and converted to Buddhism along with his whole family in 1961. In 1967, he founded the Kanpur branch of “Bharatiya Buddh Mahasabha”.

The Dalit Buddhist movement in Kanpur gained its momentum with the arrival of Dipankar, a Chamar bhikkhu, in 1980. Dipankar had come to Kanpur on a Buddhist mission and his first public appearance was scheduled at a mass conversion drive in 1981. The event was organised by Rahulan Ambawadekar, an RPI Dalit leader. In April 1981, Ambawadekar founded the Dalit Panthers (U.P. Branch) inspired by the Maharashtrian Dalit Panthers.

9.6.2 Dalit Panthers

The Dalit Panthers movement was a neo-social movement which accepted Ambedkar's philosophy to find a theoretical framework for the movement. Dalit Panthers was a social organisation that sought to fight caste discrimination. It was founded by Namdeo Dhasal and J. V. Pawar on 29 May 1972 in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

The Dalit Panthers were inspired by the Black Panther Party, a socialist movement that sought to fight racial discrimination against African-Americans, during

the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, which occurred in the mid-20th century. The initiative to form the Dalit Panther Movement was taken up by Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar, and Arun Kamble in Bombay. The Dalit Panther movement was a radical departure from earlier Dalit movements owing to its initial emphasis on militancy and revolutionary attitudes,

Most members were young men, some of whom were Neo-Buddhists. They advocated for and practised radical politics, fusing the ideologies of Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule and Karl Marx. Crucially, the Dalit Panthers helped invigorate the use of the term *Dalit* to refer to lower-caste communities.

Kumar (2016) narrates that the Dalit Panther movement was a radical departure from earlier Dalit movements. Its initial thrust on militancy through the use of rustic arms and threats, gave the movement a revolutionary colour. Going by their manifesto, dalit panthers had broken new ground in terms of radicalising the political space for the dalit movement. They imparted the proletarian – radical class identity to dalits and linked their struggles to the struggles of all oppressed people over the globe. Marxism provided a scientific framework to bring about a revolutionary change. Although have-nots from both dalits and non-dalits craved for a fundamental change, the former adhered to what appeared to be Ambedkarian methods of socio-political change and the latter to what came to be the Marxian method which tended to see every social process as the reflection of the material reality.

Unfortunately, quite like the BPP, they lacked the suitable ideology to channel this anger for achieving their goal. Interestingly, as they reflected the positive aspects of the BPP's contributions in terms of self-defence, mass organising techniques, propaganda techniques and radical orientation, they did so – in the case of BPP's negative aspects too. Like Black Panthers they also reflected 'TV mentality' (to think of a revolutionary struggle like a quick-paced TV programme), dogmatism, neglect of economic foundation needed for the organisation, lumpen tendencies, rhetoric outstripping capabilities, lack of clarity about the form of struggle and eventually, corruptibility of the leadership.

9.6.3 Contribution of Kanshi Ram

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is a popular national political party in the Indian state formed by Kanshi Ram in 1984 on the birth anniversary of Dr B.R Ambedkar to represent Bahujans (literally meaning "People in minority"). It refers to people from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes (OBC), as well as religious minorities. The cadres are inspired by the philosophy of Gautam Buddha, B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Narayana Guru, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy and Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj. The primary focus of BSP is for the upliftment of downtrodden people, with the principal goal of "Social Transformation and Economic Emancipation" of the "Bahujan Samaj". B.R Ambedkar, who was the champion of lower caste rights became the icon and ideological guru of BSP cadres. The political strategy of the party is to narrate the stories of Dalit heroes, build memorials and organize celebrations around their stories repeatedly to build a collective memory in the psyche of the people.

In 1973, Kanshi Ram established the *Backward and Minority Communities Employee Federation (BAMCEF)*. The motto of the association is to "Educate-

Organize and Agitate”.. Kanshi Ram continued building his network and making people aware of the realities of the caste system, how it functioned in India and the teachings of Ambedkar. In 1980 he organised a road show as “Ambedkar Mela” which reflected the life of Ambedkar and his views through pictures and narrations. In 1981 he founded the *Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti*.

9.6.4 Mayawati’s Contribution to Dalit Movement

Mayawati Prabhu Das became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for four separated terms. She is the national president of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). She emphasized on a platform of social change to improve the lives of the weakest strata of Indian society — the *Bahujans* or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and religious minorities. Mayawati’s government was branded as a “miracle of democracy” by P. V. Narasimha Rao, former Prime Minister of India. Mayawati during her tenure directed all the Commissioners and the District Magistrates to distribute 3 acre land pieces or pattas to weaker sections of society by launching a special drive for illegal possession of pattas be dispossessed of them and the eligible poor be identified by regular monitoring of pattas and strict action against the mafias and musclemen through spot verification of different development and public welfare programmes. In 2010, 5596 people belonging to the SC and ST communities were allotted 1054.879 hectares of agricultural land. In a special drive 74 FIRs were filed and 88 people were arrested for illegal occupation of agricultural land.

Under the leadership of Mayawati, the government has taken the following decisions (from March 2007 to May 2008) in the interest of weaker sections:- (1) Special drive for filling backlog of reservations (2) Provision of reservation to SC/ST in private sector (3). Computerisation for transparency in the distribution of SC/ST scholarships (4) Mahamaya housing scheme (5) Shri Kanshi Ram Shahri Gharib Awas Yojna for providing housing facility to urban poor (6) Construction of community halls for Dalits (7). Janani Suraksha Yojna under which the eligible pregnant women are provided a sum of Rs.1400/-. Dalit empowerment is Mayawati’s lasting contribution to the Indian polity. She has “given a sense of self-confidence to the community that even Ambedkar or Kanshi Ram could never give.”

9.7 DALIT WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

In January 1928, a women’s association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai Ambedkar, Dr. Ambedkar’s wife, as its president. On 20th July 1942, The All India Depressed Classes Women Conference was organized and 25,000 women attended that conference. The Dalit movement thus considered women of even the highest castes as Dalits, because of their oppression. The National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW), was formed by Ruth Manorama in 1993, which has forced women’s movements in India to address the caste question seriously and raised its voice against violence on Dalit women. Dalit Mahila Sanghatana was formed by dalit women in Maharashtra in 1995. It focused on representing the dalit women’s question at the International Women Conference held in Beijing. The self representation of dalit women in Durban Conference on Racism in 1993 and International Women’s Conference in Beijing 1995 are path breaking events in the history of dalit women’s politics. Ramabai Ambedkar, Mrs. Anjinibai Deshbhratar, Mrs. Gitabai Gaikwad, Mrs. Kirtibai Patil, and Sulochanabai Dongre were the chief supporters of Dalit women’s movement.

Dalit feminists have articulated the three-fold oppression of Dalit women as

- 1) Dalits are oppressed by upper castes;
- 2) Agricultural workers are subject to class oppression, mainly at the hands of upper caste land owners; and
- 3) Women are facing patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own castes

The current goals of Dalit Women’s Movement are as follows:

- 1) To change caste equations in the area/region where they work
- 2) To promote the leadership of local women
- 3) To protest against all forms of violence against women and men
- 4) To negotiate their terms with members of the upper castes during elections
- 5) To ensure that the benefits of government schemes announced under the new Dalit-run regime, flows to all eligible Dalits.

A dalit woman has to face gender discrimination being a woman. and economic and caste exploitation being a dalit and at the same time she is oppressed by the patriarchy from which the dalit communities are not free. She equally suffers due to the lack of cultural capital which dalits on the whole suffer from. Ambedkar has not only spoken for and agitated for the rights of Dalits but also Dalit women. He argued that “practices of sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage come to be prescribed by Brahmanism in order to regulate and control any transgression of boundaries, i.e., to say he underlines the fact that the caste system can be maintained only through the controls on women’s sexuality and in this sense women are the gateways to the caste system (Rege: 1998).

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the question
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

- 1) Describe Dalit Movement in Pre-Independence India

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Explain Dalit Movement in Post Independence India

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9.8 LET US SUM UP

Dalit Movement has no doubt brought a major social change in the traditional hierarchy of Indian society. It has encouraged the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and social justice among the different castes and classes of people. The Dalit movements raised the issues related to identity and reservations of government jobs and political positions. There was a strong opposition to the practice of untouchability and discrimination. The movements have brought the dalits to the mainstream politics and allowed them to hold important and administrative posts in different parts of the country. The dalit literature mobilized the dalit intellectuals to assert their rights and maintain their dignity in the hierarchical society. The Dalit movement was a direct challenge to the upper caste and class and they have been acting as a strong pressure group to the government in the mainstream politics. Thus the dalit movement has become a powerful social movement to bring a major socio-economic and political transformation in the conditions of dalits.

9.9 REFERENCES

Beteille Andre (1969), “*Castes old and new*”, Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Beteille Andre (1991). *Society and politics in India: Essays in a comparative perspective*. London: The Athlone press.

Dadawala Darshini.(2016). Dalit Literature Concept, Origin and Features, *International Journal of English, Language ,Literature and Humanities*, February volume –IV, Issue –II.

Dube. S. C. (1955). *Indian Village*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Dube. S. C. (1958) *India’s Changing Villages*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

Gooptu Nandini. (1993). Caste, Deprivation and Politics. The Untouchability in UP town in early 20th century, in *Dalit Movement and the means of labour in India* edited by Peter Robb. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

G.S.Ghurye. (1969}. *Caste and Race in India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Jord Jadhav, Narendra (1993). *Dr Ambedkar’s Economic Thought and Philosophy*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan

Kshîrasâgara Râmacandra 1994 *Dalit Movement in India and Its Leaders, 1857-1956* M.D Publication Private Limited, New Delhi

Kumar K.Sravana. (2016). Dalit Movements in India After 1947 *Indian Journal of Research* Volume : 5 | Issue : 8 | August.

Omvedt Gail. (1994). *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution – Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications. ISBN 81-7036-368-3.

Omvedt Gail. (1976). *Cultural Revolt in a colonial society: The Non-Bramhan movement in Western India,(1873- 1930)* Bombay.

Rao M.S.A. (1979). *Social Movements among the Backward classes and Blacks: Homology in the sources of identity, in Social movements in India* , Delhi: Monohar publication’.

Rege Sharmila, (1998) .p.93. See <http://youngfeminists.wordpress.com/2007/11/27/1-on-caste-and-patriarchy>.

Samaddara Ranabira, Shah Ghanshyam. (2001). *Dalit Identity and Politics* Sage Publications,. ISBN 0-7619-9508-0, ISBN 978-0-7619-9508-1.6.

Shah, Ghanshyam (1985) *Caste Conflict and Reservations*, Centre for Social Sciences, (Surat: Ajanta Publications.

Shah, Ghanshyam (ed.) (2001), *Dalit Identity and Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Shah Ghanshyam. 2004. *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature*, Sage Publications Pvt Ltd.

Smelser N J. (1962). *Theory of Collective Behavior*, New York: The Free Press.

Srinivas. M.N. (1955). *India's Village*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Srinivas, M.N. (1997). *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* .New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.1997)

Srinivas M.N. (1977), "Social change in Modern India", Orient Longman, New Delhi

Srinivas M.N (1962), "*Caste in Modern India and other Essays*", (Bombay:Media promoters,) , p.5

Sutradhar Ruman. (2014). *Dalit Movement in India: In the light of four Dalit literatures*, *IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences (IOSR-JDMS) e-ISSN: 2279-0853, p-ISSN: 2279-0861. Volume 13, Issue 4 Ver. V. (Apr. 2014), PP 91-97*

Tilly Charles. (1978).*From Mobilization to Revolution*. Publisher, McGraw-Hill,

<file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/dalit%20movement/Dalit%20Movement%20An%20overview,%20Dalit%20Problems%20Movement,%20Sociology%20Guide.html>

http://www.patkarvardecollege.edu.in/studymaterialpdf/13SY_Socio_Paper%202_Unit%203_Sem%203_Dalit%20Mobilisation.pdf

http://www.patkarvardecollege.edu.in/studymaterialpdf/13SY_Socio_Paper%202_Unit%203_Sem%203_Dalit%20Mobilisation.pdf

9.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna, also known by the name of Panchama. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism.
- 2) Dalit mobilization in India sufficiently implies how modernization has broken the backbone of caste and equates Dalit consciousness with class consciousness to bring forward the view that Dalit mobilization in India is driving Indian society in the direction of modernization giving importance to the principles of equality against the principle of hierarchy

- 3) Dalit Movement in Pre-independent India starts with the Bhakti movement. This movement led the foundation of Dalit movement by propagating equality and liberty to all sections of people. Neo-Vedantic movement attempted to remove untouchability by taking them into the fold of the caste system. Through the process of sanskritisation Dalits emulated their status in the hierarchy structure. Mahatma Gandhi also discards the practice of untouchability. Dr B R Ambedkar fought for the emancipation of dalits in India
- 4) Dalit movement began with the Buddhist Dalit Movement. Ambedkar mobilized the dalits to convert them to Buddhism for enjoying equality and protecting them from caste atrocities. Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Dalit Panther movement, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's effort to ameliorate the condition of Dalits is highly praise worthy.

FURTHER READINGS

Srinivas, M.N. (1997). *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.1997)

Omvedt Gail (1976) *Cultural Revolt in a colonial society: The Non-Bramhan movement in Western India*,(1873- 1930) Bombay.

Rao M.S.A. (1979) *Social Movements among the Backward classes and Blacks: Homology in the sources of identity, in Social movements in India*. Delhi: Monohar publication'.

Shah, Ghanshyam (ed.) (2001). *Dalit Identity and Politics*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

GLOSSARY

Dalits: The social groups which have faced discrimination including untouchability are called dalits.

Dalit Movement: It means the protest of dalits against their discrimination of all kinds and for protection of their rights.

Social Justice: It means an absence of social and economic discrimination; conditions which are for the protection and preservation of equality, self-respect and other rights.