UNIT 8  DALIT MOVEMENTS*

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

• explain what is the meaning of “Dalit” and the Dalit movement;
• describe different stages and forms of Dalit movements in India;
• Identify the Dalit leaders and their contribution; and
• explain the structural and cultural reasons for Dalit uprising.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Block 4: Social Identities and Change, Dalit Movements is the first unit. In the previous section you had learnt about the social institutions like Family, Marriage and Kinship and Religion.

This unit informs you about Dalit movements in India. Do you know that Dalit movements, like any other movement are consciously organised and are a result of sustained collective efforts by ordinary citizens?

This unit attempts to introduce you to the meaning of Dalit movements by tracing its historical origins, its development from pre-independence period to post independence and its outcomes. It explains how Dalits and their struggles

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regarding social justice demand radical transformation and structural changes in our society. For this purpose the unit is divided into three segments.

The first takes you on a historical journey to make you understand the issues and causes of the Dalit uprising. It highlights the meaning of the term Dalit and the relevance of its usages when compared to other terms like ‘harijan’.

The second segment is about the leaders who took up the causes and provided direction to the movement. The movements entered different phases under the leadership of these leaders.

Lastly, the segment will focus on the different aspects of the movements, its intellectual growth and changes in the foundation.

8.2 DALIT MOVEMENTS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In contemporary India, Dalits still bear the stigma of untouchability and continue to face dreadful socio-economic and cultural inequalities (Shah; 2004). Dalits are deprived of wealth, power and social acceptability or social status for generations. Do you know that the atrocities on Dalits involve more violent forms that are no less in intensity than those in the past despite the abolition of untouchability in free India? Dalit movements are strong resistances by both Dalits and non-Dalits to such atrocities. To begin with, Dalit movements are organised struggles against untouchability and social discrimination based on the practice of untouchability. The Dalit movements therefore challenged brahman hegemony and brahmanic traditions. To understand the Dalit uprising it is imperative to understand the term “Dalit”.

8.2.1 The Term “Dalit”

In common parlance these days, Dalit is mostly confined to administratively coined term “Scheduled Castes” (SC), however; officially it includes scheduled tribes and other backward castes too. Britishers used SC for untouchables in 1935 and earlier Depressed Castes in 1919. Commonly Dalit is also used for all the marginalised sections of the society – poor landless peasants, women, tribals, workers and those exploited in the name of religion, politically, culturally and economically. Dalit means member of the lowest caste, the downtrodden and an erstwhile untouchable caste. Most importantly the term explains the process through which Dalits themselves recognised that they are discriminated and demanded separate identity of their own.

You will be surprised to know that Marathi writers proposed the term “Dalit” in 1960s in place of “Achhuta” or “Harijan” as it means broken/scattered in Marathi. Harijan term was coined by Mahatama Gandhi, which means ‘children of God’ as he appealed caste Hindus to change their attitude towards untouchables and use “Harijan” in place of ‘antayaja’. Ambedkar used ‘Pad Dalit’, Bahishkrit, excluded caste and even depressed caste in place of untouchables but gradually moved to use the term Dalit. Harijan grew unpopular as it could not administer the change in attitude of the upper castes. Dalit word emerged as a marker of political identity and assertion when Dalit term got popularised and more used frequently.
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Now it ‘emphasizes the congruence between the backward castes and untouchables and focuses on the affinity in the experiences of these groups’ (Bhattacharya, 1995). The term Dalit in past few decades have emerged as a powerful symbol of exploited masses who stood against the oppressive structures of upper caste hegemony and social discrimination. It signifies all those who were denied of any basic right of existence since time immemorial and those who fought to change the oppressive pasts and present. Looking at the trajectories of Dalit struggles for emancipation Anupama Rao (2009:23) rightly understands Dalit as ‘political minority, negatively defined as non-Hindus in antagonistic relation to Hindu order’ in our democratic nation.

Box 8.0: Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India has played important role in the overall upliftment of the Scheduled Castes. In Part IV of the Constitution, certain fundamental rights are guaranteed to the citizens. Article 15 (2) states that no citizens shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth be discriminated with regard to (a) access to shop, public restaurants, hotel and public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tank, bathing ghats, roads, and places of public resorts. Under Article 15 (4), the State is permitted to make any special provisions for advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. (Ref: IGNOU 2010, ESO-14, Society and Stratification, Block 6, pp. 8)

The terminology dalit characterises the essential argument of the Dalit movements in India, which is change and revolution. Section 8.4 will elaborate on various Dalit movements. Meanwhile we discuss the issues and causes below.

Check Your Progress I

i) When was the term ‘dalit’ come in usage and for whom?

ii) What is the significance of the term ‘dalit’?

iii) What are some of the issues faced by the Dalit community?

iv) How has the Constitution of India played a role in the upliftment of Scheduled Castes?

v) Under Article 15 (4), what are the special provisions that the State is permitted to make?

8.2.2 Socio-Historical Background

Varna and Caste

Indian judiciary identified “caste atrocity” as crime to curb violence faced by Dalits in society and therefore clearly acknowledge that caste is central to Dalit’s servitude and oppression. You know that our society is a stratified society based on hierarchy and difference (Gupta, 1991). The stratification on the basis of caste remains specific to Indian context giving rise to exploitation of the lower
castes. The relation between varna and caste according to Srinivas (1998:63) is ‘that caste is subsumed under this traditional concept of varna’. Varna scheme has given distorted image of caste system where Brahmins are at the top and untouchables at the lowest. According to him such hierarchy has not been the only reality but later versions of varna scheme has established the supremacy of Brahmins.

Varna system is the hierarchical segmentation of society in four orders, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas and the rest were called Shudras and untouchables as ‘Atishudra’ who were outside the varna scheme. The segmental society is based on the myth established in the society that Brahmans emerged from the mouth, the Kshatriya from the arms, Vaishyas from the thighs and Shudra from the feet of the Creator. Srinivas writes that groups such as Ayogaya, Chandala, Nishada and Paulkasa also were outside the Varna scheme. In this four-fold system first three are ‘twice-born’ that is men pass through Upanayana ceremony where sacred thread is donned to them. Whereas, Shudras and untouchables had no right to adorn the sacred thread. This distinction brings ritual superiority of other three varnas over Shudras and Ati-shudras. This ritual superiority is based on principles of Brahmanic Hindu religion (discussed below). Varna in Rig-Veda means colour and initially varna described just Aryas and Dasa that later became distinction between Aryas and Shudras.

Each varna subsumes large number of castes. Shudra category includes the largest number of non-brahmanical casts. Since the ritual considerations create these four orders, caste is seen as hierarchical system. Caste as an endogamous group based on the notion of purity and pollution that provides lowest status to shudra and atishudra and recognizes untouchability as a social practice. The caste atrocities are result of this order of hierarchy that has to be followed through differences in practices and religious rituals. Caste acquired political functions after constitutional provisions but the ritual aspect still remains the fundamental source of caste differentiation and hierarchy. It obtained new meaning in British India and with the rise of western liberalism and grew stronger as an institution defining identity and community in independent India too. Dalits were seen to escape caste atrocities through conversions and Sanskritisation. However Srinivas (1998;59) argues that the problem of untouchables remained different from the other lower castes as they could not take any advantage of westernisation or move up the ladder through Sanskritisation. The constitutional provisions brought changes in the status of untouchables in Independent India but caste atrocities continue giving rise to newer Dalit mobilisations.

8.2.3 The Social Practice of Untouchability

‘Untouchability’, is one of the aspects of Indian society that has obstructed the growth and development of our country. Most importantly it compromises the dignity of human beings and deny them of their basic rights. It is a practice that has its roots in the social values of a Hindu society based on varna and jati. Untouchability, in India has resulted in poverty, illiteracy, servitude and serious contempt and exploitation within the society. Based on birth, it is a practice that has oppressed many by keeping them outside the realm of caste hierarchy or at the lowest, confining them to restricted occupation and considering them impure. The impure occupations like, leather work, cleaning toilets and sewage tanks,
drains, disposing dead bodies, etc. are polluting in nature and those involved in such occupations are only certain sections of the population, known as untouchables.

The practice of untouchability therefore restricts the social mingling with other members of the society and the impurity is socially expressed through the touch that acts as a pollutant that defiles the members of higher caste group. The ‘touch’, the ‘shadow’, the ‘skin’ and even the ‘voice’ of the lower casts all constitute the sources of pollution and have the potential to pollute the upper castes. The punishment to defile the upper castes is severe and costs the lives on most occasions. Therefore they cannot move around freely, participate in social life, access places of worship, participate in festivals, fairs, community spaces, etc. You can very well guess then, that the practice exists since the system of ‘chaturvarna’ (four-fold system of varna) prevailed and persists due to existence of discriminatory caste system inherent in Hinduism. B.R. Ambedkar in 1948 defined it; “Untouchability is the notion of defilement, pollution, contamination and the ways and means of getting rid of that defilement. It is a case of permanent hereditary stain which nothing can cleanse.”

8.2.4 Brahmanic Hinduism

The above two factors has its roots in Brahmanic traditions which acquired the form of hegemonic Hinduism since colonialism. The orthodoxy of brahmans and their domination grew as it drew their legitimacy from the constructed argument that Hinduism is the ancient religion of Hindus. Do you know that Brahmanic Hinduism rests on the authority of vedas and brahmans and consolidation of social order based on Manusmriti. The Bhagavadagita expounds that every system has to fulfill their duties as prescribed in the religious scriptures and only then salvation can be attained after death. This Karma theory flourished and Manusmriti, the law book of Hindus prescribed strict regulations regarding castes. It endorsed untouchability and the system was rigorously followed by the priestly castes. Such system designates highest rank to priestly caste as you have read above and strictly operates on the institution of caste and untouchability. The idea of ‘pollution’ attached to the caste provides the cultural identity to the higher castes in the order to differentiate them from the lower ones in the hierarchy. The ritual of purity emerges from the Brahmanic principle in which shudra, women and untouchables are all impure elements within the society and for purity of castes they have to be at the periphery of the social order and cannot share equality with other members of the society. The principle of ritual purity embedded in brahmanic practices led to the hegemony of the upper castes and the lower castes were denied of all the social rights. The temple entry was banned for the untouchables. The complete disempowerment of the lower castes and their servitude enhanced the dominant position of upper castes ritually in every respect. The higher positions in the caste ladder gave them religious legitimacy to exploit them in the name of ritual. Dalit movements therefore stood to reject the traditional Hindu social order based on untouchability promoting socio-economic inequality, cultural supremacy of brahmanic castes and discriminating religious beliefs.

8.2.5 Alternate Religious Movements
It is crucial to point out to you that throughout the Indian history as Srinivas (1998:64) writes, “attempts have been made to reject brahmanical supremacy”. The bhakti and devotional cults between 10th and 13th centuries rebelled against caste hierarchy and brahman domination, claiming devotion as the only way to salvation in place of caste. The bhakti cult saints rose against vedantic philosophy. The prominent saints were Meerabai, Chaitanya, Kabir, Tukaram, Vallabhacharya and others. There were untouchable saints like Ravidas, Chokhamela, Kanaka, Nandanara and others who were also part of Bhakti traditions. Temple entry to these untouchable saints was denied and therefore they continued their spiritual journey questioning brahmanic rituals. Bhakti Religious traditions like Sikhism, Budhism Veerasaivism also struggled against hierarchically stratified Hindu society where brahman or twice borns enjoyed the highest power. These movements provided philosophical basis and ways to fight dominant Hinduism for new generations. They laid the foundation for political aspirations, rights and complete abandoning of Hinduism.

8.3 SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS

You must be aware that social reform movements during the colonial period were an awakening and struggle against the orthodox traditional socio-religious practices to reform the society. Educated men and women worked for women’s education, widow remarriage, abolition of child marriage and practice of Sati, women’s rights and freedom. Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde, Ram Mohan Roy and many others made contributions in reforming the society. These also led to the reform of the religious traditions and modern thinkers challenged dogmatism of Hindu religion. Modern Indian social thinkers, like Mahatama Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo, Dayananda Saraswati, rejected orthodox practices of Hindu religion and gave rise to new religious discourses. They believed caste and untouchability is not core to Hinduism.

8.3.1 Rise of Print and Public Spheres

The coming of the printing technology fostered a tool in the hands of Dalit leaders and activists. Education became the central concern of the activists and there was rise of Marathi Dalit public sphere in colonial India and later after independence. Pamphlets, books and other material were produced for mobilizations. Leaders like Jyotiba Phule, B.R Ambedkar wrote extensively. Gulamgiri, written in 1885 by Phule is one of his fundamental writings explaining his position on Aryans, Caste and Hinduism. Who were the Shudras? and The Untouchables were written by Ambedkar in his lifetime and later Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India and other texts were published. Before Ambedkar G.B. Walangkar mobilized Dalits for human rights through news papers Dinbandhu and Sudharak. Tarabai Shinde in Satyashodhak Samaj wrote Stri-Purush Tulna (comparison of men and women), one of the foremost feminist documents in Marathi. Pandita Ramabai wrote in English on high caste women. On the other hand Bansode was an educator and journalist who was associated with non-Brahman movement. The rise of Marathi Dalit literature with writers like Om Prakash Valmiki and others gave rise to strong Cultural and literary traditions that shaped the movements in multiple ways.
**Check Your Progress II**

i) Explain in one line the following:

a) Caste

b) Untouchability

c) Social reform movement

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**8.4 THE DALIT LEADERS AND THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF DALIT MOVEMENTS**

Dalit movements in India saw different phases under the leadership of different leaders and different groups. Omvedt (1996:6) explains that beginning from Jyotiba Phule, the movement experienced consolidated struggle under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar and then the radical turn in the nature of movements took place with organisations such as Dalit Panthers, factionalised Republican party, Bahujan Samaj Party and some Naxilite groups of low castes. A brief sketch of the leaders, their period and associated groups will provide you an overview of the development of Dalit movements in India.

**8.4.1 Jyotiba Phule and Dalit Reform Movement**

Mahatama Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) belonged to OBC caste Mali. Influenced by the wave of reform movements, he developed a strong resistance to upper caste oppression and worked amongst the poor, uneducated untouchables and women. He founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1875. He started by establishing schools for untouchable boys and girls in Pune where he belonged. As a social reformer he had a vision that if education is imparted to poor untouchables it
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will propound rationality to fight the priestly caste. He saw education as a major source of social change and argued that knowledge, education and science are weapons of advancement in the hands of poor. He recognized that untouchables are more oppressed than lower castes but called for their unity as for him they together constituted the exploited masses of India. He felt it a necessity that shudras and Ati-shudra need to think on their own and to recognize caste as source of slavery.

Phule wrote about Aryans Conquest (Omvedt:1996). He writes about Aryans as cruel and violent invaders who upturned the egalitarian and prosperous society by deceit and violence and forged a mythology for a segmental and inequal society, not allowing access to its text. By bringing this critique he opposed brahmanical orthodoxy and upper caste dominance and led a strong anti-caste movements of non-brahman castes. Along with Savitribai, his wife he stood against brahmanic patriarchy by raising voices against brutal brahmanic practices meant for widows. The plight of widows was pitiable amongst the Brahmans and opening a house for widows and children, they attempted to humanize the society by struggling to challenge the tyranny of the Brahmans.

By 1920s and 1930s several mobilisations of peasants, dalits and women started to grow under varying leadership and ideologies. On Phule’s formulation of Shudra and Ati-shudra, anti-caste, anti-brahman and anti-Hindu ideology stuggles started to grow by lower sections of the society. The non-brahman movement in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as Omvedt (1996:35) explains, as well as the dalit movements in other states such as Punjab, Karnataka and UP, all highlighted Phule’s ideology about Aryan conquest and brahman exploitation on the basis of religion. The Adi traditions, claiming lineage to non-Aryans began to take place at several places. Kisan Faguji Bansode (1870-1946) was one of the prominent leader of Adi-movement in Maharashtra. Therefore by 1920s the new dalit movement emerged out of non-brahman struggles that claimed non-Aryans as original inhabitants and refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Brahmanic traditions. These Dalit movements were Ad-dharm in Punjab, Adi Hindu in U.P. and Hyderabad, Adi Dravida, Adi Andhra, Adi Karnataka. Therefore Phule developed a universalistic ideology to counter the wave of Hinduism that was also at its peak in the given period.

Box 8.1: Jyotiba Phule

The non-Brahmanical movement was accorded institutionalisation in the programmes of the Satya Shodhak Samaj founded by Phule. He considered Brahmisim as cunning and self-seeking and condemned it as intolerable imposition to ensure the perpetuation of the high in the caste hierarchy. The “dominant agricultural castes” that formed the core and support of this movement subsequently ushered were very pro Congress. Phule’s interpretation of lower caste exploitation ignored the economic and political contexts. Exploitation was interpreted in terms of culture and ethnicity. Phule however stressed the need for return to pre-Brahmin religious tradition. Organisation and education were considered essential for attainment of such goals. He opposed the exploitation of Indian peasants and wage earners. (Ref: IGNOU 2010; ESO-14 Society and Stratification, Block 6, pp.14)
8.4.2 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Movement

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) arose as a Dalit leader on the foundations of non-Brahman movement. Dalit movements saw second phase under him since Ambedkar insisted on safeguarding the political rights of Dalits. He demanded separate electorate for the untouchables and not just the place in the Hindu social order (Singh; 1995:115). In 1932, in Poona pact he demanded reserved constituencies for Dalits. Singh points towards two shifts in Dalit politics under Ambedkar in the period 1930-56. It was inclined towards equal political rights and complete abolition of caste system. Beginning of the independent Dalit movement can be traced when Ambedkar formed Indian Labour Part in 1936.

Ambedkar received a US degree in law and returned to India. He resigned from his state service in Baroda and began as a professor at Sydenham College in Bombay. It is here that he associated with Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and began his journey to fight for the complete autonomy of Dalits. Ambedkar entered into politics with Mahars, forming Bahiskrut Hitkarni Sabha that soon started to hold conferences in and around the province. The first Dalit liberation movement, Mahad Satyagrah was an outcome of one of the conferences. The decision to drink water from the town tank resulted in the failed attempt but the message against Brahmanic suppression was loud and clear as they burnt the copies of Manusmriti. Ambedkar emerged as the most powerful leader with the growing atmosphere of radical opposition to congress bourgeois and resentment of peasants, workers and other marginalized sections. Ambedkar sharpened his struggles against upper castes by strongly proposing the unity of workers, peasants, dalits, non-brahmans and political alliance with non-congress parties. For Ambedkar, not only Brahmanism but capitalism and landlordism were also enemies of people and he believed that not just the social but economic liberation of Dalits is also mandatory for their improved social status in society.

Ambedkar wrote extensively and adopted socialist framework and believed in state guided industrial development. He was against the non-Aryan identity claims and believed caste system came much later. Ambedkar called for mass conversion to Buddhism because Hinduism is based on caste ideology and therefore represents inequality and inegalitarianism. Nearly a million people converted to Buddhism in Nagpur. He rejected Manusmriti and embraced Buddhism as a religion of equality and rationality devoid of any oppression towards poor and women. Renunciation of Hindu religion was the only source of Dalit identity and liberation. He made a united front called Republican party that worked along Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti. He called for ideological, cultural and political struggle for transformation in social order.

8.4.3 Periyar and Mass Movement

The non-brahman movement in Tamil Nadu led to the rise of E.V. Ramaswamy, Periyar (1879-1973), who belonged to merchant family in Erode. Like Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule there were others such as Ramasamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu and in Kerala there was Dalit movement known as Shri Narayana Dharam Paripalan Movement or SNDP Movement. He left Congress by 1925. When Mahatama Gandhi defended Varnashram dharma he contested it strongly and declared that if India has to gain freedom, it has to dissolve Congress, Hindu religion and Brahman domination (omvedt:55). Similar to Phule’s Satyashodhak Samaj, Periyar formed the Self Respect League in 1926, that professed radical
nationalism and stood fiercely against caste and religion. Periyar’s radicalism, anti-caste and anti-religion views were expressed in his radical speeches giving new orientation to the non-brahman-movement.

### 8.4.4 Other Movements

After Ambedkar several movements arose under the banner of different parties. A radical turn was experienced by coming of the Dalit Panthers who fought in collaboration with all parties that were committed to decimate caste and class politics in the country. It was a militant organisation of Dalit Youths that was born in Bombay in 1972. They claimed that the entire state machinery in post independent India was dominated by feudal ideology and interests and such ideologies based on religion have deprived Dalits of their rights as individuals and power, wealth and status within the society. Alligned with several voices across the country that arose against corruption, poverty, state domination, marginalisation of weaker sections, Dalit Panthers gave new direction to Dalit movements by widening its horizon. It sparked the wave of protest and organised efforts against Brahmans that resulted into formation of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, with its branches all across the country. Gradually Ambedkarite organisations started to spring up in Tamil Nadu and by 1984 Dalit Mahasabha was formed. In the same year Kanshi Ram formed his party on Ambedkar’s birthday, known as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) that aimed to work amongst Dalits, adivasis and OBCs and minorities. Bhartiya Republic Party remained committed to Mahars and Dalits at large.

### Check Your Progress III

i) Which leader started Satyashodhak Samaj?

ii) Who were Dalit Panthers?

iii) Who was Jyotiba Phule?
8.5 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DALIT MOVEMENTS

Dalit movements are markers of Dalit consciousness about the realisation of them as any other human beings with definite needs and mental and physical capabilities like others. It made them assert their identities, culture and politics without any restrictions and infringement. This shaped the movements against caste based social exclusion of both reformative and transformative character. The case of Dalit movement rests on the dream of a modern caste-free egalitarian Indian society where no discrimination exists on the basis of caste.

Typologies

Dalit movements have seen different phases and encountered challenges both cultural as well as political. It fought for human dignity and recognition of large section of masses that remain invisible in society since ages. Therefore Omvedt argues that it was “redemptive for individuals and revolutionary in terms of society”. The struggle has always been radical in its orientations and demands change in individual psyche as well as the entire society for dalit emancipation and dignity.

Shah (2004) on the other hand argues that these movements were both reformative and alternative in nature since it demanded altered socio-cultural and religious conditions while asking freedom from bondage and servitude. He further indicates that reformative can be classified into Bhakti, neo-vedantik and Sanskritisation movements whereas, the alternative spread in conversions, religious and secular movements.

Beyond Hinduism

The movement operated at two levels: first under Phule it took the path of social reform and demanded social acceptability of shudra and atishudra by the removal of the practice of untouchability and claiming the membership within the society. It aimed to reform the society on the principles of liberty, justice freedom and brotherhood. In the second phase with demand for political as well as social, integration took the centre stage. The movement demanded constitutional guarantee and recognition of a separate identity as Dalits. Dalit Panthers and many others brought Dalit movements into the sphere of larger struggles against poverty, equal rights, employment and sharing of resources with Dalits. The mass conversion indicated for collective emancipation as Shah(2001;34) writes, that ‘throughout 1970s it the protests and struggles on issues of land rights, temple entry, farm wages, common resources for all, against discrimination in public spaces, etc. continued at local levels that reflected in electoral dignity’.

Scholars like Rajni Kothari have argued that Dalit movements were not just anti-untouchability or anti-brahman movements but had vast canavas demanding right to education, employment and political representation. Omvedt (1996;92) highlights that they demanded for democratic socialism based on equality, freedom and justice. Dalit politics moved beyond Hinduism or the cultural rights of Dalits and demanded for broad economic and political integration of the masses.

Mandal Commission brought different dimension to the Dalit Bahujan confederation. Later parties brought Dalits into mainstream politics of parliamentarian system. Gopal Guru states, that at present Dalit politics has reduced the movements to pressure groups that is restricted to micro levels. Dalits
achieved national status and have shown profound transformation in literacy reaching to 66.10% in 2011. Government further bans social discrimination in various local bodies. Yet what is challenging is the violence on political mobilisations of Dalits. Una case in Gujrat, 2016 and discrimination at the individual level Rohit Vemulla suicide case, also January 2016 are still throwing up blatant challenges to the struggles of Dalits for cultural and social equality. The hegemonic upper caste Hindu dominated society is still averse to the inclusion of lower castes and untouchables.

8.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit focuses on Dalit movements in India. It presents the meanings of the term Dalit, the causes and issues that shape the movement and most significantly its leaders.

The different phases of Dalit movement can be associated with prominent leaders and the issues they raised for the liberation and emancipation of Dalits. The movements express the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of the lower castes and untouchables in society.

The unfolding of the Dalit movement also explains us that the term Dalit encompasses all poor, marginalised and downtrodden section of the society and the effort was for workers, peasants, landless labourers, women, religious minorities as a whole. The movements had the power to create an alternative India with more egalitarian, just and vibrant society free from regressive values and helps.

8.7 REFERENCES

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8.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

The term “Dalit” is used administratively for the lowest castes called the scheduled castes or SC’s however, officially it also includes the scheduled tribes i.e. the ST’s and the Other Backward Castes or OBC’s. Britishers used the term Scheduled Castes or SC’s for untouchables in 1935 and earlier Depressed castes in 1919. This term and the term ‘dalit’ continued to be used for all marginalised sections of society, such as the poor peasants, women, workers etc. the Marathi writers first proposed this term in 1960’s in place of the term “Achuta”.

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Check Your Progress II

a) Caste is an endogamous group, dividing the society into different hierarchical groups.

b) Untouchability which has been abolished by the Constitution of India is a social practice that had ensured discrimination and exploitation towards the lower castes by upper castes.

c) Reform movements are movements that aim to reform the society from the evil religious practices, beliefs and rituals.

Check Your Progress III

a) B.R. Ambedkar

b) The group of young Dalits from Maharashtra

c) A social reformer and a Dalit leader.