



# International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: [www.ijrpr.com](http://www.ijrpr.com) ISSN 2582-7421

## A Study on opinion on Role of Dalit Movement in Dalit Emancipation with Specific Reference to Panruti, Villupuram District

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### ABSTRACT

Dalit movements within India have become strong tool of social change, countering the centuries-long practices of caste-based exclusion, untouchability, and institutionalized discrimination. Founded in past struggles against Brahmanical dominance, the movements have consistently reinterpreted the language of rights, dignity, and justice. Ranging from the reforming work of the Bhakti saints to the path-blazing work of social reformers like Jyotirao Phule, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, and Periyar, Dalit liberation has been pursued in the spheres of cultural assertion, educational empowerment, and legal-political reform. Post-independence, the cause has been advanced by movements such as the Dalit Panthers, the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and grass root activism at state levels.

The present paper examines the multi-dimensional role of Dalit movements in advancing emancipation, particularly their role in the advancement of education, political empowerment, and identity formation. It combines observations from historical records, academic literature, and a public opinion collected from survey and analyze both success and ongoing challenges. The study results indicate that though Dalit movements have been able to generate political consciousness and promote the emergence of a Dalit middle class, caste violence, socio-economic inequalities, and regional disparities continue to be major obstacles.

Through examining the implications, constraints, and possible futures of Dalit struggles, this research underlines that genuine emancipation is not just found in legal protection and political representation but also in disrupting structural hierarchies and building inter-caste unity. The research concludes that Dalit movements, despite being sometimes fractured, are still vital drivers of democratization and social justice in India's quest for equality. so, the present study describes the role of Dalit movement in Dalit emancipation.

**Key words:** Dalit movement, Dalit emancipation, Role, inequalities, Disparities, reservation,

### Introduction

The caste system in India, one of the world's oldest forms of social stratification, institutionalized inequality by dividing society into rigid hierarchies based on birth. Dalits, historically referred to as "untouchables," were pushed to the margins of society, forced into degrading occupations, and denied access to land, education, temples, and basic human dignity. This systemic oppression was justified through religious sanction and social customs, creating deep-rooted barriers that perpetuated exclusion for centuries. Against this backdrop of oppression, Dalit movements emerged as organized struggles to challenge caste-based discrimination and demand social justice. Early reformist movements, such as the Bhakti movement (15th–17th centuries), attempted to weaken caste boundaries by emphasizing devotion and equality before God. However, it was with the rise of modern reformers and leaders that Dalit assertion took a more structured, political, and revolutionary form.

### Objectives

1. To study awareness about Dalit movements among the general population.
2. To evaluate the perceived impact of Dalit movements in areas such as education, employment, and politics.
3. To identify persisting challenges faced by Dalits in contemporary society.
4. To explore expectations for future reforms and strategies.

5. To identify limitations of Dalit movements and suggest recommendations for the future.

## Statement of the problem

This topic selected by the researcher view to be good exploration by the movement information about the Dalit people and their movements. The researcher chose this study and stick on the Dalit people's struggle and their living conditions, various challenges faced by their life. So, the present describes impact of Dalit movement, role of leaders and attaining dalit empowerment in various spheres, problems and suggest suitable solutions.

## Methodology

The present study adopts a mixed-method approach combining historical analysis, literature review, and primary data collection through surveys.

- **Historical-Analytical Method:**

Review of secondary sources such as books, journal articles, autobiographies (e.g., *Annihilation of Caste*, *Why I am Not a Hindu*), government reports, and NGO studies to trace the origin and development of Dalit movements.

- **Qualitative Analysis:**

Case studies of major movements such as the Non-Brahmin Movement, Self-Respect Movement, Dalit Panthers, and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to analyze strategies and outcomes.

- **Quantitative Survey:**

A public survey was conducted to capture contemporary perceptions of Dalit emancipation in terms of education, employment, politics, and social integration.

- **Sampling:**

Purposive and simple random sampling of 100 respondents from urban and rural areas in the Panruti area at Villupuram district, across caste groups, age groups, and genders.

- **Analysis:**

Both descriptive (percentages, charts) and thematic analysis for interpreting results.

## Historical Timeline of Major Dalit Movements

- **19th Century – Jyotirao Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj (1873):** Advocated for education of lower castes, challenged Brahmanical dominance, and campaigned for women's rights.
- **Early 20th Century – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:** Spearheaded legal and political struggles, campaigned against untouchability, and drafted the Indian Constitution ensuring equality and affirmative action.
- **1925 – Periyar's Self-Respect Movement (Tamil Nadu):** Rejected caste hierarchy, promoted rationalism, women's rights, and dignity for Dalits.
- **1972 – Dalit Panthers (Maharashtra):** Inspired by the U.S. Black Panther Movement, they adopted radical measures against caste atrocities and cultural oppression.
- **1980s onwards – Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP):** Founded by Kanshi Ram, later led by Mayawati, it converted Dalit assertion into a formidable political power in North India.
- **Contemporary Era – Grassroots and Digital Movements:** Social media activism, student movements (e.g., Rohith Vemula's case), and NGOs continue to highlight issues of caste violence, representation, and social equity.

These movements not only fought for civil rights but also sought to transform Indian society by asserting equality, dignity, and identity for Dalits. Their strategies ranged from religious reform and educational upliftment to political participation and grassroots mobilization. Despite these achievements, Dalits continue to face challenges in the form of caste violence, economic marginalization, and social exclusion, especially in rural India.

Thus, the study of Dalit movements is not only an exploration of past struggles but also an ongoing discourse on justice, equality, and human rights in contemporary India.

So, in this paper, therefore, seeks to analyze the historical and present role of Dalit movements in the process of Dalit emancipation, while critically examining their contributions, limitations, and the road ahead in dismantling caste-based hierarchies.

### Historical Contribution

Dalit movements provided the first organized platforms for the oppressed to question caste domination. Reformers like Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar laid the foundation for social consciousness, demanding equal access to education, property, and civic participation.

Ambedkar's drafting of the Constitution institutionalized Dalit rights and established affirmative action policies that remain crucial today. The later movements, such as the Dalit Panthers, infused a militant edge, highlighting caste atrocities and cultural marginalization, while political parties like the BSP transformed Dalit identity into a political power bloc.

### Impact on Society

The movements led to tangible improvements in Dalit life. Our survey findings show that a majority of respondents recognized improvements in education and political empowerment. A visible Dalit middle class has emerged, thanks to reservations in education and government jobs. Furthermore, Dalit literature, art, and media have reshaped India's cultural imagination, offering alternative narratives to dominant caste histories.

### Discussion

The role of Dalit movements in Dalit emancipation is both historically significant and socially transformative. They have acted as vehicles of resistance against entrenched caste-based hierarchies while simultaneously offering pathways for empowerment through education, politics, and cultural assertion. However, the journey has been complex, with both notable successes and persistent challenges.

### Persistent Challenges

Despite these advances, discrimination has not vanished. Caste-based violence, particularly in rural areas, remains a harsh reality. Tokenism in politics often dilutes the spirit of emancipation, where symbolic representation does not always translate into genuine empowerment. Our survey highlighted that nearly 60 per cent of respondents identified caste violence as a continuing problem, showing that legal provisions alone are insufficient without a change in social attitudes.

### Fragmentation and Internal Challenges

Dalit movements have also faced internal divisions along sub-caste lines. While aiming for solidarity, political and regional rivalries often fragmented the movement, weakening its collective bargaining power. Additionally, younger generations—benefiting from reservations and urban migration—sometimes lack awareness of the historical struggles that secured their current opportunities.

### Emerging Dimensions

In the digital era, Dalit emancipation is increasingly tied to social media activism and global solidarity. Movements like Dalit Lives Matter and student-led protests are reshaping narratives and amplifying voices that were once silenced. These newer forms of activism suggest that the Dalit struggle is evolving to address not just traditional caste oppression but also its intersection with gender, class, and globalization.

### Balancing Achievements and Limitations

The discussion makes it clear that Dalit movements have significantly altered India's socio-political fabric by dismantling untouchability, promoting education, and achieving political visibility. Yet, full emancipation remains incomplete as structural inequalities persist. The need of the hour is to blend legal-political activism with grassroots social reform, ensuring that emancipation is not limited to laws and policies but reflected in everyday social interactions.

### Sociological Analysis for Dalit Development



Sources: Triumphias.com

1. **Dr.B.R.Ambedkar'sPerspective:**Ambedkarsawcasteasagradedinequalitysystemandadvocated State-driven social engineering to dismantle it. He emphasized legal and institutional change over symbolic gestures to achieve true social justice.
2. **Sanskritization:**M.N.Srinivastheorizedthatlowercastesoftenemulatedupper-caste lifestyles(Sanskritization).However, the Dalit movement rejected this path, instead asserting their own cultural and political identity without validation from dominant castes.
3. **Dalit-Bahujan Discourse:**Gail Omvedt highlighted the autonomous political and cultural agency of Dalits, arguing for a Dalit-Bahujan alliance to challenge Brahmanical dominance. She viewed Dalit movements as radical democratic transformations.
4. **Cultural Capital:** Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital noted that Dalits, historically denied access to education, language, and elite networks, lacked cultural capital. The movement's focus on education, political representation, and symbolic assertion is an effort to reclaim both cultural and social capital.
5. **Marxist Perspective:** From a Marxist lens, A.R. Desai framed the Dalit struggle as intersecting class and caste oppression, where economic exploitation reinforces social exclusion. Thus, the movement aligns with broader anti-capitalist and anti-feudal struggles.

### Public Survey

To understand contemporary perceptions of Dalit emancipation, a structured survey was conducted among 100 respondents across urban and rural areas, with a mix of Dalits and non-Dalits, and balanced representation in terms of gender and age groups. The survey used purposive and random sampling to ensure diversity. A questionnaire with both closed-ended (Likert scale, yes/no) and open-ended questions was administered.

### Key Findings:

1. **Awareness of Dalit Movements**
  - 68 per cent of respondents were aware of leaders like Ambedkar and Periyar.
  - Only 35 per cent were aware of Dalit Panthers or newer grassroots organizations.
2. **Perceived Impact**
  - 72 per cent believed Dalit movements improved access to education and employment.
  - 54 per cent felt political empowerment was significant but uneven.
  - 40 per cent noted persistent discrimination in rural social settings.
3. **Current Challenges**
  - 60 per cent highlighted caste-based violence as a continuing issue.
  - 47 per cent pointed out tokenism in politics rather than substantive empowerment.
  - 33 per cent mentioned lack of awareness among younger Dalits about historical struggles.
4. **Future Needs**
  - 70 per cent emphasized strengthening education and entrepreneurship.
  - 52 per cent demanded stronger implementation of constitutional safeguards.
  - 45 per cent suggested nationwide awareness campaign to reduce caste prejudice.

### Implications

The discussion of findings highlights several implications:

- **Social Implications:** Dalit movements have transformed caste consciousness by instilling dignity, identity, and confidence among marginalized groups. They have broken centuries-old taboos and questioned social hierarchies.
- **Political Implications:** By mobilizing Dalits into a collective voting bloc, these movements have reshaped electoral politics and enhanced Dalit representation in decision-making institutions.
- **Economic Implications:** Reservation policies have facilitated mobility, creating a Dalit middle class, though inequalities within Dalit communities remain.

- **Cultural Implications:** Through literature, festivals, and public assertion of identity, Dalits have carved out an autonomous cultural space, challenging Brahmanical narratives.

### Recommendations

Based on the discussion and implications, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Education:** Expand access to quality schools, scholarships, and digital resources to sustain long-term empowerment.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Promote entrepreneurship, skill development, and land redistribution to reduce dependence on reservations alone.
3. **Grassroots Awareness:** Launch campaigns in villages and schools to address caste prejudice and preserve the memory of Dalit struggles.
4. **Policy Implementation:** Ensure strict enforcement of anti-discrimination laws like the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.
5. **Unity across Sub-castes:** Encourage pan-Dalit solidarity to overcome internal divisions and strengthen collective bargaining power.
6. **Digital Activism:** Harness social media for awareness, mobilization, and global solidarity to amplify voices against caste violence.
7. **Research and Documentation:** Invest in studies on Dalit history, women's role in movements, and contemporary struggles to keep the discourse alive.

### Limitations

1. Many movements remained region-specific and lacked pan-India unity.
2. Internal fragmentation along caste-sub-caste lines weakened solidarity.
3. Overdependence on political representations sometimes overshadowed grassroots empowerment.
4. Persistence of structural discrimination in rural India limits full emancipation.
5. Inadequate awareness among younger generations about the historical struggles of Dalit leaders.

### Recent Developments

- NEP 2020: Criticized for lack of focused affirmative action for Dalits.
- Digital Dalit Movements (e.g., Dalit Lives Matter) raised awareness globally.
- SC rulings on reservations in promotions: Prompted protests, influencing legal reviews.

### Conclusion

The study of Dalit movements in India reveals a long and continuing struggle for equality, dignity, and social justice. Rooted in centuries of oppression under the caste system, Dalits were historically excluded from education, land, religion, and politics. Against this backdrop, Dalit movements emerged as powerful instruments of social transformation, combining reformist zeal with political assertion. From the early reform efforts of Jyotirao Phule to the revolutionary constitutional vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and from Periyar's Self-Respect Movement to the militant Dalit Panthers and the political rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party, these movements reshaped India's socio-political landscape.

The survey conducted for this study confirms that Dalit movements have succeeded in creating awareness, expanding educational and employment opportunities, and securing political representation. The emergence of a Dalit middle class stands as a testament to the success of affirmative action and sustained activism. However, the persistence of caste-based violence, rural exclusion, tokenism in politics, and internal divisions indicate that emancipation is far from complete. True liberation requires dismantling not only legal and political barriers but also deeply entrenched social and cultural prejudices.

Dalit emancipation, therefore, must move beyond the framework of reservations and political assertion to embrace comprehensive social reform, inter-caste solidarity, and economic empowerment. Education remains the cornerstone of empowerment, but it must be paired with entrepreneurship, land rights, and digital inclusion. Furthermore, preserving the memory of Dalit struggles through research, literature, and awareness campaigns is essential for passing on the spirit of resistance to future generations. In conclusion, Dalit movements have been the torchbearers of social justice in India. While they have achieved remarkable progress in challenging caste hierarchies and ensuring constitutional rights, their ultimate goal of building a truly egalitarian society remains a work in progress. The road ahead demands not only sustained activism but also a collective transformation of societal values, where equality is lived as a reality and not just guaranteed as a right.

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