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THE BLACK CONCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

ESSAY QUESTIONS

The Black Consciousness Movement successfully used its aims and ideas of self-reliance to challenging the apartheid system in South Africa in the 1970s.

Do you agree with this statement? Support your line of argument with relevant historical evidence.

[50]

Black Consciousness served to destroy the feelings of inferiority and instil black pride and confidence among black South Africans in the 1970s

Do you agree with this statement? Use relevant examples to support your line of argument

[50]

Critically discuss how the role and impact of Black Consciousness Movement influenced black South Africans during the 1970s

[50]

Explain to what extend the philosophy of the Black Consciousness influenced

The students of Soweto in 1976.

[50]

Brief Background – Reasons for Black Consciousness (BCM)

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was a grassroots anti-Apartheid activist movement that emerged in South Africa in the mid-1960s out of the political vacuum created by the jailing and banning of the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress leadership after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960.^[1] The BCM represented a social movement for consciousness. The Black Consciousness Movement started to develop during the late 1960s, and was led by Steve Biko, Mamphela Ramphele, Bennie Khoapa, and Barney Pityana. Steve Biko was clearly the primary leader of the movement however there were other leaders of the movement The movement stirred many blacks to confront oppressive Apartheid system.

The Aims of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

- Aims of BC was to liberate Blacks from inferiority.
- Resist all forms of racism

- called for resistance to the policy of apartheid,
- To unite all non-white South African (African, Coloured and Indian)
- To encourage a sense of pride among Black people

This new Black Consciousness Movement called for resistance to the policy of apartheid. It demanded freedom of speech, and more rights for South African blacks who were oppressed by the white apartheid government. It encouraged the belief in black pride. They made blackness, the rallying point of black organisations. Importantly, the group defined black to include other "people of colour" in South Africa, most notably the large number of South Africans of Indian descent.^[12] In this way, the Black Consciousness Movement provided a space for the "unity of South Africa's oppressed black people. Many black people started to feel a new sense of pride about being black.

- The B.C.M ensured that Black Community programmes or projects were set up in which Blacks helped other Blacks without white assistance. There were numerous projects were formed such as,
- The BCM set up Adult Education Classes for literacy purposes – these became important centres to influence learners, students and communities against apartheid.
- The BCM education programmes also assisted Matric students, by providing financial help for deserving poor black students and learners.
- South African Council of Churches introduced Black Theology projects which made theology relevant to the struggle of the blacks.
- The BCM also assisted students and families of prisoned politicians. This made the BCM immensely popular and influential within the black communities across South Africa.
- Publications such as black journals, magazines and newspapers popularize BCM ideas and the work done in black communities.
- Cultural groups such as Afro jazz music, theaters, poetry and literature taught BC and rejected oppression.
- Zanempilo Health Clinic in King Williams Town was ran by Dr Mamphela Ramphele to provide Healthcare facilities, another one was Solempilo community project.

Formation of Black Student Movements (SASO)

Steve Biko, Barney Pityana and other students launched SASO in 1969, mobilising Black students at universities and colleges. They developed the philosophy of Black Consciousness. SASO was formed in 1968 after some black student leaders decided to break away from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). NUSAS was a student organisation dominated by White students. The new black leaders of **SASO** developed the philosophy of **Black** Consciousness. The new student organisation came to national prominence when its members organised the boycotts against Bantu Education. By 1972 SASO was active on all black universities and colleges. It organised meetings and rallies protesting apartheid within the education system. By 1973 the state cracked down on SASO and the BCM, and Biko, Pityana and others were banned.

Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the Trade Unions movement.

BCM influenced workers to form their own unions such as Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU). The BCM encouraged thousands of workers to join local trade union structures. The BCM was involved in the staging of the large-scale protests and workers' strikes that gripped the nation in 1972 and 1973. The BCM leaders helped to organise workers and started playing prominent roles within many trade unions. They encouraged black workers were to join new more militant trade unions. The BCM also organised rallies (demonstrations) in support of striking workers.

The formation of teacher unions and associations

The BCM during the early 1970s continued mobilising Black students at universities and colleges through SASO. The BCM also influenced teachers, parents and students to form associations against Bantu education Act. Teachers started forming Teachers' Association which were closely aligned to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

The formation of South Africa Students Movement (SASM)

Secondary students were influenced to form S.A.S.M (South African Student Movement) in 1974, this organisation politicize secondary students about the Bantu Education Act. SASM immediately after its formation started organising protest against Bantu Education and other discriminatory laws which millions of black South Africans were subjected to. In townships across South Africa thousands of black secondary school learners joined SASM.

The response of the Apartheid government

The government began to clamp down on the movement, claiming that their ideas of black development were treasonous. In 1975 virtually the entire leadership of SASO and BCP were banned. The government started mass arrest of black leaders and banning others from participating in political activities. Many leaders were charged and sentenced to prison. public trials that gave a forum for members of the BCM to explain their philosophy and to describe the abuses that had been inflicted upon them. Far from crushing the movement, this led to more support among black and white South Africans for these movements.

The 1976 Soweto Uprising

The Black Consciousness Movement heavily supported the protests against the policies of the apartheid regime. The protests began when it was decreed that black students be forced to learn Afrikaans, and that many secondary school classes were to be taught in that language. Afrikaans stood directly against the BCM principle of the development of a unique black identity. The protest began as a non-violent demonstration before police responded violently. The protest devolved into a riot. 176 people died mostly killed by the security forces [needs verification].

Post-Soweto Uprising

The government's efforts to suppress the Black Consciousness Movement led to the imprisonment of Steve Biko, who became a symbol of the struggle. Biko died in police custody on 12 September 1977. Steve Biko died in detention after being brutally assaulted by security police.

One month after Biko's death, on 19 October 1977, now known as "Black Wednesday" the South African government declared 19 groups associated with the Black Consciousness Movement to be illegal. September 1977, Widespread revolts took place in reaction to his death, and a week later the state cracked down on BC organisations, banning these organisations and arresting all its leaders.

White newspaper editor Donald Woods supported the movement and Biko, whom he had befriended, by leaving South Africa and exposing the truth behind Biko's death at the hands of police by publishing the book *Biko*.

Steve Biko was a non-violent activist, even though the movement he helped start eventually took up violent resistance.

Conclusion - The gains and achievements of the BCM

- Many black people felt a new sense of pride about being black. The key goals of Black Consciousness had been attained, in that black identity and psychological liberation were growing.
- A new generation of political activists who had been inspired by the Soweto riots and Biko's death now emerged which were prepared to oppose apartheid in a more militant way.
- Thousands of students fled the country to join the ANC outside South Africa.
- The Department of Bantu Education stopped using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in Black Schools,
- As a result of the 1976 uprisings and the death of Steve Biko international countries imposed sanctions on South Africa.
- The first Black independent union FEDUSA was recognized in 1979, blacks had self-esteem, self-reliance and respected their heritage.
- Prominent figures of SASO who occupied key positions in a new democratic South Africa after 1994.



Steve Biko addressing a meeting.



Student protest 1976



Student protest 1976



Funeral of Steve Biko