INTRODUCTION

Every human society has an ambient feature of hierarchical group identities, whether based on ethnicity, race, religion, or in case of India “caste.” In the Indian context, some social groups are historically been vulnerable to hierarchical vicissitude and in these; Scheduled Castes (SCs) are being the most discriminated. When group based differences remain stable over long periods of time they have been influentially described as “durable inequalities” (Tilley, 1998). Such “inequality traps” are believed to be highly correlated with the unequal distribution of power and are consequently considered an important cause of ethnic conflict and immobility (Rao, 2006).

Caste is an ancient fact of Hindu society. However, various contemporary scholars have argued that the caste system was constructed by the British colonial government, which made caste organisation a central mechanism of administration. According to anthropologist Nicholas B. Dirks, before colonialism, caste affiliation was quite loose and fluent, but the British regime enforced caste affiliation rigorously and constructed a much more strict hierarchy than existed previously, with some castes being criminalised and others being given preferential treatment (Dirks, 2001).

Communities like SCs have suffered from multiple historical injustices are not only likely to be economically deprived, but also socially marginalised, politically insignificant in terms of the politics of “voice” which is merely exercised by the “vote,” humiliated, dismissed, and subjected to intense disrespect in and through the practices of everyday life. Even after these multiple disadvantages, we think they will participate in social, economic, and cultural transactions as equals (Chandhoke, 2015) is far from veracity.

Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India are on the lowest ladder of the caste system. Physical separation of SCs from the dominant castes was in strict enforcement of the prohibition
of inter dining at public places, housing patterns, seating arrangements in educational institutions, particularly primary schools and forcing the performance of degrading occupation, like carrying of night soil by women and manual scavenging. Discrimination based on caste results in the sexual control and violent appropriation over SC women by men of the dominant caste, apparent in the systematic performance of forced prostitution in the name of religion through *Devadasi* system and rape of SC women.

The SCs have been considered the weakest constituents of the Indian social structure. They occupy the lowest rank in the caste hierarchy and face many problems, which are social, economic and political in nature. Their suffering varies from region to region and caste to caste, as also in the time frame. The so called ‘Untouchables’ lived on the periphery of society and handled what was seen as unpleasant or polluting jobs. They suffered from social segregation generally.

The caste system, as a social organisation of Hindu Society, is based on highly unequal entitlements to economic and social rights. This inequality involves the historic exclusion and discrimination, in terms of denial of rights, of certain groups and castes, particularly the SCs, in multiple societal relations, economic, social, political and cultural. In spite of sustained and consistent efforts on the part of the government to ameliorate the conditions of SCs, this social group continues to be categorised amongst the poorest and most subordinate in Indian society by any measure of human development. Indian Constitution outlawed untouchability and caste discrimination; it did not abolish caste itself. This was realised by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, who called for the ‘annihilation of caste’ itself.

The caste system in India has left the SCs at the lowest rung of the social, political and economic setup. The Constitution of India (2016) has tried to end discrimination and marginalisation through legal measures. The practice of untouchability was banned and laws had been passed to stop embarrassing practices enforced upon SCs in India. Affirmative action in the form of a reservation policy was adopted, giving SCs provisions for acquiring reservation in government educational institution and jobs to ensure their social and economic development. At the same time, to bring them into the political
decision-making process, quotas were also reserved in representative institutions (Parliament, legislative assemblies, and local governments). Apart from these legal and constitutional measures, a number of policy initiatives were started in the last seven decades at different governance levels to improve the socio-political and economic conditions of the SC community.

Even after this, SCs are at the intersection of triple discrimination, which reinforces “the vicious cycle of oppression” and the systemic denial of their human rights. As untouchables and outcastes; they face caste discrimination, as poor; they face class discrimination and all these deprivations lead to ‘inequality of opportunities’ that is most dangerous of all.

According to International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), historically the caste system has formed the social and economic framework for the life of the people in India. In its essential form, caste as the system of social and economic governance is based on principles and customary rules that involve:

1. Division of people into social groups (castes) where assignments of rights are determined by birth are fixed and hereditary.

2. The assignment of basic rights among various castes is unequal and hierarchical, with those at the top enjoying most rights coupled with least duties and those at the bottom performing most duties coupled with no rights.

3. The system is maintained through the rigid enforcement of social ostracism (a system of social and economic penalties) in the case of any deviations.

Thus, the doctrine of inequality is the tough central part or fundamental of the caste system. Supported by philosophical elements, it constructs the moral, social and legal foundations of Hindu society. According to a report (International Dalit Solidarity Network [IDSN], 2014), caste-based discrimination includes massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The caste system is based on unequal entitlements and hierarchy is maintained among social groups by birth. It considered
those at the bottom as ‘lesser human beings’, ‘impure’ and ‘polluting’ to other caste groups.

Scheduled Caste (SC) is a group of historically disadvantaged people recognised in the Constitution of India (MoSJ&E, 2016). During British rule in the Indian Constitution, they were known as “Depressed Classes.” In 1935, the British passed the Government of India Act 1935, 2016 (GOI Act 1935), designated to give Indian provinces greater self-rule and set up a national federal structure. The GOI Act 1935 incorporated the term “Scheduled Castes” and defined the group as “such castes, races or tribes or parts of groups within castes, races or tribes, which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formally known as ‘Depressed Classes’ as His Majesty in Council may prefer.”

After independence, the Constitution Assembly continued the prevailing definition of Scheduled Castes, giving (via Article 341) the President of India and the governors of the states a mandate to compile a full listing of castes. The government of India officially recognises the Untouchables under the designation of Scheduled Castes (The Constitution (SCs) Order 1950, 2015). The Constitution provides a three-pronged strategy to improve the situation of SCs: (1) protective arrangements, through Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 (PCR Act), Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 (PoA Act) etc. (2) affirmative actions, to provide reservations in government educational institution, jobs and legislation and (3) development, through targeted welfare schemes, establishment of welfare commission and special component & sub plans for SCs (MoSJ&E, 2016). Since 1950, India enacted and implemented many laws and social initiatives to protect and improve the socio-economic conditions of its Dalit population (Census of India, 2011). Article 15 and Article 17 of Indian Constitution describe respectively prohibition of discrimination, based on caste, and declared any practice of Untouchability as illegal. The ultimate motive was to bridge the socio-economic and political gaps of opportunities, a gap that fabricated from centuries between those who have and who do not have.

There are altogether 1,241 individual ethnic groups notified as Scheduled Castes in different States/UTs. The SC population was 201.4 million and constitutes 16.6% of the
total population of India. This population grew by 20.8% during the period 2001-11. SCs are primarily concentrated in Uttar Pradesh (20.5%), West Bengal (10.7%), Bihar (8.2%), Tamil Nadu (7.2%) and Andhra Pradesh (6.9%). These states account for 53.5% of the SC population of the country (Census of India, 2011).

According to Census of India (2011), SCs in India make about 16.6% of the total population. Close to one-third of the SC population lives under the extreme poverty line, the situation is worse in rural areas where more than 50.0% of SC population is below the poverty line and more than one third are illiterate. It is unfortunate that still more than 50.5% SC households in rural areas have not received electricity facility. Clean and hygienic drinking water is vital for good health and survival of the individuals, but only 35.4% of SCs have drinking water sources within their premises, 21.0% have water source away from their premises and mostly have access to untreated water sources. The sanitation facilities are indicating the fact that only 33.9% SCs have latrine facilities at their premises. The level of open defecation was 62.1% and this was more than 75.0% in rural areas.

In India, though we have constitutional and legislative safeguards to protect SC women from discrimination and violence, they have been ineffective due to the deep rooted caste and gender biases within the enforcement agencies. Despite the preamble of the Constitution, which resolves to usher in a society where there is justice, political, social and economic to the people of India, the law of the state lacks in providing for an active programme of positive action to raise the level of SCs to the rest of the people of India (Shinde, 2005). A study (Human Rights Watch, 2003) found that lack of access to land keeps SCs in a state of economic dependency. Most rural SCs are agricultural labourers who are economically dependent on their employers and therefore less likely to report abuse. Economic dependency on agricultural jobs also makes SCs more susceptible to seasonal migratory work patterns.

The National Sample Survey (NSS) 61st and 68th rounds found that poverty ratio among SCs in rural areas has decreased from 53.5% to 31.5%, compared to 27.1% to 15.5% for general category in the years 2004-05 to 2011-12. In urban areas too, the poverty ratios
have fallen significantly. The gap among social groups is narrowing, but, it is still very high. A study (Suryanarayana and Das, 2014) shows that, although the consumption expenditure increased for SCs and almost doubled in 2011-12 from 2004-05, the gap between SCs and the general category has widened in these years. This may be due to the widening income differentials. The consumption expenditure pattern shows that the condition of SCs is very miserable and poverty reduction and employment generation programmes of the government may not have helped adequately the deprived ones.

However, the practice of untouchability has been reduced and their (SCs) socio-economic and political status has also improved over the years. Today, SCs have become a powerful political force in India and enjoy greater access to education and economy than ever before. They are exercising their voting rights. Their political consciousness and awareness about various political activities and participation in these activities have increased. Due to these facts, the government is also making various decisions relating to their rights and privileges. Efforts are still going on to remove different discriminatory practices against them (Kumar, 2012). Today, we do not ask the person sitting beside us that which caste he/she belongs to. Today at least in towns both SCs and non-SCs enjoy the same tea stall, hotel, cinema hall etc., but usually, nobody bothers about knowing the caste identity of a person. But it does not mean that the untouchability is totally abolished. It is maintained in offices, colleges, ceremonies and in minds of people, following the myths related to ‘touch’ and ‘untouched.’

So, it is of utmost importance to know the socio-economic status of SCs and as caste plays an important role in deciding one's social and economic status, the variables and characteristics which decide the socio-economic status of an individual or a household are to be studied. The study analysed “The Socio Economic Condition of Scheduled Castes in India: A Case Study of Allahabad Division.” Although the study is based on empirical analysis, in order to give a clear understanding about SCs, the study has discussed the caste system in India and some theories related to the origin of caste. The SCs cannot be discussed without considering their social background. Under this chapter, the study has analysed the caste system in India and related issues. The study covered definitions of
Caste in the beginning. Further, the study discussed the origin of caste system in India from selective theories like ‘traditional view’ and ‘occupational view’ of the origin of castes and in the end discussed the views of Ambedkar on the caste system of India. All the analysis has been given on the basis of secondary sources and intense review of literature related to the study.

1.1 Definitions of caste

Caste is a form of social stratification and every society is stratified in one way or another. The possibility of absence of any stratification in any society is almost very rare and when we talk about India, we find social stratification in the form of caste, which is based on the birth of an individual in a particular caste or sub-caste/jati.

The caste system in India is considered a closed system that has layers of social stratification, which means that a person’s social status is obligated to the caste they were born into. There are limits on interaction and behaviour with people from another social status (Sekhon, 2000). The system of closed stratification makes it endogamous and is generally associated with a specific occupation. Panikkar (1955) in his study found no basis in Hindu religion for Caste System and said it is actually a product of Hindu traditional law and of the weakness of the central political authority during India’s history.

The caste system in India attributes to its rigid rank order. The hierarchical order of the caste system is built like this in which, 'Brahmans', having the highest rank, followed by 'Kshatriyas', the warriors, the 'Vaishyas', the merchants and the 'Shudras', the workers, peasants at the bottom rank and Untouchables as the ‘outcastes.’

According to Shankar (2011), the Hindu society is a caste-ridden society. It is not a homogeneous society. Castes are groups with a well-defined boundary of their own. The status of an individual is determined by his birth not by selection or by accomplishments. Caste system laid emphasis on birth and hereditary and only based on prerogatives without giving importance to duty and conduct (behaviour). No amount of power and prestige can change the position of a person. The membership of the caste is hence
unchangeable, un-acquirable, inalienable, unattainable and non-transferable. This also led to the restricted amount of community feeling among citizens who owed moral allegiance to their caste first, rather than to the community as a whole. From these definitions, it is very clear that there was strict stratification on the basis of castes and every caste had its own rules imposed by that particular caste and further, it is divided into many sub-castes/jatis, which also have specific rules of their own. In this stratification, 'Shudras' were kept at the bottom with severe social, economic and political restrictions. This explains the rigidity of the ancient Caste System in India.

The English word "Caste" as we know it today has its origins from the Spanish word 'Casta' which means 'breed, race, strain or a complex of hereditary qualities.' It is derived from the Latin word ‘Castus’ which means pure. The Spaniards were first to use it, but its Indian application is from the Portuguese, who had so applied this term to the classes of people in India in the middle of the fifteenth century. The French word ‘Caste,’ which appears in 1740 in the ‘academics,’ and is hardly found before 1800. Before that time it was spelled as ‘Cast.’ In the sense of race or breed of a man, it was used as early as 1555 A.D. (Cox, 1959). The early Portuguese settlers in India used the word “Caste” to describe the different sections of the Hindu community. A decree issued by the Sacred Council of Goa in 1567 stated that in some parts of the province of Goa the Hindus were divided into distinct ‘Castas’ of greater or less dignity, which were maintained so superstitiously that no one of a higher caste could eat or drink with those of a lower (Devi, 1999).

Several studies have been done on the Caste System and different scholars have defined 'the Caste' in different ways. Some of the important definitions can be given as below:

According to Velassery (2005) defining the word “caste” itself is harder than thought to be. It can be defined as an endogamous and hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit occupying a position of the superior or inferior rank of social esteem in comparison with other such subdivisions. Caste name is generally associated with a specific occupation and, is a closed stratification, which makes it endogamous (Hutton, 1963).
Beteille (2002) defined caste as a named group of persons having characteristics like; endogamy, hereditary membership and specific style of life having distinct ritual status and sometimes include the pursuit by the tradition of a particular occupation based on hierarchy.

According to Ketkar (1990), “A Caste is a social group having two characteristics: one, membership is confined to those, who are born of members and includes all persons so born and two, the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group.” Here the author prefers to give the characteristics of caste so that he can give a clear identity to the caste. The definition given by him clears that birth of an individual plays a vital role in determining one's caste and inter-caste marriages are prohibited completely in this social system.

Srinivas (1997) also stated in a similar way and his definition covers almost every aspect of Caste. He defined caste as “A hereditary, endogamous, usually localised group having a traditional association with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes.” According to him, pollution and purity issues govern the relations among castes. However, a caste itself happens usually to be segmented into several endogamous sub-castes and maximum commensality maintained in general within the same caste or sub-caste. So it is evident from this that endogamy is a peculiar characteristic of the caste system. Endogamy is a rule of marriage according to which an individual has to marry within his or her group. Each caste is sub-divided into several sub-castes, which are again endogamous. So endogamy became, as the very essence of the caste system.

Ghurye (1961) has also stated in a similar way. According to him, a caste has important features like; hereditary membership, caste councils, hierarchy and endogamy, besides that, there are restrictions on feeding, social intercourse, choice of occupation.

Going through these definitions it can be seen that a short definition of caste is not satisfactory, so it is more illuminating to talk in terms of the characteristics of caste. Caste is hereditary and endogamous. It regulates social intercourse, is graded in rank,
specific occupations and has an assembly or a governing body which regulates its own rules and code of conduct. The conclusion can be drawn as ‘Caste’ cannot be defined in clear and in short since it has got several supportive aspects. So instead of defining 'caste,' it suits more to explain the structure of caste system or characteristics of the caste system.

1.2 Caste system in India: Traditional view

Though, there are several theories, opinions, and beliefs, the exact origin of caste cannot be traced. Here the study introduced racial, Brahmanical, mythical and metaphysical theories together as a broad perspective in traditional view of the caste system in India.

The racial theory starts with the concept of contact and clash of races in the Indian subcontinent. Indo-Aryans reached India about 1500 B.C. The Caste System took its birth after the arrival of Aryans in India. The social division of society started quite early in India's history that the Hindu society fell into two main divisions, the Aryans, and the non-Aryans. The former was again divided into three orders represented by Brahmans; the priests, Kshatriyas; the warriors, and Vaishyas; the merchants; while the non-Aryans constituted the servant class or the Shudras. According to Crooke (1915) feeling of racial superiority and breeding with the aboriginals was responsible for the origin of caste system in India.

In order to maintain their separate existence the Indo-Aryans used for certain groups and orders of people, the favourite word 'Varna,' or ‘Colour.’ Thus mainly two prominent groups Aryan and Dasa Varna became known not by their occupations or other characteristics but by their colour. Rigvedic literature stresses very significantly the difference between the Aryan and Dasa, not only in their colour but also in their speech, religious practices, and features. Thus this unique emergence of the caste system in India heightened ‘colour’ consciousness among the Indians and even today it can be seen. Almost every advertisement of beauty creams and in the matrimonial columns of any newspaper insists that the woman or bride should be ‘fair.’ Even the “Bollywood” songs are favouring fair faces.
Brahmans, the priestly class, had their function to study the Vedic scriptures and various branches of knowledge such as science, philosophy etc. They were to offer spiritual guidance and to perform all of religious rites and ceremonies for other classes. So is the only class who were believed to be specially favoured to interpret the Veda, everyone depended upon them for favour with the gods. They were respected for this deed by the other classes. A Brahman's body was on that account regarded as sacred, and to hurt him in any way was the heaviest sin; while to kill a Brahman was an unpardonable sin which could not be expiated even by penance through an unlimited number of successive rebirths. The studies like Dubois (1857) and Ghurye (1961) pointed out that the main reason of origin of caste system was the emergence of Brahmanism in India. The codes of conducts were to maintain the superiority of Brahmans and a clear separation was made between the Brahmans and non-Brahmans to preserve the pollution and purity issue.

According to the traditional mythology and metaphysical view, the society is divided into four “Varnas” or stratifications. This view of social stratification was introduced in the ancient sacred Hindu texts known as ‘Vedas.’ The supreme among all Vedas, the Rigveda, which is the “core of Hindu worship and faith”, provided the following scheme of social division:

The Rigveda (1500 BC) was compiled over a considerable period and it is generally agreed that ‘Purusha Sukta,’ which is the only hymn in the Rigveda which mentions the Varnas, was added during the ‘Mantra period’, the period immediately preceding the ‘Brahmana’ period or the beginning of the post-Vedic period. Ghurye (1969) in his study also stated this that, the original version of Rigveda mentioned only three Varnas, but a four-folded division of society was introduced in later hymns. The creation of Chaturvarnya is found in the ninetyeth Hymn of the Tenth Mandala (chapter) of the Rigveda, in which the Gods have sacrificed a godly deity called ‘Purusha’ to carve out the universe (in verse 11 and 12 the creation of mankind is written) as:

Brahamansya mukhmaseed baahu rajanya kritah,

Uru tadsya yadvaishyah padbhyam shudro jayat.
It elaborates that God sacrificed ‘Purusha’ into four parts of the body as Brahman was born from the mouth, Kshatriya from hands; Vaishya was from the stomach and Shudra from the legs of the deity. It is considered that from the Vedic period the Varna system was forced onto the vulnerable and Shudra had been given the lowest status as evident from the two verses.

But the defenders (Nadkarni, 2003; 2004) are of the view that tenth Mandala was chronologically the last one to be composed and in Vedic society, there was no place for Varna system. Studies show that even in the ‘Kreta Yuga,’ there was no such system of caste and all were the children of Manu and called popularly ‘Manav’ (Sharma, 2000). From this, it is evident that in Vedic society there was no such four folded Varna system and the fourth Varna as Shudra appeared towards the end of Vedic period (Ambedkar, 1946; Sharma, 2016). Even if we talk about untouchability that enacted later in caste system was not at all a part of Vedic society and taken as a post-Buddhist phenomenon and it is evident from the Ambedkar’s theory of the origin of Shudra and untouchables (Ambedkar, 1948).

Brahmans enjoyed much immunity and exemptions from certain punishments and his high rank secured him pardon for numerous crimes. On the other hand, special rules were laid down for Brahmans in order to preserve their sanctity. “A Brahman could never drink, eat meat, or enjoy the coarser pleasures of life.” This severity was due to the belief of the law-givers of India that “greater knowledge demanded greater restraint and that with the raise in a person's status his/her responsibility must also raise.” Manu says, “A Brahman who does not live as a Brahman is no better than a slave.” He could be made an outcast and demoted socially into a lower rank.

It looks from the above that, the name of the fourth class, the 'Shudra' occurs only once in the Rig-Veda. In the Rig-Vedic age divisions based on occupations had started but it was not very sharp. In the Vedic period, the fourfold division represented only classes and there were hardly any restrictions on intermarriage, change of occupations or commensality. Such anti-social religious creation was forced upon people; it should be accepted in society as the names that are chosen should be auspicious in the case of the
Brahman, indicating power in the case of the Kshatriya, indicating wealth in case of the Vaishya, and indicating contempt in the case of the Shudra.

Kshatriyas or the royal and warrior class were the rulers of the country, and their duty was to protect the other classes. The Kshatriyas constituted the knightly caste of India. They were brave and chivalrous.

The Vaishyas managed the business life of the country and were responsible for the maintenance of the other classes. They tilled the soil and managed the entire commercial and industrial affairs of the land.

Shudras or the servant class constituted the entire aboriginal non-Aryan population of the country, whose only function was to do mechanical service in the community. The laws of Manu, who was himself a Brahman, assign these separate duties to all the Varnas claiming that this was necessary for the survival of the universe. According to Manu the highest merit for this class was to serve faithfully the other three classes. Manusmriti states the acts of Shudras (chapter 1, verse 93) and it is described as;

Ekmev tu shudrashya prabhuh karm samadishat,
Ete namev varnam shushrusa mansuyaya.

It means God ordered the Shudras who are uneducated and cannot become educated, even they get education, strong by physique, well trained in services, and their only act is to service Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya without any complaint. The Shudras performed the most degrading tasks and were allowed to come into contact with the Aryan population only as menials. On account of their filthy habits, these aboriginals were not allowed a close approach to the persons of the higher classes. The God created Shudra to be the slave of all. He is given the name of “Padaja” (born from the feet). He is to be supported, to be fed, and to be clothed with the remnants and castaways of food and raiment by other three Varna (Ghurye, 1961). The distinction began to be made between things pure and impure. Weber (1967) also stated that slavery and especially personal slavery in India was not widespread because the Shudras indeed were servants of all. Brahmans had complete control over the psychology of society. They could exclude or
include new castes, particularly in the upward social elevation by propagating religious beliefs.

Manusmriti is being blamed for founding caste system in Indian subcontinent, a social order which was known as Brahmanism at that time and later, it emerged as Brahmanic Hinduism, as we know it today (Omvedt, 2016), left Shudras on the lowest position and outcaste, at even worse setting by legalising harsh punishment for them and special, benefitting provisions for Brahmans and other upper caste. Ambedkar (1987) pointed out that Manusmriti transformed the Varna system into caste system, which completely downgraded the social position of Shudras, outcastes, and women. Even from assigning a name to Shudra that pertains to slavery and to make the word ‘Shudra’ a synonym of unfit or infirm, it was all to make a system of hierarchy in which Brahmans are at the top, enjoying most of the benefits of superiority and Shudras at the lowest on the ladder. Shudras were not allowed to acquire the knowledge of Vedas and were discarded from many ‘Sanskaras’ that were found to be most important for ‘Dvijas’ or ‘twice born.’ We may have numerous numbers of verses in Manusmriti that proves the deprivation of a particular social group. On the other hand, we have some verses which can be interpreted as the positive side of Manusmriti.

Manusmriti clears what the true ‘Dharma’ is and elaborates (chapter 2, verse 1 and 11) which the wise and the good and those who are free from passion and hatred, follow which appeals to the heart. It means that if those with above-mentioned qualities and characteristics find caste system as unlawful, it may not be accepted by the society. Again in verse 176 of chapter 4, it was advised to get rid of the wealth and desires if it is accumulated through “Adharmik” or unlawful resources and ‘dharma’ itself to be discarded if it leads to the unhappiness of family and arouses peoples’ resentment.

Other than that, verse 6 of chapter 2 and verses 96-97 of chapter 12 gives sanctity, superiority, and validity only to ‘Vedas’ and clears that if the interpretation of post-Vedic texts goes against the laws of Vedas, confusing and leading to immorality, then it can be discarded completely. Even in verse 64 of chapter 10, it was mentioned that both upward and downward mobility is possible and birth does not limit the mobility of an individual.
As we move towards the Holly Bhagavad Gita, we find that according to all modern ideologies of Hindutva and even in the past, the sacred text elaborates (chapter 2, verse 31 and chapter 4, verse 13) that God himself has created the Varnas but not to divide the Manavas, it is only to assign “duties” that is not at all based on birth. It focused more on ‘merit’ or ‘guna’ and these gunas are changeable to every individual. At the same time, it had been emphasised that every individual should work according to his/her merit or guna that is based on individual’s nature and ‘Swadharma’ should be the ultimate goal which is much better than just trying to copy others “Dharma” (chapter 8, verse 47). It was then advised that ‘Swadharma’ will lead to ‘moksha’ or salvation and if any individual violates its ‘dharma’ or duties assigned to his own Varna or merit or nature, it will lead to sin.

Bhagavad Gita, the sacred text of Hindus, lays down the following rules for the different castes of India. The duties of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, as also of Shudras, are divided in accordance with their nature-born qualities. Peace, self-restraint, austerities, purity, forgiveness, and uprightness, knowledge, direct intuition, and faith in God are the natural qualities of the Brahman. Of the Kshatriyas, bravery, energy, fortitude, dexterity, fleeing not in battle, gift and lordliness are the nature-born qualities. Agriculture, protection of cows, merchandise, and various industries are the nature-born duties of the Vaishyas. Conscientiousness in menial service is the nature-born duty of the Shudras. A man attains perfection by performing those duties which he is able to do.

Here we notice that this division of duties among the different castes is “in accordance with their nature-born qualities.” We find here that the original distinctions between different classes were made on the basis of their natural qualifications and not hereditary. So the society was designed in such a way in which opportunity was allowed to everyone for only such experience as his/her mental and spiritual status was capable. So in the beginning, there was much flexibility in caste affiliations, mobility among castes were not fixed or rigid, nor were the occupations and professions.

But when we move to chapter 18 it can be seen from verses 41 to 47, that the ‘Swadharma’ or Karma related to every Varna has been elaborated and what we find here
is that hierarchy which always praised the Karma of a Brahman and degraded the Karma that is assigned to a Shudra. It is very clear from verse 44 that the ‘Swadharma’ of a Shudra is only to do service of other three Varnas as they (others) are considered to be noble than the Shudras and the hierarchy is thus maintained and proved.

The debate continues as who interprets and what according to their own level of ‘knowledge,’ ‘belief,’ and ‘understanding.’ As we found the work of Nadkarni (2003; 2004; 2008) who generally quotes verse 13 of chapter 4, verse 31 of chapter 2 and verse 47 of chapter 18 as the evidence that the Hindu scriptures are not at all pro-casteist and caste system has nothing to do with Hinduism. But on the other hand studies (Omvedt 2003; 2004) refer to the entire sequence of verses 41 to 47 of chapter 18 and according to Omvedt, even worse are the verses 40 to 47 of chapter 1. What is unjust to these verses according to Omvedt is that how could any democratic society assign people to do only certain tasks and responsibilities according to their presumed ‘merits’ or ‘gunas’ and by doing this it definitely differentiate between groups. If someone violates ‘Swadharma’ he or she is threatened as he/she is doing sin and God will punish him/her for the wrong doings.

Again Omvedt states that mixture of Varnas is found to be a cause of the destruction of the family and both will lead to hell. As the arguments are interpreted from the original texts only the validity of the arguments cannot be questioned. One thing is very clear that merits or gunas are given priority on birth and much of upward and downward mobility is possible but the degree of flexibility has been very low as the text itself advised not to leave one's ‘dharma’ and assigned duties that are based on presumed nature of a ‘Varna.’

**1.3 Caste system in India: Occupational view**

Dalits, who comprise around 17.0% of India’s total population, are victims of caste based discrimination from centuries. The caste system of India has kept them out of the social networks and assigned them demeaning, polluting and degrading jobs which are mostly manual in nature, hazardous and lethal. Actually, engagement of an individual to a certain occupation has been largely the sole criteria for deciding one's caste or sub-caste from
thousands of years and still among the most distinctive factors of the caste system, especially in rural India.

Traditionally, the Hindu caste system assigned them (SCs), the occupations, which are regarded as ritually impure, such as leatherwork or butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and human waste (scavenging). Pollution and purity have been the most important characteristics of these jobs followed by manual labour. They work as labourers either in agricultural or non-agicultural activities. In rural India, they were being the suppliers of most reliable (bounded) and cheap labour for the higher caste landowners of villages. The situation is bleak, particularly in rural India, where most of the Dalits were and are landless, having no agricultural land, very limited option left for them to pursue any other occupation as lack of education and skills restricts opportunities, stigmatisation and negative stereotypes cast them as unproductive and dependent.

Change of occupation from the earlier generations has been the most difficult task for the Dalits as they were economically dependent on other castes for their livelihood and are still managing to get socially and economically independent. Social mobility (from changes in occupation) for them is something that can change the whole situation of suppression, violence, separation from the society in particular and caste discrimination in general. As occupational mobility for them has been horizontal in nature, no such significant changes in their position in the social and economic hierarchy took place from thousands of years in rural India. The separation of people and identity on the basis of caste has become one of the peculiar characteristics of rural India and its economy.

The occupational viewpoint in the context of the origin of caste system in India has some similar characteristics with the traditional view when it classifies the society on the basis of profession or work done by an individual. The persons or castes engaged in better and respectable profession used to consider them superior and the persons or castes engaged in manual and dirty (polluting) profession were treated as inferior in the social setup of the day, which is continuing till date world over and India, but in India the sin of untouchability entered, which prohibited the touch of those people who do menial and dirty work.
The occupational view appears to be the most dominant theory about the origin of the caste system and posits that the majority of caste names were derived from the principal occupations or crafts that their members practiced (Ghurye, 1969; Dumont, 1970; Ibbetson, 1974). In the same context, Nesfield (1885) says that “Function and function alone is responsible for the origin of Caste Structure in India.” Function differentiation and specialisation led to occupational differentiation and numerous sub-castes such as Lohar, Sonar, Chamar, Bhangi, Barhai, Patwa, Teli, Nai, Tamboli, Kahar, Garadia etc. came into existence. According to Devi (1999), there is a common belief that each caste is related to an occupation and “If one knows a man’s caste, one can tell his occupation.” According to Gupta (1983), “The Varna system of India is essentially based on a classification of occupations.”

A group of people indulged in specific occupations like; trade, business, commerce, manufacturing etc. created a class or caste which followed same means of livelihood, and thereby, resulted in a non-collusive social bond for their all social and economic common goals, aims and objectives. The individual of each group, class or caste saw his/her benefit only through his/her class or group and feeling remains faithful first to his/her own class or caste and second to the whole community. This is a system, where member of each caste think, the resources and profits of each class/caste should be best controlled by its members only and forming of such guilds supported and rather perpetuated the caste system by providing all nourishment to the system of hierarchal social classification with pride and glory rather than class identity because caste always dominated class identity.

From the above analysis, it can be said that castes originated from occupational groups which were organised into guilds initially and later exclusively became the basis of social stratification. It can be claimed that any social enquiry about professions in India necessitates the study of the relationship between castes and occupations. The traditional and occupational views only differ about the origin of the caste system. The function of the caste system is almost same, i.e. division of labour and control through closure in both views. All the tasks which were physically hard, menial and of low social status...
were performed by the lower castes, meant lesser access to privileges for those involved in such tasks, leaving behind a mass population in distress.

1.4 Ambedkar’s views on caste system of India

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, also known as Babasaheb, was born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow, near Indore and belonged to a poor Mahar (an untouchable sub-caste) family. He is also known as the chief architecture of the Indian Constitution. He was not just a legal practitioner from the profession as he always fought tooth to nail against social discrimination, the system of categorisation – Chaturvarna and wrongs associated with Hindu caste system. So he was a thinker, human rights profounder, a revolutionist and most of all a great reformer.

As far as the origin of the caste system is concerned Dr. Ambedkar points out that Shudras were not a separate Varna and they were originally king, a part of Kshatriya varna in Indo-Aryan society. They were the rulers which resulted in a continuous clash between Shudra kings and Brahmans. Tyrannies and oppression of Brahmans by Shudra kings resulted in hatred towards Shudra and in course of time Brahmans successfully isolated them and degraded them socially to the lowest rank (Ambedkar, 1946).

From his real life experiences of discrimination, which started from his childhood haunted him even at school, where the untouchable students were asked to sit outside the class, as a fear of social outcry and it continued in some or the other form, not only to him; but to every Untouchable. Born as Untouchable, Ambedkar had to face the same humiliation and tribulation, which every untouchable had faced in those days and facing even today, whatever might be the degree of suppression and exploitation and by overcoming innumerable social and financial obstacles, he earned a law degree and doctorates for his research work done at Columbia University and London School of Economics. The injustices seen to others and faced by him gave a very deep impression on his mind and he must have been made up his mind to completely remove it (caste system) from India.
Certainly, the academic achievements of Dr. Ambedkar drew the attention of the British and he had been invited to testify before the Southborough Committee, which was preparing the Government of India Act 1919 to devolve greater power to the governments and to the elected provincial assemblies of British India. It was his influence, only by his academic work, which draws the attention of the British government to have his important views on voting rights of Indians as they saw a future representative of the untouchables in him. Ambedkar used this platform to raise a voice in favour of separate electorates and reservations for Dalits for proper representation of every social and religious minority in the legislative. Later in December 1925, Dr. Ambedkar had been nominated by the British rulers to the Legislative Council of the Bombay Presidency and here too, he talked about securing the rights of Indians, in particular, social and economic rights of the untouchables.

Dr. Ambedkar started Marathi Weekly Mooknayak (The leader of the Dumb) on January 31, 1920, in Mumbai with the financial help of the Sahu Chatrpati (the then Maharaj of Kolhapur) to speak for the muffled Dalits. The first issue of this paper claimed that the Hindu Society is like a tower of many stories. It has neither a ladder nor a door to go out. This weekly journal harshly criticised orthodox Hindu politicians and their perceived reluctance to fight caste discrimination. The efforts are done by him and continued the attack on caste system helped somewhat as by this time there were signs that the Hindu society was beginning to understand that ‘untouchability’ is biased and unjust.

The efforts continued and on July 20, 1924, he set up the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (Association for the Welfare of the Ostracised) to promote education and socio-economic uplifting of the depressed classes and asked to educate, agitate and organise. By 1927, Dr. Ambedkar decided to start vigorous public movements against caste system and untouchability to open up and share public drinking water resources and right to enter Hindu temples. He started Satyagraha on March 20, 1927, at the Chowdar Tank at Colaba, near Bombay, to give the untouchables the right to draw water from the public tank where he burnt copies of the ‘Manusmriti’ publicly, however; the movement did not succeed in getting water.
In September 1927 Dr. Ambedkar established *Samata Samaj Sangh* (League for equality) to spread consciousness among Dalits about equality in social life. Dr. Ambedkar also started a fortnightly Marathi paper *Bahiskrit Bharat* (outcaste India), in 1927, *Samata* in 1928, *Janata* in 1930 and *Prabuddha Bharat* to highlight excluded masses in society on political scenario and to get representation in proportion to the population of Dalits with other social reforms like; access to temples and water resources for the untouchables, and also opening up of public places in general for them, such as schools.

In 1928, when most Indians were protesting against the Simon Commission (Indian Statutory Commission) Dr. Ambedkar did not oppose because earlier no adequate efforts have been made by the Indian leaders. Being a member of Bombay Presidency Committee he submitted a statement to Simon Commission on May 29, 1928, under the caption “State concerning the Safeguards for the Protection of the interests of the Depressed Classes as a Minority in the Bombay Presidency, and the changes in the composition of and the guarantees from the Bombay Legislative Council necessary to ensure the same under provincial autonomy.” Here too, he demanded protection through adequate representation for the depressed classes first and to promote educational advancement of the same. Later, he proved before the Simon Commission that the terms “Depressed Classes” and “Untouchables” are the same, meaning thereby a person who pollutes the other high castes by his mere touch.

Dr. Ambedkar kept on demanding for separate electorates in Round Table conferences held by the British Government in London during 1930-1932, so that the ‘untouchables’ would vote for their own candidates and be allotted their votes separate from the Hindu majority and was in favour of reservations in the matter of the employment of the Depressed Classes in the Public Services and in the recruitment of the Police and Military.

According to Ambedkar, the arrangement of separate electorate for untouchables had two main objectives to be achieved. The first objective was to free the Untouchables from the thralldom of the Hindus and the second one was to improve the economic position of the untouchables particularly in Rural India. Dr. Ambedkar was opposed to territorial
constituency (the so called national scheme) and found it quite unsound on merits because of the following assumptions related to territorial constituency;

(1) It assumes that the majority of voters in a constituency represent the will of the constituency as a whole.

(2) That it is enough to take stock of the general will of the constituency as expressed by the majority and that the will of any particular section however much it may be in conflict with the will of the majority may be ignored without remorse and without being guilty of any inequity.

(3) That the representative who is elected by the voters will represent the wishes and interests of the voters and that there is not the danger of the representative allowing the interest of his class to dominate and override the interests and wishes of the voter who elects him.

Now with the following assumptions as one may depict that how the majority in all circumstances can be trusted to represent the will of all sections of people in the constituency. In this regard, Ambedkar talked about three safeguards e.g. (1) Political (2) Educational and (3) Economic & Social. Political safeguard was being found the most important at that time because of the following reasons;

(1) That the Legislature shall not be merely representative of the people but it shall be representative separately of both categories Hindus as well as Untouchables.

(2) That the Executive shall not be merely responsible to the legislature which means to the Hindus, but shall also be responsible both to the Hindus as well as to the Untouchables. And

(3) The Administration shall not be merely efficient but also be worthy of trust by all sections and also of the Untouchables and shall contain a sufficient number of representatives of the untouchables holding key positions so that the Untouchables may have confidence in it.
As it was a fight of the joint versus separate electorate, the Congressmen always raised the issue of national interest which may be found in the essence of ‘national scheme’ and were totally opposed to communal scheme (separate electorate). They also raised the issue of administrative efficiency so that an administrative position may not be filled only by seeing one's social category but to an extent, it should be filled by a minimum educational qualification.

According to Ambedkar, mere giving temple entry, social acceptability and abolishing untouchability alone was not going to work because people, now, do not mind these things e.g. train traveling, eating in restaurants etc. what the need of the time was to give equal opportunity which was and is very important for far more independence. According to Ambedkar, in the system of joint electorates with reserved seats, the candidates of the Depressed classes would be at the mercy of the majority of electorates, and in order to win their votes they would have to pander to their prejudices, or there would be every possibility of the seats being occupied by the stooges of the majority community.

According to Ambedkar, the path of social reform like the path to heaven at any rate in India is strewn with many difficulties. Social reform in India has few friends and many critics. The critics fall into two distinct classes. One class consists of political reformers and the other of the socialists. While the Congress (political reformers) was concerned with defining the weak points in the political organisation of the country, the Social Conference (socialists) was engaged in removing the weak points in the social organisation of the Hindu Society.

Ambedkar pointed out that for some time the Congress and the Conference worked as two wings of one common activity. But soon the two wings developed into two parties, a Political Reform Party and a Social Reform Party, between whom there raged a fierce controversy. The Political Reform Party supported the National Congress and Social Reform Party supported the Social Conference. As the majority of the educated Hindus were in favour of political advancement and indifferent to social reform and that while the number of those who attended the Congress was very large and the number who did not attend but who sympathised with it even larger, the number of those who attended the
Social Conference was very much smaller. In course of time, the party in favour of political reform won and the Social Conference vanished and was forgotten.

Ambedkar mentioned the speech, delivered by Mr. W. C. Bonnerji in 1892 at Allahabad as President of the eighth session of the Congress, sounds like a funeral oration at the death of the Social Conference and is so typical of the Congress attitude that he (Ambedkar) ventured to quote from it the following extract.

Mr. Bonnerji said:

“I for one have no patience with those who saw we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two. Are we not fit (for political reform) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends? because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge?"

This statement given by Mr. Bonnerji was just an example for why Ambedkar had not believed the efforts of Congressmen was in favour of vanishing social evils, actually it was like supporting the existing social structure which was highly unequally entitled of basic human rights.

The thoughts of Ambedkar on the caste system and how it is handled in his contemporary can be found in his writings. In his book “What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables” which was published in 1945 and have been banned by the Congress government soon after independence (as one can easily depict why), Ambedkar shocked everyone with the facts mentioned throughout the book that “Mr. Gandhi had under his command a sum of Rs. 1.28 Crores belonging to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Why did Mr. Gandhi not insist upon a substantial portion of this amount being earmarked for the upliftment of Untouchables?”. In this regard, Ambedkar was of the view that Mr. Gandhi showed almost complete indifference to the curse of the untouchable is beyond dispute.
In the same book, Ambedkar pointed out that Mr. Gandhi tried very hard to appease the Muslim community but sidelined the Untouchables and showed him as an orthodox Hindu when he said in reply to a question in Second Round Table Conference meeting. According to Ambedkar, Mr. Gandhi said “The best remedy is that small castes should fuse themselves into one big caste. There should be four such big castes so that we may reproduce the old system of four Varnas.” Whatever may be the motive to say this, it is clear from the statement that untouchables were not going to get their dues in the form of separate electorate. And when the British government announced ‘the Communal Award’ on August 14, 1932, Mr. M.K. Gandhi immediately went on a fast in Yeravada jail at Poona, fearing that the measure would threaten Hindu unity. As Mr. Gandhi’s health worsened by fast and ‘Hindu Mahasabha’ threatened mass massacres of Dalits, Dr. Ambedkar gave in to the pressure and surrendered the rights of the Dalits. He said that this was the biggest blunder of his life. The Dalits still remain oppressed because of the lack of separate electorate for them.

In an interview (Matrix49451, 2012) to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on December 31, 1955, Ambedkar called Mr. Gandhi an orthodox Hindu, who had no dynamics in him. According to Ambedkar, he never called Mr. Gandhi a ‘Mahatma.’ He pointed out that Mr. Gandhi, on one hand, published papers like ‘Harijan’ and ‘Young India’ which were published in English language, sounds like an opponent to the caste system and no doubt western people used to read only English papers. On the other, Mr. Gandhi also published a Gujarati paper called ‘Deen Bandhu’ and here Gandhi sounded like an orthodox Hindu, supporting the caste system as well as the Varna system. So the statements made in both papers were actually opposed to each other and definitely, the English ones were to please and placate the British government.

In his book “Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables” Ambedkar pointed out that most parts of the world have had their type of stratification like; the Romans had their slaves, the Spartans their helots, the British their villeins, the Americans their Negroes and the Germans their Jews and to the Hindu their Untouchables. All forms of stratification have vanished except Untouchability and bids fair to the last as long as
Hinduism will last. According to him, the untouchables are not merely despised but are denied all opportunities to rise, which was a very different aspect from the other parts of the world, may be that is why he opined ‘annihilation of caste’ has the solution to all the problems and sufferings. According to Omvedt (2016), Ambedkar’s position was that at the caste level, Brahmanism was the main enemy, just as capitalism was the main enemy in class terms and long term strategy was to dissolve Hinduism itself.

In Ambedkar’s own words “Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform; you cannot have economic reform unless you kill this monster” (Ambedkar, 1979). Ambedkar opined that however the untouchables belong to the same religion and culture yet they are shunned and ostracised by the community they lived in. The Untouchables observed Ambedkar, recognised the sacred as well as the secular laws of India, but they derived no benefit from this. The caste system assigned an individual as untouchable from birth, made them outcastes, permanently fixed the social position of a whole community and thereby their economic condition was permanently set. He argued the caste system was not merely a social problem. Moreover, it traumatised India’s people, its economy and the discourse between its people, preventing India from developing and sharing knowledge, and wrecking its ability to create and enjoy the fruits of freedom.

Before Ambedkar took his last breath on December 6, 1956 he opined that federation and unification of scheduled castes have created a sense of self-respect among them but at the same time it has raised an intangible wall between SCs and other classes of the society, which has drastically affected or damaged the feeling of common nationality among people, which is of utmost importance for modern India.