CHAPTER- III

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA
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3.1 Introduction: The researcher has analysed the "Socio-Economic Status" of the Castes of Scheduled Castes with special reference to 'Kolhapur' District. Although the research topic is based on empirical analysis, in order to give a clear understanding about the Scheduled Castes, the researcher has discussed the 'Caste System in India". The Scheduled Castes cannot be discussed without considering their social background. Under this chapter, the researcher has given the caste system in India and related issues. The researcher has covered, definitions of Caste in the beginning. Further, the researcher has discussed the 'Caste System in India' from ancient period (4000 BC) to Post-Independence period. All the analysis has been given on the secondary source. The researcher also has discussed selective theories of the origin of Castes. In the last part, the researcher has given the Meaning of Scheduled Castes and Government Policies concerned to them.

3.2 Definitions of Caste

3.2.1 The Indian Caste System has unique features among the systems of social stratification. It is, in fact, the significance of Caste that more than anything else that characterises India. Every Hindu necessarily belongs to the Caste of his parents and in that Caste he inevitably remains. No accumulation of wealth and no exercise of talents can alter his caste status.¹ Caste System has no basis in Hindu Religion and is a product of Hindu traditional law and of the weakness of the central political authority during much of India's history.²
Important among the attributes of caste is its rigid rank order. The hierarchical order of the caste system is built like this: 'Brahman', having higher rank, 'Kshatriya', the warriors having the next higher, the 'Vaishya', the merchants having the third higher rank and the 'Sudras', the workers at the bottom rank.3

'A caste was a group with a separate arrangement for meeting out justice to its members apart from that of the community as a whole, within which the caste was included as only one of the group. This means that, in this caste bound society the amount of community feeling must have been restricted and that the citizens owed moral allegiance to their caste first, rather than to the community as a whole'.4 According to Kroeber (1950)5 'Castes are a special form of social classes, their customs and laws are rigid and separated from one another'. From this it is clear that, there was strict stratification on the basis of castes and every caste had its own rules imposed by the Caste System. In this stratification, 'Sudras' were kept at the lower with severe social, economic and political restrictions. This explains the rigidity of the ancient Caste System in India.

3.2.2 The word, 'Caste' is of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Casta means lineage or race, it is derived from the latin word 'Castus', which means pure. The Spaniards were the first to use it, but its Indian application is from the Portuguese, who had applied it in the middle of the fifteenth century.6
Several studies have been done on the Caste and different scholars have defined 'the Caste' in different ways. Some of the important definitions can be given as below.

According to Ketkar S.V. (1909) 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. The author, instead of giving clear definition, prefers to give the characteristics of caste, because he thinks that, this can give clear identity to the caste. Further the author also has stated about the sub-caste as, "the word caste and sub-caste are not absolute but comparative in signification. The larger group will be called as 'Caste', while smaller group will be called as 'sub-caste'".

According to Kroeber A.C. (1950) Castes are a special form of social classes, which in tendency at least are present in every society. Further he says that, Castes have emerged into social consciousness to the point that custom and law attempt their rigid and permanent separation from one another.

Boungle (1958) explains that, the caste as hereditarily specialised and hierarchically arranged groups. The author has given three characteristics of the caste system: hierarchy, hereditary specialisation and repulsion.
Bailey (1960) and Srinivas M.N. (1962)\textsuperscript{11} have avoided the problem of definition of caste. They see the castes as a structure. Opler Morris (1950) also states that, a short definition of caste is not satisfactory, so it is more illuminating to talk in terms of the characteristics of caste. He further states that, “Caste is hereditary and endogamous. It regulates social intercourse, is graded in rank and has an assembly or a governing body which regulates its internal affair”.\textsuperscript{12}

Ghurye (1961) also has stated in similar way. According to him, a caste refers to hereditary membership, caste councils, hierarchy and endogamy as the important features, besides that, the author also refers to the restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and civil and religious disabilities.\textsuperscript{13}

From above all definitions, the conclusion can be drawn as, defining ‘the caste’ is not a simple task. It cannot be defined in clear and in short, since it has got several supportive aspects. Therefore, all definitions differ from one another. Instead of defining ‘the caste’, many scholars have explained the structure of caste system or characteristics of caste system.

3.3 Caste System in India

The Caste System in India has been studied in three perspectives: Indological, socio-anthropological and sociological. The Indologists have
viewed Castes from the spiritual point of view, the social anthropologists from the cultural point of view and the Sociologists from the Stratification point of view. The sociological perspective views the caste system in terms of social stratification in the society. The Caste System, as it exists today, has grown and developed through many centuries. Ahuja Ram (1999: 228-248) has explained the Caste System in India by dividing Indian Social History into four periods: first, the Ancient Period (4000 BC to 700 AD), second, Medieval Period (700 AD to 1757 AD), third, the British Period (1757 – 1947) and fourth, the Post-Independence Period (After 1947). According to the author, the Caste System is a very old concept. The author explains in following ways:

3.3.1 Ancient Period (4000 BC to 700 AD)

The ancient period is a very long period, which includes Vedic Period, Brahmanical Period, Mourya Period, Post Mourya period and Harshavardhan Period. The author says that, in every period, there exists caste system. The society was divided into different social groups on the basis of either Varna or Caste. There was clear cut differentiation in these groups from one another, and were living under several social rules. The Sudras were classified as lower, which lived with severe social restrictions. The clear idea can be given in following heads.15
3.3.1.1 Vedic Period (4000 BC to 1000 BC)\textsuperscript{16}

There are two schools of thought regarding the caste system in Vedic Period. One school holds that, the broad frame of the caste system had existed even in the earlier portion of the Rig Veda (approximate date 1500 BC) and the ‘Brahmana’, ‘Kshatriya’ and ‘Vaishya’ were the three castes divisions that the society of the Rig Veda clearly recognised. According to this school, the ‘Sudra’ caste was not existed at this initial period of ‘Rig Veda’, but it arisen at the end of the Rig Veda. The other school maintains that, these three were not Castes, but ‘Varnas’, which were not hereditary but flexible. Some exponents of this view are Weber Max (1882)\textsuperscript{17} and Ghurye(1932)\textsuperscript{18}. But Dutt (1940)\textsuperscript{19} and Apte(1940)\textsuperscript{20} and other scholars have rejected this view. They say that, Caste System did exist in the time of ‘Rig Veda’. Kamble B.R. (1979)\textsuperscript{21} argued that, ‘Caste System was sufficiently developed in the Rig Veda time and this system was not flexible but had raised enough barriers’.

3.3.1.2 Brahmanical Period (1000 BC to 600 BC)

Later Vedic period or end of ‘Rigvedic’ period is known as ‘Brahmanical Period’. The literature of this period includes, ‘Brahmanas’ and ‘Upanishads’. In this period the hierarchical system of four ‘Varnas’ was firmly established and remained enduring for all times to come. There was spectacular growth of ‘Brahminism’. Caste distinctions became very clear. The Fourth ‘Varna’ includes ‘the Sudras’, as the lowest position in the ‘Varna’ System. The ‘Brahmins’ succeeded in organising themselves as an
exclusive ‘Varna’. In the later part they took conscious efforts to organise the social life of the people by writing the ‘Grihsutras’ (700 BC to 300 BC) and ‘Dharmasutras’. (600 BC to 300 BC) The former prescribed the details about the duties of man from his birth to burial and later one dealt with a code of social behaviours and relationship. Therefore it may be stated that, the beginning of the Caste System was in later Vedic period or in ‘Brahmanical’ period.

3.3.1.3 Mourya Period (322 BC to 184 BC)

‘Mourya’ Period started in 322 BC after the fall of ‘Nanda’ Dynasty. ‘Chandragupta Mourya’ (322 BC--298 BC) and ‘Ashoka’ (273 to 233 BC) were the two important rulers in the ‘Mourya’ period. The social system in this period was not much rigid. This can be known through the writings of ‘Koutilya’. Ahuja(1999) writes that, “In this period, the ‘Sudra’ rulers tried to remove various restrictions imposed by the ‘Brahmins’ on the ‘Sudras’. ‘Ashoka’ religious policy was broadly based on toleration and universal brotherhood, which didn’t recognize the caste barriers or geographical boundaries. Therefore, the caste system in this period could not develop in a rigid form”

But other scholars like Pandey (1986) have given very opposite explanation to this, according to them the caste system was existed in Koutilya’s period, with its rigid form.
3.3.1.4 Post-Mourya Period (184 BC to 606 AD)

The last 'Mourya' ruler was killed by his 'Brahmin' Commander-in-Chief, 'Pushyamitra Sunga' in 184 BC. Later on, 'Sunga' became a ruler and established a new dynasty called 'Sunga Dynasty'. This dynasty was an ardent patron of 'Brahminism'. Hence revival of 'Brahminism' and development of Caste System began in this period. Ahuja (1999) says that, the probable date of 'Manu Smriti' is believed to be 185 BC. But others scholars have given this date as different. Dr. Buhler George has estimated that, the date of 'Manusmriti' is between 200 BC to 200 AD. But Ketkar(1909) differs from his estimate. According to him, the 'Manu' was created between 227 AD to 320 AD. Through this 'Smriti', the 'Brahmins' once again succeeded in organising the supremacy and imposed severe restrictions on the 'Sudras'. 'Manusmriti' mentioned that, 'the Sudra, who insults a twice born man, shall have his tongue cut out; if he mentions the names and 'Jatis' of the twice born with contempt, an iron-nail shall be thrust in his mouth; if he arrogantly teaches the Brahmins their duty, a hot oil to be poured into his mouth and into his ears'. Such and many other severe restrictions were imposed on the 'Sudras'. Thus the equality was completely destroyed and the Caste System was developed on a very rigid line.26

3.3.2 Harsha Vardhan and Later Period (606 AD to 700 AD)

Under Harsh Vardhana (606 AD to 647 AD) and in his next phase, the Caste System continued with the same structure. Chinese scholar 'Hieun Tsang', who visited India in 630 AD, writes that, "Brahminism dominated the
country, Caste ruled the social structure and the persons following unclean occupations like butchers, scavengers had to live outside the city". This shows that, there was existence of the Caste System in India on a rigid line. After 'Harsha Vardhana', the system continued with same rigidity.

3.3.3 Medieval Period (700 AD to 1757 AD)

The 'Medieval' Period includes two major periods, i.e., one, 'Rajput' Period (700 AD to 1200 AD) and 'Muslim' Period (1200 to 1757 AD). After the death of 'Harshavardhana' in the middle of seventh century, the 'Medieval' period began. There was no much change in the structure or system of Caste. Infact, earlier structure was forwarded in this period. One change that occurred is, the caste disintegration began in this period. This change occurred specially before the beginning of Muslim Period. Castes and sub-castes were known from their territorial.

3.3.4 Rajput Period (700 to 1200 AD)

During the 'Rajput' Period, the Indian Social System did not change. Society became static and the caste system became rigid. Brahmins gave themselves more privileges and permitted flesh, wine and women in the worship. Consequently, when foreign armies attacked India, a large number of new castes and sub-castes sprang up. The 'Brahmins' tightened their bonds of caste and defended themselves by the increased rigidity of caste association. The process of disintegration began in this period. 'Brahmins' came to be known by their territorial limits as 'Kanouji Brahmin', 'Konkan Brahmin',...
‘Telagu Brahmin’ etc. Similarly subdivision of ‘Kshatriya’ and ‘Vaishyas’ soon followed. Thus before the advent of ‘Muslims’, a distinct change had came about in our social structure in the form of multiplicity of castes and rigid observance of the caste rules 29.

3.3.5 Muslim Period (1200 to 1757 AD)

‘Mahmood Ghori’ laid the real foundation of the ‘Muslim Empire’ in India in 1175. Within thirty years, he conquered many parts of India and thus Muslim period started. In the next phase, several Muslim Dynasties ruled India. Some of them are, ‘Khilji Dynasty’ (1290-1320), ‘Tughalak Dynasty’ (1320-1412), ‘Sayyid Dynasty’ (1414-1451), ‘Lodhi Dynasty’ (1451-1525) and ‘Mughal Dynasty’ (1526-1757). The ‘Mughal Dynasty’ includes ‘Babar’ (1526-1530), ‘Humayun’ (1530-1555), ‘Akbar’ (1556-1605), ‘Jahangir’ (1605-1627), ‘Shahajahan’ (1627-1658), ‘Aurangazeb’ (1658-1707) and ‘Bahaddurshah’ (1707-1757). The Caste System in the ‘Muslim’ period became more rigid because ‘Muslims’ were not absorbed in the elastic Hindu-fold, but they tried to convert the people to Muslim. In this period also, Brahmin succeeded in imposing their leadership on ‘Hindus’ in religious and social fields. The Caste System continued with its rigid form even in Muslim period 30.
3.3.6 British Period (1757 to 1947)

'The East India Company' secured some commercial privileges from the 'Mughals' and started the British period in 1774, when 'Warren Hasting' was appointed the first 'Governor General of India'. The administration and socio-economic policies of the 'British Government' in the next phase brought some changes in religious practices and also in the caste structure of the society. The government passed some Acts in order to bring socio-economic reforms in India. Some of them are, 'The Caste Disabilities Removal Act-1850', 'the Widow Remarriage Act-1856', and 'the Special Marriage Act-1872'. Through these acts, government gave a blow to the caste system. However, some scholars have argued that, these measures were taken for administrative purpose and not to abolish the caste system. In this regard, Ghurye (1961) writes that, "most of the activities of the British Government were dictated by prudence of administration and not by a desire to reduce the rigidity of caste". Whatever the reason may be, but It is a fact that, some sort of social reforms in a constructive way began in the British period.

In the same period, some social movements attacked the Caste System in India. In this regards, Pimpley Prakash and Sharma Satish (1985) writes that, socio-religious movements have declined the Caste System in India. The author mentions some important movements, they are, 'The Arya Samaj' founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, 'The Dev Samaj' founded in 1887 by Shiv Narayañ Agnihotri, 'The Sanatam Dharm Sabha' founded in 1895, 'The Brahma Samaj' founded in 1928 by 'Raja Ram Mohan Roy' and
'The Prarthana Samaj' (1849) and several other socio-religious movements attacked the traditional caste system. These social movements generated social awareness in the Society. However, they did not succeed in removing the rigidity of the Caste System, though some structural features of Castes were definitely affected.

After the World War-I (1914-1918), India came to be industrialised country, which led to the migration of the people from villages to cities. i.e. the process of industrialisation and the process of urbanisation began in this phase, which could bring some changes in the rigid form of the Caste System. Srinivas M. N. (1962) has argued that, 'due to the migration of Brahmins to the towns, the non-Brahmins refuse to show the same respect which they showed before and inter-caste eating and drinking taboos are also somewhat weakened'. Ghurye (1962) writes that, 'the changes in the rigidities of the Caste System are due to the growth of the city life with its migratory population'. Thus in the British Period, the rigid nature of the Caste became weak and inter-caste social relations began.

3.3.7 Post Independence Period (After 1947 to till now)

The process of 'Industrialisation' and the process 'Urbanisation' continued more constructively in Independent India, which already had weakened the rigid nature of the Caste System. Besides that, the Government of India enacted several laws, which controlled the social disabilities. Some important
Acts are, Article 14 – ‘Ensures equality before law’, Article 15 – ‘Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, sex, place of birth, race and caste’, Article 16 – ‘Prescribes equality of opportunity in public employment’ and Article 17 – ‘Abolition of Untouchability’. As a whole, these legal provisions have reduced the rigidity of Caste System in India. There are some other factors which attacked the Caste System in India, are, spread of education, socio-religious reforms, ‘Westernisation’, ‘Spacial mobility’, ‘growth of market economy’ etc. The Constitution of India brought the concept of ‘Liberty, Justice and Equality’ to all persons irrespective of their different castes or religion. The Caste System no longer functions on rigid lines in contemporary India.

Education made people liberal, broadminded, rational and democratic. They don’t accept the caste norms and caste practices blindly. Old social practices of imposing social restrictions have dwindled. Caste no longer restricts the individual freedom. Caste does not determine the occupational career of an individual. Inter-caste social relations have increased in the contemporary period. Finally, it can be stated that, the Caste System has got a big blow in post-independence period and hence it has lost its rigid nature.

During the last five decades, there has been a considerable change in the Caste System. Though the two important features, hereditary membership and hierarchy, have not changed at all. But there are the changes in traditional occupations, in the idea of purity and pollution, in the social restrictions etc. The scholars like, Majumdar D.N.(1956), Kuppuswami(1971), Srinivas
M.N.(1961)\textsuperscript{39}, Ghurye(1961)\textsuperscript{40} and others have stated that, the caste system is fast changing and is weakening, though it is not being disintegrated or abolished. Ghurye(1961) argued that, ‘caste no longer rigidly determines an individual’s occupation, but continues to prescribe almost in its old vigour and the circle into which one has to marry. One has still to depend very largely on one’s caste for help at critical periods of one’s life like marriage and death’.\textsuperscript{41} Thus the rigid nature of Caste System has abolished, but the caste system still can be seen in all parts of India.

3.4 Theories of Caste

The origin of the Caste System could be understood more clearly through the various theories propounded by different scholars. These theories differ from one another. There is no similarity between these. Besides this, no one theory properly explains the origin of the caste system. Risley(1915)\textsuperscript{42} says that, 'the origin of caste is due to racial differences', whereas Nesfield(1885)\textsuperscript{43} says, 'due to the occupational factors', Abbe Dubois(1817)\textsuperscript{44} refers to the role played by Brahmins and Hutten (1961)\textsuperscript{45} : 184-185) refers to belief in Mana is its origin. The present study considers only the important theories. Ahuja Ram (1999 : 249-266) explains some important theories of origin of caste system in the following way.

3.4.1 Traditional Theory

The Traditional Theory believes that, the Caste System has been established by divine ordinance or at least with divine approval. Nagendra S.P.
(1968)\textsuperscript{46} gives the best analysis of the traditional theory. The traditional theory has two versions: Mythical and Metaphysical.

The Mythical version regards four ‘Varnas’ as four Castes and believes that, these four Varnas have emerged from the different parts of Brahma’s body. “The ‘Brahmin’ was born from his mouth, the ‘Kshatriya’ from his arms, the ‘Vaishyas’ from his thighs and the ‘Sudra’ from his feet”.\textsuperscript{47} It considers caste as a naturally determined organisation of social functions and explains the membership of an individual in particular caste in terms of ‘Karma’ and ‘Dharma’ doctrine. According to ‘Karma Doctrine’, a man is born in a particular caste because of his action performed in his previous incarnation. If he had performed better actions, he would have been born in a higher Caste. He was born in that Caste because he deserved to be born. According to ‘Dharma Doctrine’, a man who accepts and living according to the dharma is rewarded, while the violation if dharma is punished. If a man observes the rules of dharma, he will be born in his next birth in a high and rich caste and if a man violates the dharma, he will be born in a low and poor caste.\textsuperscript{48}

The Metaphysical version explains the hierarchy and fixed occupation of the caste. Each Caste has a separate function and is determined by the ‘nature’ or ‘swabhav’ and ‘qualities’ or ‘guna’ of the caste members. The ‘swabhav’ comprises two sets of qualities-gotrika and namika. The gotra (lineage) qualities are hereditary, where as namika (individual) qualities are specifically one’s own. It is the gotrika qualities, which determines his
ascriptive nature and entitled him the status in a caste. This is a hereditary membership of the Caste System. 'Swabhav' (nature) and 'Action' (occupation) cannot be separated from each other. This is nothing but fixed occupation of the concerned castes. There are two types of functions- Ordinary and Extraordinary. Brahmins were engaged in cultural-religious functions, 'Kshatriya' in military-administration, 'Vaishyas' in commercial-economic function and the 'Sudras' were engaged in ordinary function. It was believed that, since the first three have undergone training in previous births, they were rightly called 'dwijas', where as the 'Sudras' were not. This was a clear-cut differentiation of hierarchical functions.49

3.4.2 Brahmanical Theory

According to Abbe Dubois(1857)50, the caste system originated and developed in India because of 'Brahmins'. 'Brahmins' imposed sever social restrictions on 'non-Brahmins', especially on the 'Sudras', to preserve their purity. They gave themselves a higher status in the "Brahmanas' and in other books and declared all others as inferior to them. Sudras were classified as most inferior to any one else. Ghurye (1961) supports 'Brahmanical Theory'. He believes that, the role of Brahmin was vital in the origin of Caste System in India. Further the author says that, "The Brahman literature classified as 'dwijas' and 'ekjati' (the Sudra). The restrictions on marriage, acceptance of food etc., contemplated only four classes in the society, came to be the characteristics of each and every well marked group".51 Finally the author says that, 'the Caste in India is a 'Brahmanic' child of the Indo-Aryan
Thus according to this theory, the Caste System was created by the Brahmins to maintain their superiority in the society.

3.4.3 Racial Theory

According to Herbert Risley (1915) in 'Racial Theory', “the clash of cultures and contact of races crystallised the Castes in India”. The migrant ‘Aryans’ had their own ideas of ceremonial purity. They considered the original inhabitants as inferior to them. The ‘Aryans’ were essentially ‘Patrilineal’ in nature, while local population, whom they conquered was matrilineal. Therefore, they married with the daughters of the aboriginals but refused to give their daughters to them. The children of such marriages had to be assigned the lowest position in the society and were called as ‘Chandals’. Thus the origin of ‘half-breeds’ group’, as well as the feeling of racial superiority ultimately became responsible for the origin of the Caste System in India. Risley has referred to six processes in the formation of Castes. They are, Change in traditional occupation, Change in Customs, Migration, Preservations of old tradition, Enrolling oneself into the rank of Hinduism and Role of Religious enthusiasts. These all ultimately, according to the author, have developed the Caste System in India.

3.4.4 Occupation Theory

Nesfield (1885) believes that, ‘the origin of Caste has nothing to do with the racial affinity, but it mainly due to functions or occupations. The skill of occupation was passed on hereditarily from generation to generation and
because of practicing the same occupation over a long period of time, "Occupational Guilds" came into existence, which later on came to be known as Castes.' The author explains how the Brahmins were classified as highest status, that, the 'Brahmins' were specialised in the occupation of 'sacrifice and hymns and rituals'. Since sacrifices were very important in the social life of the people, 'Brahmins' became the most important and respected people in the Society. Thus every occupation became hereditary and through which the Caste System into existence.

3.4.5 Ketkar's Theory

Ketkar S.V. (1909) believes that, 'the origin of Caste was from early tribes and the psychological prejudicial tendencies of human beings.' According to the author, there were numerous tribes living in different parts of India. Many of these tribes were in struggle with each other on the issues like, boundaries, kidnapping a girl from other tribe etc. Because of such conflicts, people avoided other tribes in marriage and social relations and confined social interaction in all respects to members of their own tribe. Thus the author's view is that, the castes originated from the tribes. Further he explains that, the phrase 'origin of caste' has no meaning, though endogamy has its origin, hereditary occupation and social restrictions have their origin, association of purity and impurity to various objects also has its origin.

Ketkar (1909) further explains about psychological prejudicial tendencies. He says that, the psychology of endogamy came to be practiced because of three factors: one, due to the feelings of sympathy and affection for
the members of one’s own group, two, to maintain blood purity and, three, the social adjustment. According to the author, the superiority and inferiority are the cause or the result of endogamy. Such feeling brought the social restrictions and clear-cut differentiation of the people into different groups or different castes.58

3.4.6 Senart’s Theory

Senart (1930)59 gives historically parallel explanation to support the origin of caste. Senart finds certain similarities in the three systems: ‘Indian, Greek and Romans’. All of the three are the Aryans and their civilisations are oldest one. There are many similarities in the social relations, social practices and customs among these three systems, Just as in India, there is a custom that, after marriage, a woman transfers from her gotra to that of her husband’s, the same custom existed in Rome. Also, just like caste panchayats in India, there exist similar councils in Rome and Greece. On the basis of these comparisons, Senart says that, the Caste is the normal development of ancient Aryan Institutions.60

3.4.7 Hutton’s Theory of ‘Mana’

According to Hutton (1961), ‘mana’ is a mysterious impersonal power attached to individuals, objects and places. Wherever the belief in ‘mana’ prevails, a corresponding belief in the value of taboo as protective measures is also to be found. Taboos were, therefore, imposed on commensality, inter-marriage, social interaction etc., to save the members of one’s tribe from the
mana of the other tribe. The restrictions on sharing food with others and having contact with them are based on the belief that, these food and contacts may be infected with the dangerous soul matters of strangers.\textsuperscript{61} Thus Senart says that, people believes in ‘mana’, which ultimately created the Caste System in India.

3.4.8 Ambedkar B. R. (1946) - argues that, the ‘Shudras’ were originally king and in the later period they became slaves. The author writes that, “The kings belongs to the ‘Shudra’ group. The Shudras were one of the ‘Aryan’ communities of solar race. The ‘Shudras’ ranked as the ‘Kshatriya Varna’ in the ‘Indo-Aryan’ society. There was a time when the ‘Aryan’ society recognized only three ‘Varnas’, namely, ‘Brahmin’, ‘Kshatriya’ and ‘Vaishyas’. The ‘Shudras’ were not a separate ‘Varna’, but a part of the ‘Kshatriya Varna’ There was a continuous feud between the ‘Shudra’ kings and the ‘Brahmins’, in which the Brahmins were subjected to many tyrannies and indignities. As a result of the hatred towards the ‘Shudras’ due to their tyrannies and oppression, the ‘Brahmins’ refused to invest the ‘Shudras’ with the sacred thread. Owing to the loss of the sacred thread, the ‘Shudras’ became socially degraded, fell below the rank of the Vaishyas and came to from the fourth ‘Varna’.”\textsuperscript{62}

3.5 Scheduled Castes: Meaning and Government Policies

3.5.1 The ‘Sudras’ were classified as inferior and the last ‘Varna’ to other three ‘Varnas’, in ancient social system in India. Along with this several
social, economic and political restrictions were imposed on them. This classified 'Sudras' includes various caste groups, which have suffered social and economic inequity since the ages. They had to stay outside the village. The concept of pollution was attached to them and they were treated as untouchable castes. These untouchable or castes were officially defined as depressed castes in 1932 and they were systematically listed in the 1931-Census of India. Gandhi named the untouchables as 'Harijans'. 'Hari' means 'God' and 'Jan' means 'people', i.e. 'people of God'. The meaning of this word in Hindi, Marathi and other languages is, 'a child whose father's identity is unknown'. Therefore the name 'Harijan' was opposed and hated by the untouchables.

The Simon Commission in 1935 first coined the term 'Scheduled Castes'. All the untouchable castes, which were listed in 1931-Census of India, came to be known as the 'Scheduled Castes' (SCs) through the Government of India Act of 1935. In the mean time, the government published a list of Scheduled Castes under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936. The Government of India in post-independence period carried same idea. According to the Constitution of India, under article 341(1), the President of India after consultation with the Governor may specify, 'the castes, races, tribes or parts of groups within castes or races, which shall be deemed to be Scheduled Castes. Accordingly the President has notified the Scheduled Castes in the order called

However, under article 341(2), the Parliament of India by law can include or exclude the abovementioned groups from the list of the Scheduled Castes. In a simple way, in contemporary period, the Scheduled Castes is defined under article 366(244) of the Constitution of India as, "the Scheduled Castes means such Castes, Races, Tribes or parts of or groups within such Castes, races or tribes, deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of this Constitution." Thus the Scheduled Castes are those castes, which are listed as Scheduled Castes in the Constitution of India 67.

3.5.2 After the Independence, the Government of India has undertaken various policies and programmes in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Castes. Santhakumari (1980) 68 explains the measures taken by the Government of India in order to improve the educational conditions of the Scheduled Castes. She says that, various incentives and concessions were provided to them, in the post-independence period, to improve their educational status. In this regard, a very recent study, undertaken by Singh Hoshiar and Malik A.S. (2001) 69 explains the policies and programmes of the government to uplift the Scheduled Castes. The author explains as below:

Even before the adoption of the Constitution, 'the Minimum Wage Act' was passed in 1948, which helped to safeguard the interests of Scheduled Castes landless agricultural labourers in the country. In the later period, the
President of India appointed a ‘Backward Class Commission’, popularly known as ‘Kakasaheb Kalekar Commission’, which submitted its report in March 1955. The Commission classified the Scheduled Castes masses into various categories based upon their occupation, so that the Government could formulate appropriate policy/programmes for their development. In the same phase, ‘the Untouchability (Offences) Act’ was passed in 1955 and which was further amended 1976. After the amendment, the act termed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act of 1955. Subsequently, a study group on the welfare of the weaker sections of the village community was constituted in 1960 under the chairmanship of Jai Prakash Narayan, after which, ‘the Department of Social Security’ was created in 1964. This department was redesignated in 1966 as ‘the Department of Social Welfare’. Later on this department was elevated as an independent Ministry on August, 24, 1979, and various issues related to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women, Children etc., were transferred to this Ministry.

The Ministry for Social Welfare appointed several Committees, Commissions, Study Groups, which helped the government to derive the approach for the development of the Scheduled Castes and to formulate various policies and programmes to achieve the objective as enshrined in the Constitution of India. The First and Second Five Year Plans laid major stress on carrying out the development programmes in the field of education and training. The author further writes that, such and other several assistance continued in every five years plans. The main programme was for generating income of the Scheduled Castes through the National Rural Employment
Programme (NREP), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), and the Programme for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fishery etc. In addition to these, the basic needs of these communities were met through ‘Minimum Needs Programme’. Some other important additional steps taken by the Government of India were, ‘Special Component Plans’, ‘Special Central Assistance’, ‘Scheduled Castes Development Corporation’, ‘Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation’, ‘National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation’ etc. Finally, the author says that, the Government of India has helped in all aspects in which the Scheduled Castes were weak and suffered. The government introduced social, economic and political measures. As a result of these all, the Scheduled Castes are living with the good status compared to their ancient status.

3.6 Conclusion: Thus several scholars have given different theories for the origin of the Caste System. One differs from another. Whatever the truth may be, but it is clear that, the ‘Sudras’ were classified as lowest status groups. Several sever social, economic and political restrictions were imposed on them. The ‘Sudras’ lives with such all injustice for several thousands of years. This gives the clear idea of social stratification in India. The Scheduled Castes were known as untouchables. The nomenclature differs from state to state. In Maharashtra, 59 castes have been declared as ‘Scheduled Castes’. All of these castes had same social history.
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