CHAPTER 1

Historical Background of Indian Society and Dalit Issues:

Ancient Era to British Era
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1.1 Pre-historic India and Dalits

Right from the early stage of India’s development as the civilised state, Dalits’ ‘Human’ identity remained unnoticed. The history is the evident of this fact.

There were communities in ancient India of other origins like Negrito, Mongoloid, Austroloid and Dravidian. They were considered as the aboriginals of India before the Aryans came to India:

The earliest human activity in the Indian sub-continent can be traced back to the Early, Middle and Late Stone Ages (400,000-200,000 BC). Implements from all three periods have been found from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar, parts of what is now Pakistan and southern most tip of the Indian Peninsula. These Paleolithic people were semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers for many millennia. Five main races of people were in existence when they move to an agricultural lifestyle took place, in the middle of the 9th millennium BC. These
were the Negrito race, the Proto–Australoid; the Mediterranean race, the Mongloids and the Alpine people. (Narang 36)

Whether Aryans were foreigner to India or not is a matter of serious debate. ‘The visit of Aryans to India and its period is again a controversial issue but many researchers do admit that Aryans were foreigners to Indian land.’ (Pawar 74) There are some scholars who do not believe in the Aryan invasion theory:

Some of the results – like Jha’s decipherment of the Indus script – are relatively recent, and it is probably unrealistic to expect history books to reflect all the latest findings. But unfortunately, influential Indian historians and educators continue to resist all revisions and hold on to this racist creation – the Aryan invasion theory. (Rajaram Aryans)

For this research, the Aryans invasion theory has been considered in account. Archaeological studies in India and outside India have proved that in every phases of social and cultural life, the aboriginal people of India were advanced and superior to the Aryans. They were far more civilized than the Aryans; whereas ‘the pre-Aryan people of India were no way inferior in culture and civilization to the Aryans. Rather, it was the Aryans who were a barbarous people as compare to pre-Aryans of India. In material culture the pre-Aryans were far superior to Aryans.’ (Sur 10) Thus, the pre-Aryans were a civilized and cultured race in comparison to the Aryans.
Prehistoric Indian society had no social divisions like caste system nor did they have the concept of untouchability. They were divided in society according to their occupations and had an organised governing system. ‘The Harappan society was probably divided according to occupations and this also suggests the existence of an organised government.’ (Narang 38) But with the passing of time the well developed prehistoric civilization of the non-Aryans of India was declined by the time around 1700 BC. Very significant study suggests:

By about 1700 BC, the Harappan culture was on the decline, due to repeated flooding of towns located on the river banks and due to ecological changes which forced agriculture to yield to the spreading desert. . . . When the initial migrations of the Aryan people into India began about 1500 BC, the developed Harappan culture had already been practically wiped out. (Narang 39)

Before the Aryans arrival in India and settled downed in India, the native people of India were living life without any social barriers of social divisions. They did not have superior or inferior complex of social status. They were unaware of the Aryans’ social divisions. It was the Aryans who had not only introduced the *Varna* based social system in India which in course of time transformed into rigid and irrational caste system but also gradually pushed the non-Aryans to the worst living conditions.
1.2 Vedic Age and Dalits

Dalits were inhumanly and irrationally treated community since the centuries. From ancient time they were known by different terms. For the sake of domination, Aryans had continued their wars against aboriginals. The ancient scriptures show that Dalit in ancient time were known as “Dasa”, “Dasyu”, and “Nisadasa”:

The inhabitants of the cities of the five rivers against whom the Aryans had carried on incessant wars and called them Dasyu, Dasa, Asura, Pani etc were none but the bearers of the Indus Valley Civilization. (Sur 21)

In the course of time, the Aryans got supremacy in every aspect– social, cultural, political, educational and spiritual. As they became the dominant class, the natives or the original Indian inhabitants were pushed as the servile class. Further, the Aryans had considered the natives as inferior human beings. According to Sanjay Sharma, “The Aryans... For centuries they remained involved in constant conflict with the indigenous people, whom they looked down upon as culturally inferior and ritually unclean.” (Dalit Society 35)

The Aryans found ‘three groups of people-‘Dasas’, ‘Dasyus’, and ‘Nisadas’, which were then in the state of backwardness.’ (Durrany 7) They were gradually made slaves. In the course of time, they were thrown to live in inhuman conditions. Later on, their touch was even caused the pollution to the Aryans. Thus, after the settlement of the Aryans in India,
‘south of the Himalayas and the north of the Vindhyas’ (Verma 21); a new history began in the form of the Vedic Age:

The Aryans organised among themselves in three groups. The first group was of the warriors and they were called Rajayana, later they changed their name Rajayana to Kshatria. The second group was of the priests and they were called Brahmans. . . The third group was of the farmers and craftsmen and they were called Vaisia. The Aryans who conquered and took control over parts of north India subdued the locals and made them their servants. In this process the Vaisias who were the farmers and the craftsmen became the landlords and the businessmen of the society and the locals became the peasants and the craftsmen of the society. (Narang 56)

Thus, after the settlement of Aryans, they formed their society into three sanctions and the fourth sanction was of unwanted natives. Gradually, the Aryans had controlled over the regions of the native Indians and applied the Varna system on the original inhabitants of India. To enjoy the higher and good life style in society, they had created a social system of four Varnas:

The Rigvedic people originally had only two social classes: nobles and commoners. Eventually, they added a third: Dasas, of “darks.” These were, we
presume, the darker-skinned people, they had conquered. By the end of the Rigvedic period, social class had settled into four rigid castes: the caturvarnas, of “four colours.” At the top of the caturvarnas were the priests, or Brahmans. (Kandpal 34)

Thus, for their own good living purpose, they formed four classes or *Varnas*: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras on the basis of one’s ways of life and profession. This classification was on the basis of ‘self-will, functional, experience and inclination.’ (Verma 25)

The concept of untouchability did not exist during the early Vedic Age. ‘It is generally accepted that untouchability was not practised in Vedic period.’ (Kothiyal 125) There was no trace of untouchability and all human beings were equal and could change their profession, it shows the social mobility of their society. Swami Dayanand is of opinion that ‘untouchability was alien to Vedic culture . . . ’ (Sharan 9) Thus, it was the Aryans who for their better life style and comfort divided their society into four main divisions as well as divided individual’s life in four parts:

The first part . . . , the student period of life, acquiring knowledge, developing self-discipline and self-control, continence; the second was that of the
householder and man of the world; the third was that of the elder statesman who had attained poise and objectivity, and could devote himself to public work without the self desire to profit by it; and the last stage was that of the recluse, who lived a life largely cut off from the world’s activities. (Nehru 83)

The Aryans had formed a distinct kind of social order which was not hereditary when it was applied to their society. ‘In the Rig-Vedic period, descent or heredity was not a criterion of belonging to a particular Varna.’ (Sharma, S. 153) Liberty was offered to the people as could move from one Varna to another to adopt the desired occupation:

In the beginning the caste system was not a strict system and people could move from one Varna to another. Indologists give different dates to this period of change. Some claim the change occurred around 500 B.C. and other claim 500 A.D. Until then, communities and even singular person moved from one Varna to another Varna, because of their desire to adopt different occupations. There were some kings who belonged and Kshatria (warrior castes) and changed their status to become religious Brahmans. (Narang 63)

‘Of the other essential features of the Caste System, viz., prohibition of inter-dining and intermarriage, no such restriction is even remotely hinted at in the hymns of the Rigveda.’ (Kapoor 101)
But in course of time, this ideal social system was distorted by the Brahmins to control their grip over the lower strata of life. As time passed, *Varnas* were divided into castes and plenty sub-castes. Further, its connection was considered right from the birth. Thus they changed their social structure. ‘They changed ‘varnas’ into castes, based on birth heredity.’ (Verma 26) So the *Varna* system ‘which was flexible in the beginning, degenerated into rigid caste system in course of time and lingered on when it had outlived utility.’ (Kothiyal 125) In this way, the society of the Aryans ‘turned into birth and heredity based caste system. Each caste cut off itself into separate and hierarchical endogamous communities.’ (Verma 42)

This change resulted in the dehumanized conditions of the Shudras. ‘Gradually the Varnas became distinguished, marked off and separated from one another leading to immobility between the four Varnas and created disabilities for the fourth *Varna*, the *Shudras*.’ (Sharma, S. 153) History has noted that in different ages, Dalits were identified by different names. They were no longer being considered as human beings. In the famous Purusha Sukta hymn of the Rigveda the reducing status of the Dalits is recorded. It reveals the creation of man from God’s different parts of body. The oldest recorded reference of the Varna system is in the Purusha Sukta of Rigveda 10.90.12 which depicts:

*His mouth became the knowledgeable Brahmin, his arms the warrior and protector Kshatriya, his thighs the earners the Vaishyas and his feet was born the service class (the Sudras).* (Vaidya 108)
The Aryans had cunningly used the religious scriptures to enslave the servile class. Further, they reduced the status of servile class to the lowest level. This legacy of the Aryans is rightly exposed by James Massey in his critical work *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India’s Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation*:

Systematically, the first colonizers [Aryans] took away the basic human rights of the first people of the India and managed to conceive them that their resulting status had been ordained by God himself. (Massey 12)

The Dalits were left to live like lepers. In addition, Aryans took off religious, educational, economical, political and social rights of Dalits. The Dalits were mercilessly forced to accept the irrational and cruel ways of life ‘which forbade them the right of any education, rising arms and to do any business and trade.’ (Chand 4) Their touch and shadow were considered even polluting; ‘the wind which had touched the body of a Candala [Dalit] was considered impure’ (Fick 319); such was the position forcefully implemented by the Aryan on the non-Aryans in ancient time.

The Rigvedic period was followed by the era of Upanishads. In the literature of Upanishads, there are certain references which reveal that the problems of Dalits were getting worse. Time of Upanishads era ‘dating from about 800 BC,’ (Nehru 86), the degraded conditions of the Dalits became worse than the worst. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* the much shoddier condition of the oppressed is depicted. The untouchables were known as *Chandala,*
during this period. According to this text the out-castes were considered as dog or swine. As Messy James has quoted the *Chandogya Upanishad*:

Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here – the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a *Brahmin*, or the womb of a *Ksatriya*, or the womb of a *Vaishya*. But those who are of stinking conduct here – the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine or the womb of a *chandala* (10:7). (Massey 13)

In the *Dharmasutras*, the substantiation of the pathetic conditions of the untouchables is recorded. These creations of the *Dharmasutras* ‘were complied between 600 and 300 B.C.’ (Yamazaki 4) which state that the untouchables were excluded from the customs and public dealing of the Aryans’ society. There were strict punishments for the untouchables, if they violate the social, cultural, and religious norms made by the Aryans. Severe punishments were imposed on them. Further, these punishments were justified with the help of the religious scriptures. There are plenty examples in the scriptures which present cruelty and injustice on outcastes, untouchables. The ears of the untouchables, for instance, were filled with molten-tin and dark-red pigment, if they overheard the Veda chants. Further, if the untouchables recited the chant themselves, their tongues were cut out. The pinnacle of the punishment was that if the untouchables learnt the chants by heart then their bodies were split in twain. These inhuman and irrational punishments for the untouchables are nothing but the extreme hatred of the Aryans’ for untouchable. This cruelty is evident in the Hindu scriptures:
Maitreyani Samhita gave right to the upper castes to accept the shudras in the form of property. Jaiminiya Brahmin literature ordered the shudras to wash the feet of the upper castes. According to the Latyatan Shraut scriptures food grains, a cow, agricultural implement and two labourers (ati-shudra) should be donated to the Brahmins. Gradually, the process of turning the labourers into slaves, preventing them from education, knowledge and religious rituals began. Stories of their defiling touch and sight gained ground. Then came Maun Smruti [Manu Smriti] making the four-fold caste system rigid and permanent. (Sivaprakasam 78-79)

Ordains were depicted in Manu Smriti. Those codes were related to social, cultural, and religious duties to all Varnas at that time. According to the Manu Smriti, the untouchable should not be treated as human beings. The worst condition of the untouchables found ‘in the Dharmasutras was systemized in Manu Smriti, which was compiled between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200.’ (Yamazaki 8) The Code of Manu ‘must have been composed between 170 BC and 150 BC.’ (Mandal 164) The purpose behind the creation of the ‘Manu Smriti’ was to distort the occupation based humanitarian social system established by the Vedic society; and to control the entire social system for the benefits of the Brahmin class. In the hymns of ‘Manu Smriti’, the very cruel, inhuman and irrational rules related to the Chandalas and Sapakas were given:

According to Manu, they were to be the hangmen who were to be prohibited entry into villages and towns during day time, were to be stamped with some
marks and were to serve as the undertakers for unclaimed corpses.

(Sivaprakasam 5)

‘The Chandalas and Sapakas are supposed to be the forbears of today’s Dalits.’ (Massey 15)

Cruelties of the Aryans are further evident in the verses of ‘Manu Smriti’. These verses of ‘Manu Smriti’ respectively depict irrationality and inhumanity of the Aryans. They had imposed the rules of ‘Manu Smriti’ on downtrodden. Following verses of ‘Manu Smriti’ show the worst alien conditions of the Dalits:

But the dwellings of Kandalas and Svapakas shall be outside the village, they must be made Apapatras, and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.

(Muller The Sacred Book Vol.XXV. 10. 51, 414)

Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place. (10.52, 414)

A man who fulfils a religious duty, shall not seek intercourse with them; their transactions (shall be) among themselves, and their marriage with their equals. (10.53, 414)
Their food shall be given to them by others (than an Aryan giver) in a broken dish; at night they shall not walk about in villages and towns. (10.54, 414)

Thus, by the time *Manu Smriti* had composed the condition of the untouchables forcefully thrown to its nadir. In later times, with the elaboration of ritualism, class status became hereditary and the Shudras were not even allowed to hear the sacred word of the Vedas. The *Manu Smriti* claims that by the time it was written, the Aryan society had included fifth class. The people of this class were having no position in any of the four Varnas and were associated with the lowest kind of jobs:

In Puranic period i.e., 3rd century A.D. to 1000 A.D., due to certain economic forces the people belonging to higher castes indulged in lower occupations and naturally they were declared as out castes [out-castes] and once they lost their position it was not possible for them to regain it. (Sivaprakasam 5)

As a result, the Aryans regarded them as the untouchables, the fifth *Varna*. Prath Majumder has noted that ‘the menial workers, the so called “untouchables”, were placed in a new varna, Panchma (meaning fifth).’ (Majumder *Indian*) These castes were the outcasts who were untouchable to the four *Varnas*. These untouchables worked in degrading jobs like cleaning, sewage etc. For the sake of their benefits, Aryans had established such customs in the name of religion and society that had been resulted into untouchability:
It was the handy work of some priests who wrote the Puranas and the Smrities. The objective was to ensure a way of livelihood by exploiting the masses in the name of religion. For this purpose, a number of superstitions and myths were also created. While the Upanishads took care of the spiritual pursuits, codes of conduct for mankind, like the *Manu Smriti*, were written to bind the masses in such a way that they could never think of getting out of the bonds. . . . Caste became inherited by birth alone and could not then be changed. The *Shudras* were further classified into different sub-castes according to the type of manual work they were required to perform. Those who performed the dirtiest types of work, came to be regarded as the untouchables. (Vaidya 71)

Thus, the Aryans had created the irrational social framework which was good and beneficial only to the Aryans and the worst for the untouchables. The untouchables were considered the cause of pollution for the Aryans. Thus, Aryans had used religious scriptures very cunningly to remove human identity of untouchables. Untouchables were once human being with dignity, equality and identity; now living the worst life. The life they lived was worse than animals. ‘The first three castes had social and economical rights which the Shudra and the untouchables did not have.’ (Narang 59)

Cry for power and domination let the Aryans fling the Dalits to the worst conditions of living. For this purpose they used religious scriptures as their weapons. Aryans’ hunger for
authority and wealth was evident in the later Vedic epochs as ‘the religion of the Later Vedic period is dominated by the Brahmans, or priestly book, which was composed sometime between 1000 and 850 BC. Later Vedic society is dominated by the Brahmans and every aspect of Aryan life comes under the control of priestly rituals and spells.’ (Kandpal 35) The sole purpose of the Aryans was to dominate and to control society, economy, and culture only and only for their benefits. For this purpose, Aryans had used religion as the most effective weapon against the downtrodden and untouchables. Further, they turned Dalits’ life as a living hell:

On the basis of law of karma, the varna system was translated into a caste hierarchy wherein the majority of the lower strata were subjected to inequality, exploitation and oppression. The metaphysics of Hindu religion became the citadel of caste system which made millions of the lower caste virtual serfs, slaves and sub-human. (Verma 41)

Aryans’ cry for power and prosperity had distorted good social order into a rigid caste system around about 700 B.C. ‘The Vedicas, after their deterioration, transformed into Hindu Dharma with evils of plurality of religions, idol worship of gods and goddesses, other-worldliness, reincarnation, casteism, exploitation of lower castes, degradation of women and the like.’ (Verma 17) With the help of religion, the social and cultural evils were established by the upper castes which had exploited all the castes. The best examples of it are found in the Indian epics. The epics present the degraded conditions of the untouchables. One of the
stories from the Ramayana shows how the Aryans had pushed the status of the Shudras to sully. During the reign of God Rama only the Aryans were permitted to do penance and meditation. Shambuka, the Shudra wanted to attain spiritual height. It was believed that as he started penance and a 15 year old Brahmin boy died. The father of the dead kid complained to Lord Rama to restore life of his child. Rama after learning the circumstances of the death went to the Shudra; and said to Shambuka:

“You are indeed blessed. Tell me, in which caste have you been born? I am Rama, son of Dasaratha. Out of curiosity I have asked you this question. Tell me the truth. Are you a Brahmin, Ksatriya or a Sudra?” The ascetic replied, “O King! I am born of the Sudra caste. I want to attain divinity by such penance. Because I want to attain divinity, I will not tell lies. I am a Sudra by caste, and my name is Samvuka.” (Massey 13-14)

As the story presents, when Rama came to know that Shambuka was the Shudra he drew his sword and in a moment without thinking anything severed the head of the Shambuka. When Rama was asked about the Brahmin boy to life, he replied that the Brahmin boy had already been revived the moment the Shudra ascetic was killed. Thus, God Rama had killed an innocent Dalit ascetic. This cruel act of Lord Rama is considered just in the epic Ramayana.

Another historical story of cruelty and injustice of the Aryans is found in the Mahabharata. The story in the Mahabharata illustrates the degraded state of the natives.
Ekalavya had to cut off his right thumb as a consequence of his learning of archery too well. He mastered the skill so well that his skill and ‘proficiency was greater than Arjuna, a Kshatriya.’ (Sivaprakasam 104) The point is that the low castes were denied the right to get education; and if they would do so, they had to pay too big price:

The legends of Shambuk getting beheaded by king Rama and Eklavya getting physically disabled by guru Dronacharya were deliberately incorporated in the great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata to terrorise the Shudras and also to brainwash them to remain ever loyal to the doctrine of varna-duties or else to keep prepared to meet the fate of Shambuk and Eklavya for attempts of violation. (Chand 4)

Thus, such are the inhuman attitudes, codes and customs of the Aryans which had divided society into the worst and the most distorted form. In all this process Dalits’ human identity was gradually degrading.

As time passed, the Aryans society had created the fifth *Varna* and it was at the periphery of Aryan society. The fifth *Varna* developed from different ages and from different stages. During the post-Vedic time the ideal *Varna* system metamorphosis into the worst form of society with its irrational notion of untouchability. It was this age when the concept of Varna system developed into its ugliest and distorted form of untouchability. The Aryans,
even, had not left hope for the untouchables that they could ever live like a human being. Thus, ‘in the hierarchy of the caste system they were more degraded and treated as outcastes, untouchables,’ (Namishray 171) in the Aryan social structure; and their ‘touch was considered to be profane.’ (Namishray 171)

Thus, by the end of ‘200 BC, this process of mixing and transforming was more or less complete and the culture we call “Indian” was fully formed.’ (Kandpal 36) Thus, new India came into existence whose distinctive hallmark was her irrational and degraded caste system which gave birth to the Untouchability; and it became unacceptability of the fifth Varna. This social rejection is differently evaluated by the scholars. Kothiyal cited about the origin of the untouchability as Dr. Ambedkar believed; ‘Associated with casteism was untouchability. […] Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believes that the practice of untouchability began in post-Buddhism period.’ (Kothiyal 125) The reference of it is found in Buddhist Pali textbooks:

Buddhist Pali textbooks speak of the people ranking socially below them as hina-jati, “low tribes”, marked out by their pursuits of “low crafts”, hina-sippa, and instance the workers in rushes, fowlers and cart-makers, who were aboriginal people; as also mat-makers, barbers, potters, weavers and leather workers. (Kapoor 219)
Thus, the Buddhist texts clearly mention about the worst conditions of the unwanted untouchables. They were treated worst than animals. Animals had a better life than untouchables. Injustices were heaped on them and cruelties were justified with the help of religion and religious scriptures. Thus, Aryans had removed the human identity of downtrodden and untouchables.

1.3 First Attempt to retrieve Untouchable’s Human Identity

Injustice and cruelty cannot be imposed by any race in any human society forever. The history of human civilization presents the truth that whenever cruelty reaches at the apex; its fall takes place by eminent person or his ideology. The Aryans’ supremacy was challenged thus by the revolutionary, rational, pioneers of Jainism and Buddhism. The pioneers of these sects have strongly challenged century old Aryans inhuman social structure.

During the Post-Vedic era, the Aryans’ cry for supremacy resulted into the utmost worst social structure for downtrodden and untouchables. The Brahmins had controlled every fields of life with more strength; so the Kshatriya reacted against ‘the domination of the priestly class, who claimed various privileges, was one of the causes of the origin of new religious sects of Hinduism such as Jainism and Buddhism.’ (Sivaprakasam 7) The two faiths, Jainism and Buddhism were not only the spiritual movement against the Vedic Dharma but also a movement of social reform against the irrational and inhuman ideology
and social dealings of the Aryans. Unlike the Aryans’ religion, both the faiths advocate equality of human beings. Thus, the very first revolt was made by the Buddhists and Jains against the Aryans’ injustice and cruelty to human beings. According to S. L. Verma, “Both Jains and Buddhists were highly critical of the Brahmanical system: birth based caste hierarchy, oppression of the low castes, animal sacrifices, allurement of heaven, performance of ritualism etc.” (Beyond 35)

In Jainism and Buddhism caste system had no place. Mahavira had preached his followers that it is one’s action decides who he is and not the birth. In The Jain Sutra this is clearly mentioned:

By one’s action one becomes a Brahmin or a Kshatriya or Vaishya or a Shudra. (Muller The Sacred Book Vol.XLV, 140)

Buddha, too, preached his disciples in the same doctrine of action. But unlike Mahavira he was highly critical of Aryans’ social structure and condemned Vedic literature which preached caste system and distorted the status of human beings on the birth based Varna system. In Buddhism the social distinctions and caste barriers were forbidden. It had also restored dignity of human as human being by improving the status of the untouchables. Thus, it was the first attempt to retrieve human identity of untouchables.
Buddha denounced the folly of social inequality and the injustice committed on the name of caste. He believed in reason based actions. Buddha ‘was the strongest opponent of caste and the earliest and staunchest upholder of equality. No caste, no inequality, no superiority, no inferiority –all are equal.’ (Mandal 62) Both the founders of the faiths, Buddha and Mahavira, had considered then existing codes and conducts of the Brahmanism as irrational and inhuman. And they established their own liberal and humanistic ideology for the downtrodden and untouchables:

. . . both Mahavira and Buddha put up their own original alternatives, challenging all the fundamentals of the Vedic Dharma. In place of their hierarchical unequal and exploitative society, they advanced the ideal of a society of equals. There was no distinction of any kind. All were free to realize emancipation: kaivalya and nirvana. (Verma 35-36)

Both Buddha and Mahavira had strongly challenged the religion of the Aryans and exposed the element of irrationality. Buddha preached the supremacy of good ethics and morality over philosophical speculation and ritualism. And this new faith of Buddha is, unlike the religion of Aryans, based on equality, freedom and reason. Thus, for the first time, both the pioneers had strongly challenged the Aryans’ orthodoxy and accepted unaccepted mass of the Aryans society. It was the first attempt to retrieve human identity of downtrodden and oppressed.
Challenge of the Jainism and Buddhism had forced the Aryans to change their outlook for supremacy. To survive with their hereditary-based caste system, they tried to control every field. To save their status and supremacy in society, the process of reformation took place in the religion of the Aryans. As a part of their reform, as the study presents that the concept of Untouchability was introduced in Indian society:

Brahmanism felt threatened by Buddhism, it adopted a holier than thou attitude, and not only did avoid killings, but also considered the dead bodies and those having anything to do with them polluted and untouchables. Thus those people who disposed of carcasses and worked with hides and skins, and did such other things came to be regarded as untouchables. (Kothiyal 127)

The humanism of Buddha and Mahavira was condemned by the Aryans. As an outcome the untouchability became a prominent characteristic of the Aryans’ social system. According to R. K. Kshirsagar, “Untouchability, which originated initially in the contempt and hatred of Buddhism by the Brahmanic forces became an integral and essential part of Hindu social habit observed by the caste Hindus all over the country.” (Dalit Movement 14) Untouchability based social structure of Indian society is not practiced anywhere in the world. It is irrational and inhuman.

The role of the untouchables, in their daily life and society was to perform menial, degrading, disgusting jobs. The conditions of the untouchable were made so inhuman that
they were not treated as living human beings but as the ugly creatures whose shadows were even polluting to the Aryans:

The untouchables were not allowed to touch people from the four Varnas. They were not allowed to enter houses of the higher Varnas. They were not allowed to enter the temples. They were not allowed to use the same wells used by the four Varnas. In public occasions they were compelled to sit at a distance from the four Varnas. . . but also even a contact with their shadow was seen as polluting. (Narang 65)

A person born as Untouchable remains Untouchable forever. He may be superior to the upper caste in every aspect but because of his low caste birth he remains the untouchable and exploited. There was no way open to him by which he could escape from his destiny. The Aryans had pushed the untouchables at the lowest level of living. They had also exploited untouchables in all the phases of life. Untouchable’s ignorance was the means of benefits of the upper castes:

The caste Hindus could successfully exploit the ignorance and helplessness of the untouchables to such an extent that they were made to believe that it was most religious and divinely instituted, and resistance to it would bring divine wrath. (Kshirsagar 31)
Dr. Ambedkar has remarked on the wretched conditions of the untouchables and so called religious supremacy of the Aryans. S. N. Mandal, in his study has noted Dr. Ambedkar, “The Hindu religion consists primarily of rituals and observances. It is a religion of temples, Love to man has no place in it.” (Mandal 29)

Thus, both the preachers, Buddha and Mahavira had revolted against existed irrational and inhuman social and religious ways of life and tried to set humanitarian and equal society. They had tried to give human identity of the untouchables. But their efforts, at large, could not cure the cancer of the untouchability thoroughly. Thus, ‘neither Jainism nor Buddhism could make any substantial change in the position of Sudras.’ (Sivaprakasam 7)

The pitiable condition of the untouchables was continued after the death of Buddha. The Aryans had used religious means in such a masterly ways that the conditions of the untouchables were getting worse than the worst. Gradually, the Aryans had controlled again each and every phase of society, religion, and economy; and pushed the untouchables to the level of sub-human and then no human. A hope for human dignity, equality, identity and freedom for Dalits became utopia. Thus, no scope of change for better life was left for the untouchables. Aryans had used religion and religious scriptures most effectively to crush down the untouchables. Thus, again, human identity of untouchables and downtrodden was removed with the help of religion and religious scriptures.
Later on during the reign of Gupta dynasty, in 5\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. a Chinese visitor Fa-hsien ‘came to India in the (399-414 A.D.).’ (Sivaprakasam 8) He visited India when the Gupta King Vikramaditya (Chandra Gupta II) was ruling the country. He recorded the worst and ugliest conditions of the untouchables as they lived. He mentioned that the untouchables were considered pollution to the upper castes. And to keep away themselves, the Aryans had made inhuman codes and conducts for untouchables. He gave an account of the unimaginable pitiful conditions of the \textit{Chandalas} in following words:

Faihen refers to this special class of people called chandalas, who lived outside the city gates and had to strike a bamboo stick on the floor, while travelling on the road-side so that people might take precaution and were not touched by them. Their shadow was not to fall on the people. The chandalas reared pigs and birds and ate all kinds of foods. (Sivaprakasam 8)

Similarly, no hopes for the good and equal life for the untouchables were found during the reign of King Harsha (606 AD to 647 AD) of Gupta dynasty. Hsuan Tsang, a visitor from China paid his visit to India when Harsha was ruling the kingdom. This Chinese pilgrim had recorded the same pathetic and painful conditions of the untouchables. The statements of the Hsuan Tsang were noted by Fa-hsein in following manner:

The Chinese pilgrim takes notice of untouchables such as scavengers, executioners, etc. They live outside the village and took garlic and onion. The
untouchables announced their entry into the town by shouting loudly so that people might keep away from them. (Sivaprakasam 9)

Thus, these two visitors from China highlighted the worst life-conditions of untouchables. Both the visitors had noted that the candalas were considered as untouchable. The early medieval law books have noted that the untouchables have been called by different names and categories like antyajas, bhadhatu, barata, baruda, bheda, bhilla, candela, carmakara, dasa, nata, rajaka, doma, hadi, and svapakas. ‘Twelve categories of untouchables are mentioned in early medieval law books, but the actual number might be much more. Detailed rules in the law-book of Parasara suggest an increase in the number of candalas and svapakas.’ (Sharma, R. 260-61) Thus, by removing dignity, equality, freedom and identity of untouchables and downtrodden the upper castes had committed sin against humanity.

1.4 Medieval Period and Dalits

From ‘the 8th century C.E. to the end of the 17th century’ (Massey 30), the thousand years of Muslim domination too, shows the degrading status of the untouchables. The untouchables were considered the ugliest kind by the Hindus. The orthodox Hindus even preferred animal than the untouchables. The Hindu ‘had developed very complex social structure by the beginning of the 11th century.’ (Sivaprakasam 9) In that rigid and complex social structure the Hindus were enjoying economic, social, and religious supremacy and the
untouchables were given the ugliest jobs of the cleansing of villages and the like. Al-Beruni who came to ‘India around 1030 C.E.’ (Massey 16) has described how the Dalits at some stage in that period were treated by the Hindus:

The people called Handi, Doma (Domba), Candala and Badhatau [names for Dalits communities given by others] are not reckoned among any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleaning of the village and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by their occupations. In fact, they are considered like illegitimate children; for according to general opinion they descended from a Sudra father and a Brahmani mother as the children of fornication; therefore, they are degraded outcastes (Alberuni’s India, ed. E.C. Sachau, vol. I, pp. 101f.). (Massey 16)

During the 11th century the untouchables were excommunicated from the society of the Hindus. So the untouchables had to live outside villages and towns. Further ‘they suffered from many social and economic disabilities which made their lives miserable.’ (Sivaprakasam 9) Al-Beruni had also mentioned that during the eleventh century there were no great differences ‘between the vaisya and the sudra.’ (Yamazaki 9) Thus in rural India, caste origins were more readily apparent during this period. Untouchables, as a result, remained excluded forever from the local social, economical and religious life. As a result, untouchables were not in position to revolt against such irrational, inhuman, and orthodox social structure. The brains of the untouchables were washed in such a manner with the help of the religion, social codes and conducts that the untouchables had to accept their inhuman
conditions forever. They had lost their hope for any improvement in existing status of theirs. Thus, after deaths of Buddha and Mahavira till 11th century A. D., for untouchables and downtrodden to think of equality, dignity, identity and freedom was nothing but an imagination.

A new kind of socio-religious movement was started during ‘12th to the 17th century’ (Sivaprakasam 11) which is known as Bhakti movement. It originated, ‘and flourished for the first time in south India from the 6th century onwards.’ (Chandra 3) Gradually, it was spread all over India. It was a protest movement. This protest movement occurred against social discrimination. The saint-poets of the movement had composed songs in their vernacular languages which were simple, witty and satirical in their tone. At the same time, the songs of the saint-poets protested against caste-system and ritualism of the Hindus. The aim of these saint-poets was to reform not only the evils of the Hindu religion but also the caste system as a whole through their practice and perching. They preached through spiritual songs. In the course of time it became the stronger movement:

This movement was geared by a set of saints in different parts of India: Ramananda, Kabir, Vallabhacharya, Nanak, Surdas, Tulsi Das, Raidas, Mirabai in North, Chaitanya, Sankara Dev in East; Namdev, Tukaram, Sant Gyaneswar, Eknath, Ram Das in West, Ramanuja, Purander Das and Basava in South India. This movement was reformist in the sense that it attempted to correct some of the evils in Hinduism, particularly the practice of untouchability without questioning the caste system. (Sivaprakasam 11)
The history of India presents that after the Buddhism and Jainism, the *Bhakti* movement becomes the protest against the cruelty of the Hindus towards the untouchables. The movement had tried to establish the egalitarian society in India. Though the aim of the saint-poets was to attain spiritual divinity, simultaneously, they tried to establish egalitarian equality of human beings in the rigid society of the Hindus. These saint-poets were interested in equality but not at the cost of the caste system. They wanted to change the status of the untouchables by restoring them as human beings in the orthodox social structure of the Hindus. Saints from every caste has proclaimed one notion that caste and religion have nothing to do with the devotion to God and all are equal:

Accordingly, the *Dalit* community has shaped themselves for a ‘new self-image’ starting roughly from the *Bhakti* Movement (12th to 18th centuries) which attempted to purify Hinduism of its evils and fought against the tyranny of the caste system and produced great saints like Chokhamela, Eknath, Pandita Ramabai, Kabir, Ravidas and many more who left an immense appeal for the establishment of an egalitarian society. (Sharma, P. 3)

The saint-poets of the *Bhakti* movement have presented in their songs– religious tolerance, propagation of fraternity, and social reform. They preached the basic ideology that in the eyes of God all are equal. All saint-poets had practiced human equality and had rejected notion of the caste system based on inequalities. The saints like Chokhamela, Kanaka, Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Kanakadasa, Basavanna,
Nanak, etc., denounced inherited social status. Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) the founder of the Sikhism, for instance, who declared that God lies where the lowest of the low lies:

The lowest among the low castes,

those still lower and the most lowest –

Nanak is in solidarity with them;

he does not care for the high and mighty.

Because your grace falls on the land

where the poor are looked after. (Sivaprakasam 31)

These saints had questioned the authority of the Brahmins and announced that everyone could devote himself to God. They believed that life in every human being is Divine. According to them only the ignorant would do injustice against their own brethren by irrational practices. For these saint-poets everyone is equal. For them no one is superior or inferior. The Hindu saints had accepted the untouchables as their disciples and thus spread the message of equality. At the same time, they condemned the Hindus for their inhuman and cruel attitudes towards the untouchables and downtrodden. Thus, these saint-versifiers, in their literary works, have constantly commented about inheriting social status. They had not only presented Dalits in their works but also asked for equality and identity of Dalits:
In the fourteenth century, Ramanand spread the Bhakti Cult. He had disciples of all castes including the Dalits. The Hindi speaking belt of U.P. [Uttar Pradesh] and Bihar found their ontological roots from the Bhakti movement. The non-brahmanical spiritual leaders like Kabir, Ramadas articulated their messages through folk languages and tried to rebuild the cultural edifice structuring them on the scaffold of equality and fraternity. Tallapaka Annamacharya through his sankirtanas stood firm on the side of the Dalits. Chenna, the Dalit was the staunch devotee of Siva in Mallikharjuna Pandit’s Sivatatwasaram. In Somalilakadha, Palkuriki Somanadha affirmed that a Dalit too could be worshipped. Sri Krishana Deva Raya in his Amuktamalyada made Dalit his heroin his Mala Dasari Kadha. Vemana’s Sathakas also are replete with his paradigms of equality. (Padmarani 78)

The untouchable saint Namdev whose writings adopted into Sikh holy book Sri Guru-Granth Sahib, has revealed his first hand experience in his songs. He protested against the distorted social conditions of the untouchables. At the same time, he also presented the irrational practices of the Hindus towards the untouchables:

In a cheerful mood to thy temple I came.

While performing devotion, I was pushed off.

O Lord, why have you given me birth

in the home of a washerman?
They considered my caste very low. (1-5, Massey 31)

Chokhamela and Kanaka both were the untouchable saint-poets and both ‘were not allowed entry into the temple of Vithal at Pandharpur and the temple of Krishna at Udipi respectively.’ (Sharma, S. 44) These untouchable saint-poets had composed their first hand experiences into their literary creations. Chokhamela, Mahar by caste was a Maharashtrian untouchable, is one of the great names of the Bhakti tradition. He has protested against untouchability. He has presented his first hand experiences in his songs. He had composed Abhangs which expressed his devotional facet towards Lord Vitthal. At the same time they also highlighted the anti-social practices of the Hindus towards the untouchables of that time. He satirised the orthodox Brahmins who practiced untouchability. In his article Dalit Sahitya: The Historical Background Zelliot has noted Abhanga of Chokhamela. In his one of the Abhangas, the saint-poet says that the folks who believed in purity and impurity are ignorant because all the five elements are having impurity in them. Further he says that in the creation of the body there is nothing but impurity. So, not a single person on earth is pure. Thus, the saint-poet, by presenting the truth rejects the irrational belief of untouchability:

The only impurity is in the five elements.

There is only one substance in the world.

Then who is pure and who is impure?

The cause of pollution is in the creation of the body.
In the beginning.

At the end,

There is nothing but pollution.

No one knows anyone who is born pure.

Choka asks, in wonder

Who is pure? (Chokhamela 4)

The untouchables were not considered a part of human society but something less than a human being by the Hindus. Such irrational and inhuman practices of the Hindus were exposed in *Abhanga* 76 of Chokhamela. In it he had depicted the harsh reality related to the worst condition of untouchables. He explained to Hindus that God had created everyone equal. He remarked in his *Abhanga* 76 that body in itself is impure and not the soul. He also satirised the ignorance of the Hindus about the purity and impurity. He left message that every one is equal. He has also presented first hand experiences being untouchable in his *Abhanga*. His agonized psyche is presented thus:

O god, my caste is low; how can I serve you?

Everyone tells me to go away: how can I see you?

When I touch anyone, they take offence.

Chokamela wants your mercy. (Nimavat 11)
Raidas, the untouchable saint-poet had contributed to uplift the status of the untouchables. His spiritual songs are adopted in the holy scriptures of Sikh i.e. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. One of his songs from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* reveals that every one is the creation of God and there is no one lower or higher but all are equal. Here he criticises the Hindus for their inhuman and irrational approaches to the untouchables. He has given examples of water of Ganga and has remarked that after it mixes with wine it would lose its sacredness. Whereas the Tar Tree is considered as impure and yet when religious writings are printed on the paper made of the Tar Tree, people bow down and worshipped to it:

Well-known is my cobbler’s caste,

but still in my heart, I continue to praise my Lord.

You should know even the wine made with sacred Ganga water

the real devotees will not drink.

Even after it gets mixed up with impure liquids,

the sacred Ganga water is not different from it.

The Tar tree is considered impure,

so also the paper made from it is considered such.

But when words of the Lord’s devotion are printed over it,

it is worshipped and bowed down to. (2-11, Massey 32)
Raidas was an enlightened soul. So he knew the reason. The same rational belief he has presented in the spiritual song, even though he was forced to obeisance by the Brahmins. He remarks that the untouchables have been doing great task of purity by removing dead animals from the streets of Banaras. And yet they are subject of hatred of upper-castes in general and Brahmins in particular:

People of my caste are hide-beaters and binders,

carrying, dead animals around Banaras.

Yet upper-caste Brahmins to me make obeisance, (12-14, Massey 32)

Thus, the saint-poet has used a satire on irrationality and inhumanity of Brahmins of Banaras. Raidas in his many songs sang of equality and equal status of human beings. According to him every one is equal and all are dear to God. There is no difference of caste for the Almighty:

God does not reside only, “in families where there are Vaishnava sadhus. He resides everywhere and does not distinguish between high castes and outcastes, between the rich and the poor. For Him brahman, vaishya, shudras, khatri, dom, chandal and mlechahha (the untouchables) are the same.” (Shobha 61)
Kabir, the most outstanding of the medieval saint-poets was a social-reformer and preacher of religious truth. He was a low-caste weaver. He had preached about equality of all human beings. He himself had suffered the irrational dealings of the Hindus on the name of religious customs and caste. So he has denounced harshly caste-based and religion-based discriminations in his songs. The orthodox Hindus and Muslims did not like Kabir’s radical thinking based on equality. So he was criticised by the orthodox and shallow-minded Hindus and Muslims. ‘When the low-caste weaver Kabir began preaching to men of high caste the principle of equality of all men, he was reproached for his daring.’ (Hedayetullah 209) He wanted to change ethically and socially the orthodox minds of the Hindus and of the Muslims. For this purpose he used his spiritual songs as his weapon against the Hindus and Muslims not only to expose their hypocrisy but also to satirise their irrational and inhuman practices:

... Kabir ... like the Buddha, denounced the folly of social inequity and the injustice perpetrated in the name of caste. Kabir ridiculed the orthodoxy of both Hindu and Muslims and challenged them, like any later scientific rationalist, to justify their sham and hypocrisy. (Machwe 28)

He had interwoven his own personal experiences of being the victim of the Hindus’ irrational and inhuman practices into his *padas*, songs and *bhajans*. These saintly compositions become the reformers like him. Kabir protested against the unequal, irrational, and orthodox practices of the Hindus and Muslims. Thus, his eye-opener creations have created a large number of followers for him and his ‘personal protest becomes the voice of the dumb millions.’ (Machwe 39) Such protest, Kabir had presented in his poetic creations. In his poem *Such an*
Illusion, Kabir has used very bitter tongue to explain rationalism and humanism to orthodox Hindus and Muslims. He has firmly remarked that those who say that they know Vedas and Koran and yet practice untouchability or irrational approaches are lost. And in true sense, they are the ignorant people:

Such an illusion in this vast creation –

Ved and Koran, Heaven and Hell,

O fool, search, you are lost,

The same bones and skin and urine and excreta

and blood and ass-hole, one stamp,

The entire creation is by the same drop.

Who is Brahmin and who is Shudra? (1-2, 7-11, Machwe 43)

Kabir was a saint but worked as a social reformer. He vehemently and with logical arguments denounced the caste system. He was considered as the consistent critic of rigidness and irrational contemporary society and its values. He became the voice of the untouchables and downtrodden. He was of belief that to ask a saint was stupid. According to him, God wanted a true devotion and nothing else. It would no matter to God whether a person belonged to high or low caste:
It is but folly to ask what the caste of a saint maybe;

The barber has sought God, the washer-woman, and the carpenter–

Even Raidas was a seeker after God,

The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.

Hindus and Moslems alike have that End, where remains no mark of
distinction. (4-9, Tagore 1-2)

“Equality and one-ness of the humankind,” according to Savitri Chandra Shobha, “was a
central theme of Kabir’s social philosophy. He condemned the inequality of men on the basis
of religion, caste, tribe or race or family.” (Social 48) Kabir declared that all human beings
are equal on the basis of their original creation; and therefore to treat anyone as an inferior
and low is not just and it is a sin against humanity:

God in the beginning created Light,

all human beings belong to him.

Since from one Light is the whole world created,

Here who is noble or who is inferior? (Massey 31)

Kabir sang that everyone is born equal. In the eyes of God there is not any distinction, based
on caste or on religion. The harsh words of Kabir are presenting his anger towards the
orthodox and shallow-minded Hindus’ superior complex. The untouchables were not considered by the Hindus the member of human society, but they were considered as filthy beasts. Thus, orthodox Hindus considered untouchables inferior than animals. Kabir had opened the eyes of the Hindus through the following sharp satirical lines:

‘If thou art a Brahmin born of a Brahmin woman, why hast thou not come in another way?’

‘Whose art thou, the Brahmin? Whose am I, the Sudra: whose blood am I? Whose milk art thou? Kabir says, who reflects on Brahma, he may be called a Brahmin. (Machwe 31)

Kabir was a harsh and strict critique of the society. His criticism was on caste-based and religion-based discrimination. He preached to create egalitarian society and equality of all human beings. He strongly condemned the Hindus for their practices of inhuman rituals and untouchability. Kabir ridiculed the sense of superiority of the Hindus in his Pada (poem) 42:

Do you have milk in your veins while we have blood in ours?

If not, how are you a brahman and we sudras? (Shobha 49)

According to Surdas, a leading saint-poet, untouchable was far better than the orthodox Brahmin if the untouchable was a devotee of God. He believed in concept of
equality of human beings. In his poems, Surdas had sung for the superiority of the untouchables and condemned the orthodox Brahmins:

“An untouchable is superior to anyone if he is devotee;

Without devotion to Gopal, even the life of a twice-born is useless.”

(Shobha 62)

Thus, the *Bhakti* movement was centred to the communion with Almighty on its first rate importance and not wholly devoted to the task of metamorphosis of the untouchables into equal human beings. The saint-poets wanted to create a link between man and God through their *bhakti*. They preferred a change into then existed irrational, inhuman, and orthodox society but not caste-system as a whole. According to Professor Satish Chandra:

The *bhakti* movement can scarcely be called a mass movement in a strict sense, for its objective was individual salvation or mystical union with God rather than a change in the living conditions of the masses, except indirectly. (*Historical 1*)

On the whole, the saint-poets from upper castes and from untouchable communities have tried their best to eradicate the social evil of untouchability. But the conditions of Dalits remained as they were. The *Bhakti* movement had attempted to retrieve Dalit’s human identity, dignity and equality. But, more or less the attempt was not strong enough to retrieve Dalit’s human identity.
1.5 The Nineteenth: A Concrete Attempt to retrieve Dalits’ Human Identity

In nineteenth century we witnessed the emergence and development of a number of socio-religious movements in India like the “Brahmo Samaj”, the “Arya Samaj”, the “Nirankari Movement”, the “Kuka Movement”, the “Namdhari Movement”, the “Dev Samaj”, the “Chet Ramis”, the “Jat Pat Todak Mandal”, the “Radha Swami Faith”, the “Sivanarayana Paramahansa”, the “Sanatani Movement”, the “Christian Missions” etc. All these movements were focused on the reform of the socio-religious structure of the Indian society. They all adopted the task to accept the Untouchables. But, time and again, to a little extent, they succeeded in their adopted task. However, at large, the conditions of the untouchables were not improved. It was due to half-heartedness of the movements to obtain equality and dignity for the untouchables.

The Brahmo Samaj was established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social reformer in 1828 in Culcutta was ‘often remained dubious in their practice and percept and the removal of untouchability remained an idle talk as most of the problems that the Brahmo Samaj took up were of caste-Hindus.’ (Sharma, S. 2-3) Swami Dayanand Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj. It had undertaken the Suddhi (purification) ceremony to uplift the untouchables and succeeded in almost all the campaign. More than 36000 Meghs (Dalits) purified of the district of Sialkot and Gurdaspur. But the task adopted by the Arya Samaj remained incomplete and the structure of the society remained the same as it was:
Most of the times they did succeed in their ventures but in Hoshiarpur when they purified members of the Kabirpanthi sect–sweepers by caste –and then publicly inter-dined with them, the local orthodox society unleashed a violent movement against them and even threatened to outcastes the Aryas. This outburst occurred because the Samaj was dealing with the lowest of the low social groups of the outcastes who were not only ‘despicable’ themselves but undertook the most filthy and demeaning profession. (Sharma S. 5)

All these different socio-religious movements of the nineteenth century were founded with a view to change the distorted ways of orthodox Hindu society and to give untouchables status of human being. But the socio-religious movements could not change thoroughly the irrational, unequal, and distorted society of Hindus.

Jotirao Phule, (1826-90) started the real movement to lift up the status of untouchables to equal human level. He had faced himself the cruelty of the Hindus on the name of religion and caste. So, he made it his sole aim to change Indian society’s caste-based inequality. According to Ashok Jha, “It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason.” (Dalitisation 18)

He established the ‘Satyasodhak Samaj’ on 23rd September, 1873 at Pune.’ (Pawar 50) which was against orthodox Hindus for their inhuman attitudes towards the untouchables.
It was his firm faith that the domination of the Hindus on the Indian society was because of their scriptures and *Puranas*. He also believed that one of the purposes of these religious books was social, economical, and political exploitations of untouchables. According to him ignorance and economic exploitations were the responsible factors for the deteriorating conditions of the untouchables. So, he ‘attacked the Brahminical scriptures and *Puranas*, revolted against priest craft and the caste system and set on foot a social movement for the liberation of the Shudras, *Aitishudras* (Untouchables) and women.’ (Jha A. 19)

Phule wanted to establish society, equal for all. Therefore, he gave priority to the rational attitudes. He was of the firm faith that education was the most powerful means for the liberation of untouchables. His first step towards women education started with his wife Savitri Phule. He started school for the girls in 1848. Afterwards Phule had taken strong actions to educate the untouchable girls and for the same purpose he opened school in 1851 for untouchable girls. Thus, Jotirao was the first Indian to start a school for girls and women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Started the first school for girls at Budhawar Peth in the residential building of Tatyasaheb Bhide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julu 3, 1851</td>
<td>Started the school for girls at Budhawar Peth in the residential building of Annasaheb Chipalunkar.</td>
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</table>
1851 Started the school of backward classes girls at Ganj Peth in the premises provided by Sadashivrao Govande.

September 17, 1851 Started the school for girls at Rasa Peth.

March 15, 1852 Started school for girls at Vetal Peth. (Pawar 93)

As an outcome, not only boys but also girls were having education. At the same time, it gave Dalits to think about their human identity. Gradually, Dalits could understand how religion, power, and caste had been used against them and forced them to live like ugly, filthy and unhygienic animals. The best example of how education helped Dalits to understand their dignity and human values is found in the essay written by the fourteen years old Mang, the untouchable girl. She studied at Phule’s girls’ school. She writes:

‘The Brahmins say that the Vedas are their monopoly. They alone could study them. It is evident from this that we have no religious book. If the Vedas belong to Brahmins, it is their duty to conform their daily life to it. If we have no liberty to study books on religion, we are without religion. This is clear enough. O God, cell [tell] us which religion is descended from you so that we may follow it just as the Brahmins do their own.’
She continues, ‘Formerly we were buried alive in the foundations of buildings. We were not allowed to pass by the Talimkhana. If any man was found to do so, his head was cut off playfully. We were not allowed to read and write. If Bajirao II came to know about such a case, he would indignantly cry. “What! If Mahars and Mangs learn to read and write, are the Brahmins to hand over their writing work to them and to go round shaving widows with their bags hanging from shoulders?’ God has bestowed on us the rule of the British and our grievances are redressed. No body harasses us now. Nobody hangs us. Nobody buries us alive. Our progeny [progeny] can live now. We can now wear clothes, can put on cloth around our body. Everybody is at liberty to live according to his means. No bars, no taboos, no restrictions. Even the bazaar at the Guitekadi is open to us. (Sharma, S. 209)

Phule fought throughout his life in order to re-establish basic Human Rights: economic independence, social justice, equality, humanity, intellectuality, brotherhood, and independence of the women and of untouchables. Because of the inhuman attitudes of orthodox Hindus the untouchables who had lost their rights as human beings, Jotirao dreamt of creating a new society for them:

Satyashodhak Samaj was an organisation for social reforms but it was an organisation to make conscious primarily to the downtrodden castes so far neglected by the main stream. . . . It was more or less the social movement to
eradicate casteism, caste distinction, untouchability and the domination of priesthood in Hindu religion. (Pawar 54)

In order to spread his revolutionary thoughts, Phule had written prose, play and poetry. In his literary creations Phule had exposed the deteriorated conditions of the untouchables. In his ‘Trutiya Ratna’, the first modern, social and independent play in Marathi, knowledge is considered as the third jewel in Indian tradition. It depicts how the Brahmins had exploited ignorant untouchables. It also illustrates how the untouchables were cheated and deprived of their human rights because of their ignorance. Further, it effectively reveals the importance of education. The play has limited characters and incidents. In it, the character of Vidushak is important. It is through this character, Phule has pointed satire on Brahmins and their false teaching and preaching. The play on one hand criticises the Brahmins and on the other explains importance of education for the downtrodden and Dalits:

‘Trutiya Ratna’ drama is based on the realities of life. . . The central idea of the drama is that a poor Kunbi farmer is deprived of his valuable articles of his daily use because it was predicated that the proposed child birth was dangerous to the whole family. The way suggested to come out of the danger was to arrange dinner for Brahmins and to present him articles to avoid the ills of child birth at improper time. . .

An incident at temple to obtain the blessings of Brahmin priest after his dinner at Kunbi farmer is self explanatory. . . The inferences from the
incidents highlight the importance of education and the monopoly of Brahmins in the field of education.

In the end . . . the last scene a Kunbi farmer and lady Kunbi farmer approach to the night school of Jyotiba Fule [Phule] where education was free. The ignorance of knowledge was the origin of unvirtuous [wicked] behaviour is the advice given by the drama. (Pawar 110-11)

In ‘Gulamgiri’ (Slavery), for the first time Indian history is presented as the history of the fight between the untouchables and the orthodox Hindus. It is divided in sixteen parts. Phule had critically analysed the Hindu mythical stories in it. As Phule believed in rational thinking and humanity, he had critically analysed the Hindu mythological stories in this work. He had harshly satirised and criticised Hindu gods and goddesses in the play. He used very bitter tongue to criticise severely the orthodox Hindus and their gods like Brahma, Savitri, and Saraswati etc. Further, Phule explains why Hindu god Brahma is not respected or worshipped by the Hindus. His use of such bitter language is seen in the dialogue between Jotirao and Dhondiba:

JOTIRAO: Now Brahma had a wife, Savitri. Yet why did he invite the trouble of growing a foetus inside his mouth, giving it birth and developing him on his own head? This is extremely intriguing.
DHONDIBA: What about his other three heads? They were at least free from this bothersome mess. Was that bastard a sissy to like such a game which only little girls play in the house?

JOTIRAO: Now to call him a bastard is a bit problematic as he committed incest with his daughter Saraswati. This is why his other name is Daughter-Fucker. Nobody respects or worships him because of this heinous deed that he committed. (Phule 49)

Gulamgiri (Slevary) is written in form of conversation between Jotirao and Dhondiba, follower of Jotirao. It exposes that how in the name of creation of all Varnas the Brahmins have exploited the ignorant people.

In ‘Akhandadi Kavyarachana’ (Continuous Poetic Creations), Phule has presented his thoughts on enlightenment. It also criticises religious orthodoxy. Further, it presents teachings of untouchables in a sweet, simple lyrical genre. However, Phule did not care much about grammar. It is because his was a mission of awareness among the downtrodden and not to be a great writer. Thus, on one hand this lyrical work presents his rational thinking and on the other criticism and satire upon orthodox Brahmins.
In ‘Sarvajaneek Satyadharma Pustak’, the last book by Jyotirao was published posthumously in the year 1892 advocates Phule’s great thoughts of ‘Manav Dharma’ (Humanitarian Religion) for the common people:

The religion described in ‘Sarvajanik Satya Dharma’ is a religion irrespective of the consideration of country, time, colour of skin, castes and sects. It is universal religion... (Pawar 133)

In this book he has dreamt of a new society based on equality, fraternity, humanity. In it, he has also abandoned the rigid and outdated religious orthodoxy. Besides, the book presents a description of simple rites which lead to happiness along with the equality of men and women. After Phule’s death, Savitri Phule actively continued in the mission Jotirao Phule.

Thus, Phule had done mammoth efforts to lift up the untouchables socially, educationally and religiously. He tried his best to retrieve Dalit’s human identity. His were the concrete efforts for Dalit’s equality, dignity and identity. His efforts had awakened Dalits to fight for their human rights. Not only that but he had given a vision to the untouchable leaders to fight for the rights of their brothers:
He worked throughout his life for the cause of the oppressed people. Hence, he may rightly be called as the father of modern oppressed India. His philosophy of social reformation, eradication of untouchability and restoration of the toilers had a far reaching influence on the social political life on Maharashtra and ultimately on India. (Kshirsagar 45)

Thus, in the beginning, considering the history of India, there was no such social order before the Aryan came to India. The foundation of the making people untouchable was laid down in the Vedic era. Gradually, the process had moved on in Upnishadik and Puranic ages. As an out come, Dalits’ the identity of being human had been removed. To fight against such irrational and inhuman practices, Buddha and Mahavira raised their voices. Both had established new sects in which there were no such inhuman approaches towards untouchables. But the first recorded challenge in the history could not able to regain the lost human identity of the untouchables.

Afterwards, the orthodox and inhuman mentality of the upper castes made the condition deteriorating and worse day by day for untouchables. They developed such an inhuman mentality that they did not even prefer the touch of the untouchables’ shadow. The worst life of the untouchables had been unimaginable. In the course of time during the Bhakti era, the saint-poets from the Untouchables and Hindus came forward to empower the untouchables spiritually to the level of human being. But not strongly advocated by either of the saint-poets to restore the human identity of downtrodden and untouchables.
Later on it was Jotirao Phule who had strongly advocated the issues of the untouchables. He tried to lift up the social status of untouchables by the means of education and reason based ideology. He saw the seeds of new light for the Dalits and carved the way for the Dalit leaders to restore the human identity of Dalits.

Thus, the second half of the 19th century proved very significant period for untouchables’ emancipation. The gradual process to establish untouchables as human beings was started. Introduction of education to the downtrodden and untouchables played very significant role for the Dalits in the direction of human identity. For that, credit goes to the Phule couple.

Indian history presents Dalit’s human identity was not accepted in every era by different means. They were pushed at the periphery. For their human identity, enlightened Dalits and non-Dalits both raised their voice for justice. But their voice remained subsided for centuries.

Works Cited


