Chapter 6

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Punjab is one of the most prosperous states of India but on Human Development Index (HDI), it is ranked 9th. Inspite of its composite culture and strong history of social reform movements, including Ad-dharam movement in 1920s, caste bias is still rampant in Punjabi society even after 64 years of independence. The status of dalits against the expectation from a developed state like Punjab is rather exclusionary. Dalits are lagging behind on important accounts such as education, ownership of land, employment, social mobility, health indicators, standard of living, political assertion and development. No formidable dalit political leader has emerged from the ranks of dalits in a state which has the highest proportion of dalit population. Though the Bahujan Samaj Party was founded in Punjab, it could take roots only in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh and other North Indian states.

The study was undertaken to critically analyse the disempowerment of dalits. Dalit empowerment has been analysed and discussed in a holistic manner. The various aspects of empowerment, such as, socio-demographic, cultural, economic and political have been analysed. The gender division within dalits is also probed in the study. Intercaste variations with respect to dalit empowerment are also discussed. The achievements and impediments to dalit empowerment under various heads are as under:

Socio-demographic empowerment

In our study, the largest number of dalits belonged to Mazhabhi Sikh followed by Ad-dharmi, ‘Others’ and Balmikis. Majority of the households were male headed. Sex ratio signifies gender empowerment among the dalits. The sex ratio among the dalit household is not only favourable to women, women actually outnumber men. This impiles that the dalits are not practising female foeticide. There are inter-caste variations but dalit households as a whole have more women than men. On the question of religion, Ad-dharmis are now asserting their independent religious identity far removed from Hinduism and Sikhism. A small number of dalits have also converted to Christianity and Buddhism. Dalits are flexible in the realm of religion and follow different religious practices.
After the partition, there were some dalits who came to present place as refugees. A large number of Rai Sikhs, now recognised as dalits, settled here after partition. Ramdasias and Rai Sikhs were the highest and lowest beneficiaries of BPL based schemes, respectively. Here, one important point worth mentioning is the politics of poverty at the village level, which is the greatest stumbling block in the effective implementation of the Below Poverty Line (BPL) based schemes. Same was the case with old age and widow pension, where petty politics of poverty was denying the benefits to the deserving, and delivering to the undeserving. It was observed that joint family is making way for nuclear family. The average family size in our sample was of five. Half of the head of the households were middle-aged. Majority of the head of the households were married.

There was marked deprivation amongst the dalits as far as ownership of household assets is concerned. Within dalits, inter-caste variations are also observed. As far as the ownership of household assets is concerned, skewed distribution was observed. Television was most desired household asset and two-wheeler was owned by a very small proportion of households. Regarding the ownership of four-wheeler and telephone (landline), only 4.5% owned four-wheelers and 21.7% owned telephones respectively. The same scenario continues with ownership of tape-recorder (13.1%), Air-cooler (7.7%). The highest ownership of assets was of bi-cycle (73.7%) and electric fan (79.6%). It is worth mentioning that assets owned were second hand or local made. The high ownership of bi-cycles shows that dalits are moving in a radius of 15-30 Kms in search of work. It also reinforces that the dalits prefer to work outside the village because of higher wages available. The distribution of livestock shows that buffalo was the most common milch animal followed by cow. In a nutshell, we can conclude that the socio-economic profile of the dalits is far from satisfactory.

**Socio-cultural Empowerment**

There was no overt practice of untouchability against dalits. There is tendency to segregate religious places (Gurudwaras) and cremation grounds between dalits and non-dalits. There is a strong opposition to inter-caste marriage, especially among the dalits and the non-dalits. The dalits are also strongly opposed to a hypergamous or hypogamous marital alliance between a dalit and a non-dalit. Inter-caste marriages are a very rare phenomenon in the villages of Punjab. Out of the eight villages studied, there
were only five cases of inter-caste marriages between dalits and non-dalits. Even in these cases, inter-caste marriage took place as the male was well educated/or handsomely employed. In one village of Doaba, there was a case of inter-religious marriage as well. But, within dalits, there was very less incidence of inter-caste marriages.

The social and geographical mapping of the villages showed the houses of dalits falling outside the legal boundary (*lal dora*) of the village. Dalit houses were generally located on the western side of the villages. The dalit locality was named as *Chamarli, Thathi* or by the caste name, like, *Bazigar* or *Sansi Mohalla/colony*. In few villages, the dalit houses were usually located near the village pond as the mud from the pond was used for house construction. In village of Doaba, there was friction between dalits and Jatts on the issue of drainage of dirty water from tannery into the village pond.

There was no case of atrocity perpetrated against the dalits but in one village of Mazha, a Jatt Sarpanch addressed an elderly dalit woman derogatorily as *Chuhadi*, which led to tension between Jatts and Mazhabhi Sikhs. In one other such incident, there was simmering tension between Jatt Sikhs and Bazigars on the issue of land in a village of Mansa district. Shyamlat (village common land) was another issue of contention.

Occupational mobility was also observed in the study. Firstly, less than half the dalits in the study had left their traditional caste occupation and took to other occupations. Secondly, few dalits, like Ad-dharmi have moved to white collar government jobs leading to their upward social mobility. The remaining dalits were not as upwardly mobile as Ad-dharmis. Intragenerational mobility was observed in just 3 percent of the dalit households, with Ad-dharmis again, being the most upwardly mobile. As far as occupational mobility across three generations is concerned, there is an upward social mobility which is restricted to few dalit castes, Ad-dharmi and few dalit individuals.

Another feature of the dalits is that they have flexible approach to religion as they are visiting multiple places of worship, from religious sects to shrines within the state and outside too. Some dalits in Doaba region even have Samaddhs/shrines in the premises of their homes.
Economic empowerment

Dalits in Punjab are facing a severe dearth of employment. Only a few among the Ad-dharmis and Mazhabhis were working in Government jobs. A large majority of dalits were part-time workers. Majority of the dalits were working as daily wage labourers. Dalits, on an average were getting work for 125 days annually. With the present level of wages and employment, dalits were barely able to survive. Even after back-breaking work, large numbers of dalits were not able to cross the average annual per capita income. The only change was that only a few dalits were working as Siri (attached labour) in comparison to earlier generations. A large number of dalits were commuting to the nearby towns for work or else they were hawking from village to village. They did not prefer working as agricultural labourers due to abysmally poor wages offered to them. A handful of dalits owned land and they were also small farmers. Every fourth dalit was in debt. Ad-dharmi was the most indebted caste not simply out of penury but more out of hope to further empower. Some dalit households were so poor that they had taken to begging for survival. To make matters worse, child labour was rampant, especially amongst the most depressed dalits.

International migration, used by a small number of households, is one of the most effective method of dalit empowerment, is confined primarily to Ad-dharmi and Mazhabhi Sikhs. However, the emigration of dalits is largely restricted to the Doaba region. The emigration is male dominated and they move out primarily to Middle East countries for labour. Less than half of the migrants were sending remittances back to the native villages. Very few dalit emigrants settled abroad had sponsored other family members to emigrate overseas. Dalits mainly work as labourers in foreign countries. As a result of emigration, socio-economic empowerment has taken place.

State welfare schemes have failed miserably in empowering the dalits. It gains extra importance in the wake of extensive landlessness among the rural dalits in Punjab.

Political empowerment

Another source of empowerment of the dalits is through the Panchayats. Out of the 8 village panchayats, there were four dalit (two Ad-dharmi, one Mazhabhi Sikh and one Rai Singh) Sarpanches. Dalits were dissatisfied as far as equal participation in the decision-making in Panchayats was concerned. They were still coerced during
different elections. Dalit women were doubly disadvantageous and they too were denied due place in the decision-making process. There was only a single dalit woman Sarpanch in the villages under study. The funds meant for dalit empowerment were not utilized properly.

Some dalits, especially in the Doaba region, were asserting their presence by erecting motif of Ambedkar, Guru Ravidass, Maharishi Valmiki, Gautam Buddha at the entry of their houses. Dalits of Doaba went a step further by inscribing “Putt Chamaran de” (Sons of leather workers) on their cars and motor-bikes. To counter the similar assertion made by dominant Jatt caste, there were few pop songs with title ‘Putt chamaraan de’. In a few cases, especially in Doaba region, religious conversion was also observed. Ad-dharmis were asserting themselves as separate religious identity (qaum). There were 8 cases of religious conversions to Buddhism and Christianity.

Dalits were also asserting through parallel places of worship in the form of separate Gurudwaras and shrines of Pir. In all the villages surveyed, there were separate Gurudwaras for dalits and non-dalits. In large majority of the villages surveyed, there were separate cremation grounds. A sizable number of dalits were participating in religious deras like Sachkhand Ballan, Nirankaari and places of religious worship like Baba Balak Nath. Instead of visiting upper caste Gurudwara/temple, dalits were participating in caste-specific shrine (Sachkhand, Ballan) or other religious sects (Radha Soami Satsang, Beas) as a mark of protest or assertion, or for, spiritual solace. Dalits were also participating in these sects for their cultural advancement by quitting alcohol consumption and also, expanding their social networks.

Dalits were worshipping in multiple ways and forms. Apart from their usual religion, they were visiting religious sects, religious places and Pir Baba’s shrines, and Gugga Madhi in large numbers. Some dalits even had motif of worship within their own houses. Almost 60 percent of the dalits visit one or the other sects or shrine. Some of them are even visiting more than one place of religious worship.

Cultural Empowerment

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said dalit empowerment can come through education. Dalits, especially Ad-dharmis, have successfully followed this message. Most of the other dalits were lagging behind in education. Although educational level of the dalits is on
the rise, but still, there is a long way to go. Within dalits, there is wide inter-caste, inter-religious, inter-regional and inter-gender variations as far as education is concerned. Male Ad-dharmis from Doaba have emerged as the most educationally mobile dalit group in our study. The other aspect of education is that 94% of the dalits are getting education in village Government schools which are at the lowest ebb as far as quality of education is concerned. The infrastructure of Government schools leaves a lot to be desired. The teacher-pupil ratio is approximately 1:47. The Government schools lack in bare minimum facilities like separate toilets for girls, boundary walls, electricity connection, safe drinking water, and so on. The drop-out rate of dalit girls is high. A very few dalits could afford private tuitions for their children. Majority of dalit children were going to school on foot. Mid-day meal scheme was implemented in all the schools. Corporal punishment to children is yet to be wiped out. Dalits are lagging behind the other castes in gross enrolment ratios in Government schools situated in the villages. Across three generations, the most heartening sign is that the dalits literacy rate is going up slowly and gradually. But, there are wide gender disparities in education.

Majority of the dalit households comprised of 4-6 family members. Due to the lack of resources, majority of the dalits were living in small houses of one to two rooms. In addition, a large number of dalit houses are lacking in basic infrastructure, like proper sanitation, bathroom, kitchen, electricity supply and drinking water. A sizeable number of dalits are still living in mud houses. As far as sanitation is concerned, less than one out of four dalit households had toilet facility in their homes, which is indicative of extremely poor socio-cultural and economic empowerment. At the time of conflict between dalits and Jatt landowners, the latter don’t allow the dalits, even their children to answer the call of nature in their fields, which leads to severe humiliation of the dalits. In majority of the dalit houses, the sanitary conditions were very bad. Nearly one-fourth of the dalit houses were lacking in electricity supply, drinking water, bathrooms and kitchen which adversely affects the general hygienic condition within the house. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that majority of the dalits are living in squalid and utter miserable living conditions.
Inter-caste variations in dalit empowerment

Most depressed dalits (MDD) are languishing at the bottom of the hierarchy among the dalits in Punjab. In comparison to the rest of the dalits, the socio-cultural empowerment of most depressed dalits, be it education, health or self-esteem are in a very poor state. As far as their standard of living is concerned, a large majority of the depressed dalit homes lack in basic amenities. They are living in mud houses of very small size. Most of the family members from most depressed castes are either engaged in agricultural labour or traditional caste occupations, which are lowly paid. Therefore, there is no intra or intergenerational mobility in the case of the most depressed castes among the dalits. Child labour is rampant among their families. Many of the dalit families are under debt. Women are even worse off as far as development indicators are concerned. Not a single household owned land.

Overall, among all dalit castes, there is no political assertion in contrast to the Ad-dharmis. Religious conversion or assertion of identity is absent in the case of most depressed dalits. Similarly, international migration which is one of the most important factor behind dalit empowerment and economic clout is completely absent among most depressed dalits. In addition, most depressed dalits being small in number makes them politically weak to effect state’s policy.

As far as sex-ratio is concerned, there are inter-caste variations. Rai Sikhs and Ramdasia had the highest number of females in their population. In the economic hierarchy, Ad-dharmis are relatively affluent followed by Mazhabhi Sikhs, the ‘Others’, and Ramdasias, Balmikis and Rai Sikhs are at lower ladders in the hierarchy. As far as indebtedness is concerned, there are sharp inter-caste variations with respect to indebtedness. Ad-dharmis are the most indebted but they are also the most upwardly mobile. Generally, the debt is incurred to send a family member abroad, to buy land or construct a house.

Ad-dharmis are also relatively well off and are living in pucca or mixed houses. A high proportion of ‘Others’, Balmikis and Rai Sikhs are living in mud houses. There are glaring differences among different dalit castes as far as education is concerned. Except Ad-dharmis, dalits are less educated. Poverty is the biggest factor responsible for poor educational achievement. Within dalits too, there are marked variation as far as poverty being a cause of drop-out. Upward social mobility within dalits is largely confined to
Ad-dharmis, Mazhabhi Sikhs and Ramdasias have also gained better foot-hold. The rest of the dalit castes are still engaged in agricultural labour and petty jobs. There were separate cremation grounds in majority of the villages and separate Gurudwaras for dalits in all the villages covered in the fieldwork. As per dalits lived experience, there were less inter-caste variations as far as segregation in cremation grounds and Gurudwaras is concerned.

**Dalit Women empowerment:**

Dalit women outnumbered their male counterpart as far as sex ratio is concerned. This implies that among the dalit households, female foeticide is almost non-existent. Our findings are also corroborated by the Census of India, 2001 which showed that the sex ratio among dalits was higher than the overall sex ratio in five of the eight surveyed villages.

Dalit women are worst off with respect to their education and health. There was no primary health centre in the villages under study that severely affected the dalit women. Dalit women were also lagging behind in education, employment and decision-making. Drop-out among the dalit girls was higher inspite of the fact that they fared better than their male counterparts. The reasons behind the higher drop out were parent’s apathy, double burden on dalit girls, their vulnerability to sexual abuse and lack of mobility.

**Dalit consciousness:**

Dalit consciousness is reflective of dalits’s reverence for their Gods and political leaders. Ad-dharmis are more aware of Mangoo Ram and Guru Ravidass in comparison to Balmikis. On the same lines, Sansis and Bazigars are largely unaware of Mangoo Ram and Gautam Buddha. In addition, one dalit caste is not attending the birthday celebrations of other dalit icons except B.R.Ambedkar. The incidence of inter-caste marriages amongst dalits is low. There is low political consciousness amongst dalits.

**ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPEDIMENTS OF DALIT EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL PUNJAB:**

In a nutshell, the achievements and impediments of dalit empowerment in rural Punjab are discussed as under. Dalits consider education as an effective tool for their socio-
economic and cultural empowerment. But, there are only a few dalit castes that have followed this message diligently. There are wide inter-caste and inter-gender variations in education. Lack of educational infrastructure in villages coupled with high teacher/pupil ratio compounds the problem further.

Due to the lack of education, dalits are unable to earn a decent living, making it difficult to make both ends meet. Less proportion of dalits are able to get Government jobs. Dalit women are lagging behind in education and therefore, are unable to get jobs. Very few dalits have been able to emigrate abroad, and even fewer have been able to empower their dependents at the place of origin. Those who have got empowered as a result of international emigration have also witnessed a rise in their status back home.

Landlessness adds to the woes of the dalits in rural areas. The living conditions are awful as a large number of dalits were barely surviving in small, mud houses bereft of basic amenities like drinking water, electricity and sanitation, etc.

Dalits also face religious discrimination in a subtle manner. Separate Gurudwaras and separate cremation grounds are a norm in villages. Inter-caste marriage between dalits and non-dalits is unthinkable. Also, inter-caste marriages within dalits are severely opposed.

Inter-generational mobility is confined to few dalit castes/individuals. Majority of dalits are still engaged in lowly-paid labour. Intra-generational mobility is even rarer. Ad-dharmis are asserting culturally and politically in the form of Ad-dharam movement and BSP/Dera Sachkhand Ballan. On the contrary, the remaining dalits have not been so successful.

Dalits are still discriminated in the decision-making at the village level. As a mark of protest towards the existing socio-cultural milieu, dalits are participating in religious sects/shrines like Radha swami Satsang, Beas in a big way.

The most depressed castes within dalits including women are in a miserable state as they are severely oppressed. Educational levels among them are dismal. Political assertion is also negligible as they are barely able to survive.

State’s measures for dalit empowerment have been a dismal failure due to lack of commitment and other vested interests. Politics of poverty is denying the dalits their due share.
Policy Recommendations

The following are the recommendations, including policy measures for state action to tackle the impediments in the empowerment of the dalits in rural Punjab:

1. Until or unless the educational infrastructure in rural Punjab improves, dalits are not going to be empowered. Going a step further, Right to Education (RTE) in private schools must be implemented at the earliest. Among the dalits, drop-out rate of girls is extremely high. There should be special provisions/ freeships /flexi-hours in schools so that their high drop-out is checked.

2. Land reforms that were an utter failure in the past should be revived, and dalits, who have the highest proportion of population, should be given their due share in land. Also, the village’s common land (Shyamlat land) which is normally grabbed by the big farmers should be checked.

3. State’s policy of intervention has failed miserably to ameliorate the dalits. Corruption at the level of Sarpanch and Panchayat secretary should be tackled with an iron hand. Implementation of schemes should be made transparent and devoid of vested interests.

4. In the state of Punjab, separate Gurudwaras for dalits, cremation grounds and separate dalit settlements have become very common. Such a tendency may not be conducive to social fabric. The State should endeavour to mitigate such exclusive tendencies.

5. Empowered dalits should look after the disempowered ones. ‘Each one, teach one’ should be the slogan. Until or unless, the dalits emerge as a single political force, their empowerment is a sheer pipe-dream.

6. A separate pro-active policy for the most depressed castes should be worked out and be implemented on priority basis. Women of the most disempowered dalits should be the first to receive any relief from the state.

7. Fast-track courts should be set up to tackle the atrocities against the dalits. Otherwise this menace would continue unabated.

Ambedkar said, ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality. Dignity and self-respect is the bare minimum necessity for dalit empowerment. As per Oommen (2005:104), facts alone are
inadequate to understand social phenomena. Perceptions are equally important. As Thomas theorem in sociology upholds, “if human beings define a situation as real, it is real in its consequences.” The earlier we recognise this theorem, the better it would be to understand social problems in a humane manner.