Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

To be an untouchable in Indian caste system is to be below human dignity. Untouchables are persons of a discrete set of low castes, excluded on account of their extreme collective impurity from particular relations with human beings (both human and divine). They make up about 16.2 percent of the Indian population. They have been called by various names, such as Untouchables, Exterior castes, Depressed Classes, Outcastes, Pariahs (commonly but undoubtedly derived from the Tamil word pera or perai, the drum (Deliege, 1997). In ancient times, the term Mlechha, Chandala (used by Manu), also Panchama (the fifth class), Avarna (i.e. outside the four varnas), Nishada, Paulkasa, Antyaja, Atishudra, etc. were used. The term “Scheduled Castes” appeared for the first time in April 1935, when the British Government of India (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1936, specifying certain castes, races and tribes as Scheduled Castes. Prior to that these population groups were known as “Depressed Classes”. The term “Dalit”, first used in journalistic writings as far back as 1931 to connote the untouchables, did not gain currency until the early 1970s with the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra. It implies a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on account of their lowly birth (Michael, 1999:12-13).

Dalit “oppressed” or “broken” is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of “Depressed Classes”, the term in the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1930, there was a Depressed Classes newspaper published in Pune called Dalit Bandu (Friend of Dalits) (Pradhan, 1986:125).

“Dalit” is a term coined by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Indian constitution of 1950 and revered leader of the Dalit movement (Human Rights Watch India, 1999:2). The word was used by B.R. Ambedkar in his Marathi speeches. In The Untouchables, published in 1948, Ambedkar chose the term, ‘broken men’, an English translation of ‘Dalit’, which referred to the original ancestors of the untouchable for reasons which must have been self-evident because he did not explain them. The Dalit Panthers revived the term and in their 1973 manifesto expanded its referents to include the scheduled tribes, ‘neo-buddhists’, the working people, the landless and poor
peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion (Omvedt, 1995:72). There has thus been a narrow definition, based on the criterion of caste alone, and a broader one to encompass all those considered to be placed at the same level (Michael, 1999:68).

Dalits, as understood SCs, were denied access to temples, wells, and schools, as they fell outside the pale of the Varna scheme. Dalits constituted a vital segment of the population; they performed the manual and unskilled labour, particularly the ritually “unclean” occupations without which the very existence and continuance of the traditional system would not have been possible. As part of the Hindu Jajman (patron-client) system, the scheduled castes (dalits) served the upper castes as leather workers, sweepers, scavengers, village messengers, and the like. Although they were the tillers of the soil, a majority of them did not own any land and were, in fact, traditionally prohibited from doing so. They frequently earned meagre incomes, were perennially indebted, and were coerced to work as bonded or attached labourers to their upper-caste masters for low wages. They were also compelled to perform forced labour (Begar) without compensation (Human Rights Watch, 1999: 28).

Before they began to receive their Constitutional rights in Independent India, the economic subservience of untouchables was reflected in their political impotence. They usually had little voice in the decision-making process of the community. Disputes among them were often arbitrated by the upper castes. Like women and the shudras, the Dalits were prohibited from learning the Vedas, and rarely received any formal education. Generally speaking, the Dalits were segregated from the rest of the community; they lived on the outskirts of villages and towns, mostly in houses of inferior (Kaccha) construction, with mud walls and thatched roofs, situated on land owned by their masters. Thus, the Dalits were, in a very real sense, marginal to the system, although they lived in communities, they were not fully members.

The collective identity of Indian untouchables has passed through different phases and in each stage there was a salient dimension to their identity. Although the dalit identity crystallized first in Maharashtra, it spread quickly, gaining wide currency, and is used all over India. The crucial significance of dalit identity is primarily political and hence its orientation is militant and rebellious. The Dalits seek to capture political power as an instrument of social transformation (Oommen, 2003:137).
The three sources of change were social reform movements, state action, and political action. These changes evoked the following responses from the dalits: attempts to move up and secure a higher status within the traditional system; accepting a lower ritual status to achieve a higher secular status; and rejecting caste as a basis of status identity. Admittedly, the erstwhile status does not become completely irrelevant or insignificant as the search for new identities continues. In this sense, what occurs is not status displacement but status accretion, a person is at once an “Untouchable”, a member of the dalit, and a citizen. The status accretion then leads to a gradual process of change, avoiding the high social costs and sudden breakdowns associated with rapid social changes. But the true upliftment of dalits can occur only if the stigma of untouchability disappears (Human Rights Watch, 1999:34).

**Emergence of the term dalit:**

The term ‘dalit’ literally means the one that has been broken, ground down, downtrodden, oppressed, is now being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy (Michael, 1999:27). The term was made popular by the dalit icon, B.R. Ambedkar. The term has two usages: in its broader usage, it represents all the poor and downtrodden in our country, be it the upper caste poor, minorities, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and poor women. In its narrow usage and in the Ambedkarian framework, ‘dalit’ primarily means the scheduled castes (UNDP Punjab Human Development Report). The word ‘dalit’ particularly emphasises the dehumanising ‘caste oppression’ that makes them outcastes and untouchables (a degradation not shared by the tribals or shoshits), within the context of the Hindu caste system with its religio-social organising principle of ‘purity and pollution’ (Michael, 1999:100).

The need for autonomous representation and a quest for a common name led to the appearance of a collective identity, towards the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Terms like Avarna, Pancama, Achuta, Paria, Depressed Classes, Untouchables and Scheduled Castes have been used, but later came to be considered inappropriate and derogatory. The euphemism Harijans (Children of God), used by Gandhi was not acceptable, the Mahar found this term pejorative and because in Hindi it means the children born to prostitutes (Issacs 1965: 41, Moon 2001:37). Certain castes were promoted, for instance, the prefix adi was used, which signifies the aboriginal status in India (Gupta: 1985:5-6; Omvedt 1994:117-19).
In the wake of the Ambedkar movement, the Marathi terms *asprishya, bahishkrita* and *dalita* were often used in combination with the word *varga* (class) signifying a connotation in terms of social class. At first, they were used indiscriminately; the words *asprishya* and *bahishkrita* then disappeared, making way for the term *dalit*. It is difficult to ascertain when the term ‘dalit’, which was already used in Sanskrit and old Marathi, came to signify ‘oppressed’ in the sense of untouchable.

According to Zelliot (1992:271), Phule used the term dalit to connote social upliftment of the oppressed (*dalitoddhara*). It is very probable that this lexical change took place during the late nineteenth century and the term *dalit varga* was a direct translation of depressed classes. The dalit movement, to which this widespread usage of the term is attributed, came into being in Maharashtra during the 1960s to safeguard the rights of the dalits and to fight for the emancipation of the exploited (Beltz, 2005:31).

This quest for a common identity reminds us that the untouchables are a social class with history. The idea that the caste system and the practice of untouchability are uniform and rigid should be abandoned. There exists a dynamic relationship between the study group, its self-awareness and the ethnographic description (Fuchs, 1995).

Charsley deduces that ‘the academic debates are more concerned about the identities than the people give them credit for’. As a consequence, Beltz feels strongly that there should be the usage of the term *Samaja, bauddha Jana* and dalit instead of the term untouchables. The group does not identify itself with a single term (Charsley, 1996:23).

Both the Indian and Western press had been using the term dalit for some time, with reference to the untouchables in general. Massey (1994) includes all those marginalized and exploited, like tribals and women, in the dalit category. In fact, the fundamental question behind this terminological discussion is whether the ‘caste system’ is a religious phenomenon or a social one. Dumont (1992:103-8) opts for the first solution by dissociating the notion of socio-economic superiority from the notion of status. According to this solution, the term dalit would be a euphemistic synonym for the term untouchable. On the contrary, Omvedt (1979) and Patil (1994) reject all dissociation of superiority and status and define untouchables as a social class.

As per Ambedkar, the untouchables were only oppressed dalits, why would he want them to convert to another religion? The terms caste and class partially overlap and are intertwined, untouchability being a complex phenomenon with a number of social,
economic and religious ramifications. Beltz implies that the terms untouchable, Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit ought to be retained. He disagrees with Gokhale (1993:9) who considers the above mentioned terms as inter-changeable. They are markedly different from each other because each word has a history and represents specific experiences and identities.

Dalit is not a caste; it is a constructed identity, which is a reality that cannot be denied (Reddy, 2002). Recent studies show that a new identity is emerging that the dalits will not acquiesce forever with their subordinate position. Use of the term ‘dalit’ has become a nationwide phenomenon and is widely used by all untouchables irrespective of traditional and parochial caste distinctions, also becoming a symbol of their social identity. Even social scientists have used terms dalits, untouchables and scheduled castes interchangeably. This trend helps in uniting and integrating all the Jatis within the scheduled castes for a common cause is welcome (Ram, 1995).

**Empowerment: definition and theoretical framework**

The dictionary meaning of the word ‘empower’ is to endow with the ability or power required for a purpose or a task. Empowerment refers to the action of empowering someone, the state of being empowered. Empowerment is best understood as a process whereby people gain increased control over their lives as a result of greater awareness and improved capacities, leading to greater participation in decision-making and transformative action. Within a feminist literature, empowerment is characteristically used in ways that capture a sense of gaining control, of participating, of decision-making. Specifically, it tends to entail four central components: consciousness raising, providing a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group; skills development, generating the capacity to plan, make decisions, organize and manage; participation and decision-making power in all areas of life; and action to bring about greater equality (Karl, 1995).

Community care theorists and practitioners frequently invoke the notion of empowerment, arguing that empowerment of ‘clients’ is necessary if they are to, at least, partly meet their own ‘needs’ (Servian, 1996:8). Here the concern with enabling individuals to meet their own needs generates debate about whether official intervention is the key to empowerment (via legislation regarding the allocation of resources) or
whether one should also consider democratic rights and participation. When used by development agencies, the concept of empowerment is frequently used to refer to entrepreneurial self-reliance.

The term empowerment has usually signalled a commitment to a concept of 'power to' rather than 'power over'. It focuses attention on power as enabling and expansive rather than as zero-sum dominance. Power is, 'of, by and for elites' (Elstain, 1992: 112). In other words, empiricist power theorists have confined themselves to one particular locution of power: ‘power over’ (Lukes, 1978).

Arendt (1969) has been a key theorist here, asserting that power ‘corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert’. Power, for Arendt, belong to a group and is never ‘the property of an individual’. Power stays as long as the group stays together: ‘When we say of somebody that he is “in power”, we actually refer to his being epowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with disappears, “his power” also vanishes (Arendt, 1969:44). From this perspective, power is neither zero-sum nor conflictual, as it arises when people work together rather than they act against others. It can therefore be distinguished from violence, force and authority.

Influentially within feminist debates, Hartsock challenges the notion that the exercise of power can best be understood as the ability to compel obedience. She suggests a connection between masculinity and the exercise of power over others, arguing that the repression of eros in a masculinist society underlies the definition of both sexuality and power as domination (Hartsock, 1996:31).

Elstain offers a clear argument for viewing power and empowerment as complementary concepts. She claims that human societies throughout time have differentiated between maleness and femaleness and located complementary forms of power in the two sexes (Elsthtain, 1992:115).

**Working definition of Empowerment:**

Empowerment is a process of building capacities and capabilities among those sections of society that are left out of the process of development in history. In lived experience, there are three realms of empowerment namely, socio-cultural, economic and political.
All these aspects of empowerment affect differentially to the male and female population. Also, the gender dimension was taken into account.

Socio-cultural empowerment includes the extent of removal of social barriers between castes that can be measured from the index of untouchability, caste-based atrocities or segregation and frequency of inter-caste marriages. Change over from the traditional caste based occupation that were loaded with stigma of purity and pollution, was an indicator of social empowerment. Occupational mobility: intra-generational and intergenerational was studied by collecting data from head of the household, head of the household’s parents and children of the head of the household. In the social aspect of empowerment, provision of infrastructure like toilet facilities was studied. Incidence of inter-caste marriage and the treatment meted out to the dalits in upper caste Gurudwaras was observed in the fieldwork. Another dimension studied was the incidence of separate Gurudwaras and separate cremation ground for the dalits and the non-dalits. Religious conversion amongst dalits as a means of assertion against the caste system and as a tool for empowerment was also studied.

In terms of cultural empowerment, education was the basic input for the dalits. The major focus of the study was to go into the details of success and failure of imparting education to the dalits. Education also includes that how far the dalits have understood their own position in the society, in contrast to the influence of ideology of dominant castes. The quality of life of the dalits was a major indicator of their cultural empowerment.

Economic empowerment includes availability of agricultural land, freedom from debt, access to Government jobs and availability of employment opportunities both within the agricultural sector and outside of it, including emigration. It also includes efforts made by the state through various welfare schemes for the dalits in rural areas such as employment generation, providing household grants/loans and health care services.

Political empowerment was measured by finding out the extent of participation of the dalits in panchayati raj institutions, parliamentary, assembly elections and other social institutions in the village. Intimidation and coercion of dalits to inhibit free exercise of their political right was also studied. As a part of process of political empowerment, it was also enquired to what extent dalits are asserting for parallel places of rituals and social mobility through political action. Another thrust area of the study was the
participation of dalits in the different deras like Dera Sachkhand, Ballan, Radha Saomi Satsang, Beas, Dera Sachha Sauda, Sirsa and others.

**Review of Literature:**

The literature has been reviewed theme-wise and the different themes under which the literature has been reviewed are the following: dalit empowerment, social empowerment of dalits in Punjab, cultural empowerment through education, economic empowerment, political empowerment and dalit assertion, differential in dalit empowerment, international emigration and its impact on dalit empowerment, empowerment of dalit women, and, lastly, impact of state’s different welfare programmes/schemes on dalit empowerment.

**Dalit empowerment**

Srinivas (1966) observed that scheduled castes are an integral part of the village life. They perform certain essential tasks in agriculture, they are often village servants, messengers and sweepers and they beat the drum at village festivals and remove the leaves on which people have dined at community dinners. Also, he has talked about the process of Sanskritisation as a means to upgrading the dalit status by following the Brahmin’s cultural practices like following their rituals, dressing and dietary patterns. This practice may lead to upward social mobility but the two points of contention are: Can Sanskritisation lead to structural change? What about those states/regions like Punjab, Haryana and Bihar where shudras/OBCs are the dominant castes?

Guru (2009) has explored the complex and varied meanings, contexts, forms, and languages of humiliation with an interdisciplinary approach. While ‘humiliation’ as a theme has found expression in both nationalist and socio-political thought in modern India, it is the first time it has been thoroughly and systematically studied. As per him, humiliation is endemic to social life which is active through asymmetries of intersecting sets of attitudes- arrogance and obeisance, self-respect and servility, and reverence and repulsion. The meaning of humiliation has been well understood by juxtaposing it with other concepts such as shame, disgust, discrimination, degradation, and segregation. Various forms of humiliation like racial humiliation in the context of colonialism, the humiliation of working classes in Bombay textile strike of 1982, caste-based
humiliation through the practise of untouchability, and various forms of gender humiliation.

Thorat (2008) and others have conducted a study on the prevalence of untouchability in rural India. The findings of the study are shocking; untouchability and caste-based atrocities are still rampant in Indian rural society in a big way. The study highlights exclusion, humiliation-subordination and exploitation to understand the heinous phenomenon. The forms and degree of rural untouchability being practised both within secular/public sites such as the state, the economic sphere or the cultural domain as the well as within the personal sphere is changing across the states under study. Further, due to the gendered division of labour that exposes women to specific forms of untouchability as a result of their gender and caste identities. The study offers micro-analyses of dalit mobilisation and resistance through the strategic use of symbols, rituals, provisions, social and political organisations to register dalit presence and opinion across a range of sites, including education, literature, politics and participation in the public services. The most heinous and degrading practice of manual scavenging is still being practised in some parts of rural India.

Satyanarayana (2005) deals with the inter-relationship between caste system, land control, and domination in modern Andhra. It seeks to examine the social origins, material basis and crystallization of the dominant upper castes in a long term historical and sociological perspective. Taking caste as the central problematic of historiography; the study views caste as a dynamic, historically evolved structure of power relations of domination and subordination. The study, instead of viewing caste as a cultural construct by the brahmanical forces, seeks to unravel the dynamics of Indian social system by viewing it as determined by the dialectic of upper caste dominance and lower caste resistance.

Chalam (2008) has emphasized access to quality primary, secondary and higher education for the empowerment of the dalits. As per him, Ambedkar’s vision was to achieve the goal of universalization of primary education for the dalits social empowerment.

Shukla (2010) provides a much more sophisticated way of looking at different dimensions of social inequality. The poverty of data in India has meant that innumerable government policies, anti-poverty or labour, have been structured with
inadequate data. It is the first attempt to use cross-country sample to quantify the impact of education, urbanisation and occupation on the income levels of different caste groups. The study is a good attempt to provide clarity on the vexed issue of caste-based inequality in India.

Kuppuswamy (1975) has suggested the removal of social disabilities as the greatest problem of the dalits. Legislation is necessary, but not enough. The researcher points that three considerations based on caste, endogamy and hierarchy are very important to understand why the constitutional abolition of caste has resulted in the social abolition of castes. Through education, a person could impose his class status but his caste status pursues him and his children throughout her/his life.

Kumar (2001) has found in his study on dalits in Haryana that education, political representation, development schemes have helped the younger generation of Dalits in Haryana to opt for modern occupations and value-orientation. Yet, the landlessness among the rural Dalits and violation of human rights persists.

Kapoor (1990) did a study on Jattav Chamars of Dehradun city in an urban setting. Her main findings are: sharp intergenerational educational mobility among the Jattavs. The factors which have motivated to promote education among the Jatavs are: positive reference groups, opportunities to get better jobs and social prestige. The policy of protective discrimination in terms of educational incentives and other privileges have led to considerable educational achievement among the Jatavs. In addition, occupational mobility is also visible among the respondents generation in comparison to their ancestors.

Premi (1976) has worked on scheduled castes and educational opportunities. He has pointed out that in order to achieve equality of educational opportunity in the true sense for scheduled castes, it is necessary to take some more radical steps favouring these groups at the grassroots level, like multiple entry points in schools, vacation timing and school hours adjustment, subsidy to poor children, daily meal, and to gear the school curriculum according to the needs of each local area.

Virmani (2002) has suggested a new development paradigm comprising of ‘employment’, ‘entitlement’ and ‘empowerment’. The state should confine itself to managing the economy so as to accelerate employment and income growth in a self-sustaining manner, ensure that all citizens receive their basic entitlements of basic
public goods and services and empower the poor so that they have equal rights and responsibilities with the better-off citizens.

Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Jeffrey (2005) have argued that educated dalit young men have responded in heterogeneous ways to the apparent ‘failure’ of school education to desalaried white-collar employment. What about the young dalit women- continue to be excluded from the development process? As a result of exclusion of some dalit men too, some men have channelled their frustration at being excluded from such work into political activity. Other unemployed educated young male dalits highlight the disappointment and opportunity costs associated with spending long periods in school, but continue to place value on education as a form of cultural capital that distinguishes them from illiterates.

Iversen (2006) have studied Udupi hotels in southern India with the help of small, purposive sampling. The case studies of the two orthodox hotels in Mumbai and Bangalore show that brahminical attitudes continue to influence contemporary practices, with neither making radical adjustments to their menu. In the Bangalore orthodox hotel, Brahmins predominate among cooks and suppliers, and Brahmin cooks are also in charge of the preparation of the Chinese dishes. While Muslims make up as much as 25 percent of the customers, no Muslim (or Christian) has ever worked in this hotel. Despite the mixed customer base, suppliers, both Brahmins and others, wear vermilion and white dhotis-attire associated with upper-caste Hindu society. A boy of dalit background rose through the ranks to the position of chief cook. The said individual had to conceal their caste background in order to find their way, first into the workplace and, in this particular case, subsequently into the kitchen.

Kumar (2001) has reported that the untouchability and caste discrimination prevalent in hilly areas of Uttaranchal, even though there is little economic differentiation between dalits and non-dalits.

Kumar (2010) opines that some people are concerned with the question of sanitation; they fail to understand the hidden caste-religious construction of scavenging and the scavenger’s identity. Certainly it is the state education apparatus which keeps us from this very important issue, and there is a growing antagonism towards anyone who questions caste-based discrimination and occupation. The scavenging population has been bypassed by the Indian state’s modernity drive. The state’s failure has been that it
has viewed caste and the question of sanitation/scavenging only at the level of the individual and not as a problem of the structure. The social disabilities that come with scavenging/sanitation can only be eradicated by a large-scale reformation of the caste Hindu society. Quoting Valmiki (1991:16-17), “As long as there will be a metal trash can in Rameshwari’s hands, the democracy of my nation will be an insult”.

Thorat and Newman (2010) observed that while the linkages between caste and society are studied widely, the interface between caste and economy or economic development remains an under-researched terrain. The study explores contemporary patterns of economic discrimination faced by dalits and religious minorities like Muslims and the underlying attitudinal orientations that contribute to inequality in various spheres of life. In his edited volume, it analyses discrimination by focusing on the urban labour market as well as other markets in rural areas.

Joshi (1982) has examined in both absolute and relative terms that the dalits have very restricted access to crucially important rural economic resource such as land. Several decades of land reform legislation have done little to correct basic inequalities of the dalits. The general agricultural development programmes have also been substantially less beneficial to the average rural dalit family than to others. Much of the prosperity of the “green revolution” in terms of the scientific farming has gone to those who already have relatively abundant investment capital.

Kumar (2010) has come up with shocking finding that the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP) has created a new situation where dalits are pushed again in a state of anxiety. Whether they will be benefited in this new system or not, is a significant question. As per the study, economic reforms are leading to unemployment, underemployment and more poverty amongst the dalits, especially dalit women.

Oommen (1990) has analysed protest as a source of social change which has largely been neglected in the social sciences. By focusing on on-going movements comprising of ‘protest’ in independent India and by treating it as source of change, this volume has tried to fill the gap in the existing literature. The basic sources of change have been taken to be the economy or those water-sheds in human history known as agrarian, industrial or information ‘revolutions’. In contrast, political revolution has been recorded little or no attention. Because political uprisings by definition imply the transfer of power from one category to another, those likely to be deprived of it, as also
those sections of the population who support the ruling elite, disapprove of protest. This ‘displacement syndrome’, renders the potential of protest as an instrument of change contentious thus leading to a neglect of the analysis of protest as a social phenomenon and as a factor of change. If one looks at the trajectory of dalit protests; there is an emergence of dalit bourgeoisie and dalit political broker. Needless to say, the dalit proletariat is alienated from its primordial base (fellow dalits) due to class differentiation and from its civic base (fellow proletariat) due to primordial attachment. The only way out of this impasse is either united class action or caste mobilization. If, for the former, a cultural revolt is a pre-requisite, for the latter, categorical solidarity ignoring class differences is required. He concludes by saying that if cultural revolt is yet a far cry in India, assertion of caste solidarity does not augur well for ushering in a democratic, secular and socialist India.

Gulalia (2003) has emphasised that there is a lot of confusion among the Government officials about the exact definition of manual scavengers. The process of identification of scavengers and their dependents was to be completed through a rapid survey by June, 1992. An outlay of Rs 464 Crores was provided in the Eighth plan for the rehabilitation of 4 Lakh scavengers. The Scavenger rehabilitation scheme has been implemented in the last decade, i.e. 1992-2002, but the programme has been implemented in a very haphazard manner. The process of elimination of manual scavenging from the country comprised of two-pronged strategy, one, conversion of all the existing dry latrines into pour flush latrines and construction of new sanitary latrines for those who defecate in the open, and rehabilitation of liberated scavengers in alternative jobs and occupation after imparting short training, wherever necessary. But, the ground reality is that even after 2 decades after this scheme targeting the elimination of manual scavenging, the menace continues unabated.

**Social empowerment of dalits in Punjab**

Writing about the culture and tradition of Punjab in the late nineteenth century, Briggs observes that ‘they were little more than serfs; they were the hired labourers who followed the plough, drove the bullocks and served both tenants and the landlords (Briggs quoted in Prasad, 2000:26).
Brahmanism had a very weak influence over a long time in Punjab. Scholars of ancient history noticed that probably because of the continuous influx of diverse foreign people, Brahmin orthodoxy had ‘practically abandoned’ this region and shifted quite early to the Indic-Gangetic region (Buddha Prakash, 1976: 8).

During the first serious survey of castes in Punjab for the 1881 Census, Ibbetson came to discover that Brahminic influence was ‘probably never so strong in Punjab as in most other parts of India’. Ibbetson observed that the influence of Islam may have been one of the reasons (Ibbetson orig. 1916, rpt. 1987: 14-15).

Discussing the social configuration of castes in Punjab during the century before independence 1857-1947, Tandon recalled: “That they (Brahmins) could be the leaders of society, in a position of privileges, I only discovered when I went to live outside Punjab. With us the Brahmans were an underprivileged class and exercised little or no influence on the community” (Tandon, 2000: 73). The widely prevalent dalit conception of untouchability in India is somewhat similar to the one articulated by Weber and Dumont. Dumont, for instance, located the essence of caste hierarchy in the bi-polarity between ‘the pure and the impure’, a counter-position of Brahmin and Untouchable (1998: 33-64). Strikingly parallel was the views of Ambedkar. Ambedkar was positively obsessed with Brahmins’ (Mandelsohn and Vicziany, 2000: 6, 20).

Jodhka (2000, 2002) has opined that Punjab being a Sikh-majority province, many in the country think that there is no caste in this state. Although the social structure of Punjab is indeed different from other regions of India and the sway of Brahmanical Hinduism has been quite weak here, caste distinctions have been very sharp, particularly in the rural setting. Rural Punjab has not forgotten caste. While it is true that in most cases, caste-based prejudice against dalits has considerably declined, only rarely did we find it completely missing.

There may be a number of factors which distinguish the position of dalits in Punjab from that in Haryana. The Jatt Sikh of Punjab has a relatively more liberal attitude towards the Dalits in terms of purity and pollution than that of Hindu Jaat of Haryana. The areas of the present Punjab never has any institution like Haryana’s Khap Panchayats of the Jaats to protect and defend the caste superiority through ‘blood and kinship conglomeration’ (Kasni, 2003).
Awasthi (2003) estimated that more than one-fourth of Punjab’s villages (3,368 out of a total of over 12,000) have a Dalit population of over 40 percent at present. A number of villages such as Talhan, which was in the news recently for the first ever case of a caste-based mob violence, had a dalit population of about 65 percent.

The radical Ad-dharam movement represented a spirited struggle for dignity as well as the formation of a distinct, assertive cultural and political identity. After Juergensmeyer’s work, “Religion as Social Vision” (1982), the legacy of Ad-dharm in the radicalization of dalit consciousness in contemporary Punjab is explored by Ronki Ram. Going over the protracted history of Ad-dharam’s social and political conflict with the upper castes, he also finds that their recent violent conflict with Sikh Jatts in village ‘did not erupt suddenly’. The Ad-dharam movement helped the Dalits in Punjab to rise socially, economically, politically and psychologically. The international migration to the West also served their cause in gaining higher social status and prestige (Juergensmeyer, 1980).

Adi-dharam movement has helped in Dalits achieving a higher social status with the help of political and cultural mobilization (Kamaljot, 1996).

Jodhka presents a picture of the impact that socio-economic development and the strategies of social and cultural assertion made on the life and struggle of the dalits during this period. His study gives a picture of the empirical reality of the dalits conscious dissociation from such occupations and practices as are related to their stigma, humiliation and oppression, and of their distancing from the structures of social and cultural dominance of the upper castes. The study corroborates an earlier finding of Saberwal that the new influences tended to dissolve the earlier ‘legitimacy of the hierarchical order’ and ‘propriety of evaluating individuals primarily with reference to their caste group’ (1972:115). A number of field studies viz. Jodhka (2002), Judge (2002), Sharma (1995) and Aggarwal (1996) shows that perhaps not more than 10-20 percent follows their traditional occupation at present.

Ram (2004) opines that more and more Ad-dharmi/Chamars are turning to Guru Ravidas Deras such as the Sachkhand at village Ballan near Jalandhar. He discusses the massive reach of this dera and how the Ravidas Janamasthan Mandir built by this dera at Seer Goverdhanpur near Varanasi has become as holy a pilgrimage for the Ravidasis just as Golden Temple is for Sikhs. However, hardly any dalit from Valmiki caste went
there or to Ballan, perhaps are Valmikis and other scheduled castes are expected to go there. The different Jattis, “discrete in character, with their own idiosyncratic hierarchies”, to use words of Gupta (2000:227), appeared to be in the process of inventing and strengthening distinct Jatti based religio-cultural identities through symbols, rituals, ceremonies, festivals, jaikaras (religious cries) and salutations.

Sharma (1983) did a study on the role of Arya Samaj movement in the upliftment of Scheduled Castes in Punjab. The religious conversions of scheduled castes to Christianity spurred the upper castes into action. The Arya Samajists performed “Shuddhi” of the converted dalits to bring them back into Hindu field. Their slogan was ‘Back to Vedas’ and they wanted the dalits to be integrated into Hinduism and to maintain Hindu solidarity. Thus, by and large, the social status of dalits in Punjab was not uplifted.

Judge (2009) has delineated three alternative means of status improvement for the dalits, i.e. socio-religious reform movements, various efforts of the post-colonial state, efforts of the scheduled castes and use of political means. The issue of social mobility among the dalits has remained central in any discourse on social inequality in India. The findings pertaining to the education and occupational changes provide a mixed scenario, because there is change in the educational levels of dalits across generations. At the same time, education as a vehicle of occupational mobility has not come out strongly due to the low proportion of highly educated dalits. The issue of empowerment has been the most complex of all as the earlier studies have maintained that there is a positive relationship between political mobilisation and status improvement. There is low percentage of dalits who are involved in entrepreneurial activity. And the paradox of the changing dalits that emerged was if the dalits do not break caste barriers among themselves, their struggle for equality will remain futile.

Walia (1993) undertook a study on the problem of untouchability with focus on Mazhabhi Sikhs in Punjab. Untouchability is prevalent in Punjab in a covert manner and education coupled with urbanization is the remedial measures to it. Economic development of rural Punjab has not automatically resulted into the fair deal to the dalits. It seems a long journey to remove social disabilities and to achieve social equality. Khalsa (2004) records with some pain that, “Punjab has no untouchability probably because of Sikhism, but I am ashamed to say that in
committing atrocities on Dalits, we do not lag behind” (Indian Express, August 21, 2000).

While the freedom to enter Gurudwara (Sikh Temple) was never an issue after the 1920s, the fact that in more than 60 percent of Punjab villages the Mazhabhi and other Sikh scheduled castes had their separate Gurudwaras indicates the continuing problem of insult and humiliation on the basis of caste. Out of 12,780 villages in Punjab, there are separate Dalit Gurdwaras in about 10,000 villages (Charchrari, 2003:33).

Kaur (2005) analyses the recent caste clashes in the Jalandhar district between the members of Jatt and dalit communities. She deals with the recent and reportedly the first case of caste violence in Punjab which has interestingly happened in the area which is called ‘NRI land’ as every Dalit family here has at least one member working in some western countries. The conflict erupted when the Dalits constituted a separate management committee for the Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh Gurdwara as the earlier management committee comprising jatts stopped dalit women from preparing the Langer. She contends the dalits in Punjab have historically articulated their religious identity in order to undermine caste-based dominations and oppressions. The Talhan incident proves that the economic status of dalits does not guarantee them protection against caste discrimination and oppression.

Dalits of Punjab see no virtues in the hierarchical structures of caste. They all aspire to better material conditions and a dignified life (Deliege: 1999).

**Cultural empowerment through Education**

Majumdar and Mooij (2011) opine strongly that the poor state of education in India is leading to social inequality. Also, there is overt and covert discrimination prevalent as far as the dalits and the girl students belonging to any caste or class group is concerned. There is segregation and segmentation as far as school is concerned. Mid-day meal scheme leave a lot to be desired as is the quality and quantity of education being imparted to the students, especially in the government schools in rural India. Physical beating of the students is still rampant in rural schools leaving indelible mental and physical scars on the psyche of the children. And the latest scare is the sexual abuse of the children by the teachers in some of the schools.
Sikdar and Mukherjee (2012) consider reason for dropping out varies between the rural and urban sectors and across economic classes. Three principle reasons in the rural areas are household atmosphere, financial constraints and quality of education. Interestingly, the quality of education is the main reason for dropping in all economic classes in the rural areas- access being the least important. And in the secondary stage, the impact of alternative sources of work and household duties becomes a more important determinant for dropping out of school. However, the two principle reasons for dropping out remain quality and financial constraints. A disaggregated analysis shows that universal enrolment, retention and completion in both elementary and secondary education can only be achieved by improving quality and mitigating financial constraints, especially for the dalits and poor in both rural and urban areas.

Pimpley (1980) has examined the educational problems of school and college students belonging to the scheduled castes in Punjab. He further states that one of the most obvious but by far the most humiliating aspect of a person's status as a member of scheduled caste is his forced 'isolation' from other castes. It is only when such isolation is broken down that there is possibility of improving the status is of those belonging to these castes.

Another study conducted by Pimpley (1976) on social characteristics of the scheduled castes in Punjab is that of the Sikh scheduled caste children lag behind their Hindu counterparts in matter of education. Member of Ad-dharmi caste seem to have taken to education quite seriously.

D'Souza (1980) has analysed the educational problems of the scheduled castes in the Punjab state. He has also thrown light on existence of educational inequalities among the scheduled castes themselves. He adds that the educational inequalities between the scheduled castes and the rest of the society are due to the longstanding socio-economic exploitations of the former by the latter.

**Economic empowerment of dalits**

Judge (1989) conducted a study on the expectations of the scheduled castes from the Government in Punjab. As per his suggestions, more employment opportunities, reform in the loan disbursing system, removal of corruption and provision of technical training are some of the steps to be undertaken by the Government. First, the need of the hour is
to bring administrative and organizational changes for rural development. Second, the involvement of the people in the rural development as it happened in the case of Sidhwan Bet Block of Ludhiana district can bring better results.

Dreze and Sen noted that the general population below poverty line (BPL) in Punjab was 21 percent in 1994, i.e., less than half of India’s then average of 45 percent (Dreze and Sen, 1998:45).

However, the Government of Punjab record showed, with a 28.3 percent share of Dalit population (Census, 1991); they constituted 53.81 percent of the BPL population (Yadav and Sharma, 1995:14).

With significant field experience, Juergensmeyer, therefore, observed in 1979, that “the poor (in Punjab) are the scheduled castes and the scheduled castes are the poor”.

A comparison of the gains of scheduled castes as against the non-scheduled castes made by Gill shows a further “widening of the gap” between the two. The share of scheduled castes in cultivable land was just 2.4 percent. Nearly half of the total scheduled caste population still lived in unhygienic conditions in colonies on the edge of the village. A study of poverty in rural Punjab revealed a significant decline in poverty over the last three decades, i.e. 1961-1991. The National Sample Survey made in 1990-91 showed that “there was no rural household in Punjab whose members were not able to eat two square meal a day on all the 365 days in a year” (Shergill and Singh, 1995: A-80).

Political empowerment and dalit assertion

Omvedt (1994) traces the history of the dalit movement from its beginnings in the nineteenth century to the death of its most famous leader, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in 1956. Focusing on three states, Andhra, Maharashtra and Karnataka, the study analyses the ideology and organization of the movement and its interaction both with the freedom struggle and the ‘class’ struggle of the workers and peasants. The study also looks into historical account of the origin and development of the caste system. Her analysis is based on a modified historical materialism which takes into account the realities of caste, class and gender, and also includes a critical analysis of Ambedkar’s thought which is the dominant ideology of the dalit movement.

Hardtmann (2009) observes that the dalit movement has grown tremendously all over India since the beginning of the 1990s. The dalit networks are spreading across the
globe, which includes dalit activists in the diaspora as well as non-Indian sympathizers. By taking three separate and influential dalit discourses, she has argued that contributions within the movement contribute to its growth and stronger cultural identity. Apart from dalit feminism and gender relations, she also has discussed the role of the dalit figures like Kanshi Ram, Mayawati, and Phoolan Devi, apart from Ambedkar and Gandhi, in the dalit movement. In the context of Punjab’s dalits, there was an ambivalent stance in ad-dharam movement as whether the dalits belonged to Hinduism or were separate from it. Ad-dharam was taken an example to demonstrate this two-sided stance regarding the Hindu tradition. They take their inspiration from the Bhakti movement and Ravi Dass, which clearly belong within a Hindu tradition. But in their rhetoric they dissociate themselves from the Hindu religion and Hindu community.

Parish (1996:204) observed that low-caste actors might reject notions of equality as a basis for critiquing the caste system when they feel threatened by the still ‘lower’ groups. By contrast, it is the need to preserve a core of self-esteem associated with an ‘educated’ identity that encourages the educated Chamars to construct new forms of hierarchy. Young men therefore respond to the crisis in job availability by actively re-imagining educated cultural capital in ways that are moulded by prevailing ideas of social mobility and respect. Low-caste political activity is central to this process, providing a powerful model of dalit masculinity based on education and white-collar employment.

Ram (2008) in his study unfolds the various tenets of socio-economic and political discrimination practised against them as well as their own discontents and and their assertion and movements. He has discussed the various movements from below. A more egalitarian type of social change may occur only, if ‘status quoist’ forces are uprooted from their continued grip over appropriating material and non-material resources. This may be possible through Dalits and allied forces, having full control over the political governance as some may argue, but the political governance would have its own limitations as is evident from some recent experiences in several parts of the world.

The social reform movements, particularly the Arya Samaj, and the Singh Sabha movements launched in the last quarter of the nineteenth century resulted in the communal consolidation and increasing the number of respective communities of Hindus and Sikhs. The reforms lost their steam by the early 1920s. However, the Arya
Samaj’s efforts to educate untouchables threw up a number of leaders from within the untouchable castes to launch their own historical Adi-dharam movement in 1925 (Juergensmeyer, 1982:35-38).

The role of visions and values in shaping the aspirations and setting the agenda for action in the Dalit struggle for their own transformation has been recognized (Michael, 1999:17; Juergensmeyer, 1982). Cohn underlined the significance of seeing and understanding the untouchables as the bearers of ‘an alternate social and cultural system, different from the upper caste culture’ (Michael, 1999:23).

The attitude to politics points to another, somewhat distinctive, orientation to Dalits in Punjab as against those in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. Kanshi Ram was able to mobilize Dalits on a distinct platform that their problem was of “humiliation, not deprivation”. His ethnic politics, which was clearly linked to the rise of a class of educated employees, “was able to wean the scheduled caste voters away from the Congress” (Chandra, 2000:36-38).

Mehta (1972) studied the leadership pattern of dalits in a village in Ropar district of Punjab and he found that majority of the dalit leaders were aged, better educated and economically well-off.

Murugkar (1991) has attempted to analyse exclusively the Dalit Panthers’ movement which had emerged and become quite effective in Maharashtra during the period 1972-1979. Using the framework of the sociology of social movements, she has argued that the Dalit Panthers’ movement initiated by a few angry and audacious dalit youths is closely interlinked with the dalit literature movement and it is impossible to think of one without the other. The researcher has further depicted that the Dalit Panthers’ movement had many parallels with the Black Panthers’ movement of USA which had emerged in California with the formation of the ‘Black Panthers’ party for ‘self-defence’ in the 1966.

Baviskar and Mathew (2009) have studied political empowerment in rural areas, namely, Karnataka, Kerala, W. Bengal, Maharashtra and Gujarat, Haryana, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. The shocking findings of the study are as follows: the elected representatives from SCs are not allowed to even sit on chairs. For tea to be served in separate cups, kept especially for lower castes, is not uncommon in these contexts. Another strategy of the upper castes is to divide all the dalit castes so that they never
emerge as a collective, unified force. Another raging problem is the inability of the dalits, even the elected representatives to speak up and assert for their rights. Women within tribals and dalits are the worst exploited.

Kumar (1989) has studied scheduled caste panchayat heads in western Uttar Pradesh. Further, he has analysed the impact of political socialisation on their political outlook, the pattern of their recruitment and their performance. The study was based on village panchayat elections of 1982 in U.P. has suggested that political socialization, performance and recruitment of the dalit leaders at the grass-root level of democracy in the rural setting. However, in one block of the Ghaziabad district seven of the pradhans were elected from amongst the dalits (Chamars), even without reservation, which was not a mean achievement in those times.

Lynch (1969) has shown with a wealth of detail how a particular dalit community has sought to combine their traditionally low-income occupation (made economically advantageous by changed circumstances) with the desire for higher social status by change of religion and political mobilization. This study succeeds in pointing out that political activism may not solve their problems of deprivation.

Louis (1993) has stated emphatically that Ambedkar was one of the main architects of modern India in the spheres of legal, political, economic and social spheres are concerned. He traced the roots of Hindu social system as well as of Hindu religion. He proved that there were two Aryan races in India. Untouchables were from the other solar Aryan race and they were degraded from the Kshatriya status by Brahmins. Chaturvamya was the fabrication of Brahmins which was added to the Veda in the post-vedic period. He also refuted the theories of origin and growth of caste institution based on occupation, survival of tribal organisations, etc., the rise of new belief, cross breeding, and migration. To him, democracy based on liberty, equality, fraternity, justice -- social, political, economic, and one man one value was a way of life. To him, political power for dalits was a basis for social success and empowerment.

Kumar (2010) in his article has used the term ‘dalit’ strictly for ex-untouchables who have faced cumulative ‘social exclusion’ in the Indian society in general and Hindu society in particular. Further he adds, an ex-touchable is deprived with regard to all the four- social, cultural, economic and political realms. Quoting Oommen, ‘Dalit consciousness is a complex and compound consciousness, which encapsulates
discrimination stemming from inhuman conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony’. Dalits have mobilized through socio-religious movements like the Adi-Hindu, Adi-Dravid, Adi-Andhra, Adi- Karnataka, Adi-dharma or the religious conversion movements. Also, dalits have politically mobilized themselves through Independent Labour Party (ILP), Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF), Republican Party of India (RPI), Dalit Panthers’ Party and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

Mobilizations of dalits through dalit intellectuals like Ambedkar, Savitri Phule, Jyotibha Phule, Narayan Guru, E.V. Ramaswamy, Periyar and Sahuji Maharaj have also contributed immensely to the dalit movement. Dalit employees and dalit women have also mobilized them politically through associations like All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) and National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) respectively. Dalit NGOs like Sanmarg Bodhok Nirashrit Samaj (Depressed Class Society Showing Right Path), Namasudra Hitashini Samiti, Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (Depressed Classes Welfare Association), Samaj Samta Sangh (Organization for Equality in Society), Samta Sainik Dal (Organization of Soldiers for Equality). The challenges to the dalit movement are many fold, like, the need to bring the diverse streams of dalit movements into a dialogue is a big challenge to the dalit movement. Also, dalit movements by definition cut across caste lines but the truth remains that they are themselves dominated by seven to eight castes though the official schedule of scheduled castes has approximately 700 castes, for instance, Mahars in Maharashtra, Chamars in Bihar and UP, Namashudras in W. Bengal and Holyars in Karnataka dominate the dalit movement.

Guru (2002) looks at social exclusion of dalits in terms of the loss of control over ‘time’ and ‘space’. This is a negative exclusion which constitutes the life-world of the dalit and can be contrasted with the privileged, and hence positive, exclusion of the twice-born. For the achievement of dalit political aspirations, he has called for ‘active citizenship’ among dalits.

Zelliott (1970:29) observes, “Among all the dalits in India, the Mahars of Maharashtra have used political means most consistently in order to better their own status.” The Mahars began their attempt to upgrade their status by claiming Kshyatriya status in the late 19th century.

Seth (1979) worked on the issue how improvement in the status of scheduled castes can be brought about through political empowerment. The comparative study of two
villages, i.e. Dighavat and Ahilia concluded that the unity and solidarity exhibited by the dalits of the former village led to their status enhancement in comparison to the latter.

Mittal (1990) did a study on the ‘scheduled caste MLAs in Haryana’ and found that the Chamars were the most upwardly Sewing Machine caste among the scheduled castes followed by Dhanaks and Balmikis. As per one of the MLA interviewed, “The biggest problem for a Dalit is to be born as a dalit in India’s caste-ridden society”.

Parvathamma (1989) has found that the dalit leaders are not only self-centred but also behaving with the dalit masses in the same fashion in which the non-scheduled castes have been traditionally behaving with the scheduled castes. Hence, she has called them neo-brahmins who exploit the poor dalit and treat them as untouchables. She has also called them classes vis-a-vis dalit masses.

Somner (2001) has brought forth the plight of the landless and bonded labourers, women’s self-employment and unionizing, lobbying with government for policies responsive to the needs of the poor, and initiatives in advocacy and disaster relief. The most important lesson of his study is that strength of conviction, courage and the determination to achieve justice at any cost are powerful tools which can overcome most hurdles and lead to lasting change.

McMillan (2005) has critically evaluated and analyzed representation and electoral reservation of dalits in India. The Indian constitution has made special provisions for the electoral representation of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, members of social groups seen to be at the lowest rungs of socio-economic and ritual hierarchy. The reservation of a number of constituencies from which only they can contest elections is intended to place these otherwise marginalized groups in the highest levels of elected government. By analyzing unique survey data and the social and institutional contexts in which reservation operates in India, he shows how the SCs/STs continue to be discriminated against in socio-economic development and are also subjected to political manipulation by the process through which reserved constituencies are allotted. He argues that while electoral reservation has little impact on the voting patterns of SCs/STs, it exerts a negative influence on participation in general. The system does provide symbolic representation, but evidence for any real substantive benefit is limited.
Ram (1995) differentiates the following three types of dalit activism: movements against socio-economic exploitation and numerous types of atrocities on dalits; movement for better access to the opportunities and for realization of goals of equality, liberty, fraternity and justice; and movement for gaining self-respect and dignified social status.

Kumar (2002) in his study has categorised the dalit leadership according to temporal and spatial bases. The study discusses the different phases of dalit leadership under Dr. Ambedkar. Further, the study focuses on another factor which has retarded the emergent dalit consciousness, and finds the lack of growth of a unified identity among dalits at the all India level. The shift in the strategy of the dalit leadership especially of the BSP from social reform to capturing political power has definitely aroused the aspiration of the dalit masses. As far as empowerment of dalit masses is concerned, the dalit leaders have exploited, to some extent, the existing opportunities.

Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) have defined the process of mobilisation as a study of political development and the pivotal role of caste in Indian politics. As far as the process of the mobilisation of dalit masses by the dalit leadership is concerned, we have analysed under two categories i.e. horizontal and differential mobilisations.

Aggarwal (1983) found that during the 1970s, based on his study of 30 dalits including a few dalit leaders elected to the parliament found them helpful to the dalit masses. He cited the example of Jagjivan Ram, the dalit leader, whose presence in the government at the Centre had helped the dalits in many ways. Aggarwal pointed that untouchability was rampant in the society and even Jagjivan Ram was forced to say that, “untouchability is deep rooted in the minds of our people and I notice it frequently”.

Gokhale (1993) presents a social history of political movement of the Mahars in Maharashtra. He argues that the emergence of the dalits in the political scene in the state is one of the significant events in the history of the twentieth century India. In fact, she has discussed the history of the dalit movement from the early days of self-reform through the successive stages of Ambedkar’s Satyagraha. She has presented the picture of fragmentation in the dalit movement specially the tussle of ego among the Republican Party of India (RPI) leaders in U.P. and Maharashtra.

Dhaka (2005) has studied dalit women in Panchayati Raj in the two districts of Haryana. Gender discrimination has been identified as one of the most serious and
contentious issue in the developing countries. The findings of the study are: most of the
elected Scheduled caste women representatives are between 30-50 years of age. Most of
the Scheduled caste women representatives have been elected for the first time. Also the
startling finding of the study is, scheduled caste women are not even aware about their
functions and responsibilities. Most of the scheduled caste women respondents were of
the view that the Panchayats are not functioning properly. The problem of proxy
representation in Panchayats is a common complaint. In some instances, husbands
insulate the women scheduled caste Sarpanches from performing Panchayat related
duties and activities. The Upper caste villagers in general do not have much expectation
from the elected scheduled caste representatives, as they lack both knowledge and skills
required to discharge their functions effectively.

Sahay (2009) has cited M.N. Srinivas who has described rural India as characterised by
the presence of locally influential ‘dominant castes’. The study is an empirical
engagement with the concept of ‘dominant caste’ in the context of electoral politics in a
district of Bihar. The field data strongly indicate a significant dispersal of power among
castes, particularly the major castes, and thereby cast serious doubt on the applicability
of the concept of a ‘dominant caste’ at the village level. The major castes compete with
each other to structure and manage the pattern of dominance, including in political
affairs. This results in a conflict-ridden situation which periodically culminates in open
violence among the major castes. Secondly, to achieve their political goal, castes make
alliances among themselves according to their material interest and situational
expediency. Furthermore, in the Parliamentary and Assembly elections, two or more
major castes, and alongwith some minor castes were seen forming one block of castes
on a political platform to support and vote openly for the candidate.

Teltumde (2012) quotes Ambedkar, “Vested interests have never been known to have
willingly divested themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them”. The
occupation of the Indu Mills near Chaitanyabhoomi in Mumbai by dalit youth
demancing that an Ambedkar memorial should come up there is a positive
development. Dalits have been victims of their poor self-image induced by the caste
system and caricatured by others. They have overcome it to some extent through their
struggles. Capitalist development thus thrust them into the ranks of the proletariat and
the current phase of neo-liberal globalisation has reduced them to a “precariat”, to use
economist Guy Standing’s term, a neologism derived from merging precariat with
proletariat, referring to people with no job security, or no prospect of employment. The precariat must realise that they have the potential to change the world. The strategies for future struggles must be conceived from this position of strength.

Jodhka (2006) has quoted Ambedkar’s staunch views on caste, “You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up a morality. Anything you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole”. The article is based on the case-studies of three villages of Punjab, namely, Jethumajra (Nawanshehar, Doaba), Talhan (Jalandhar, Doaba) and Hassanpur (Sangrur, Malwa region) and the dalit assertions and caste-based conflicts in contemporary rural Punjab. Much of the available literature on the subject tends to ignore the crucial dimension of the democratic politics of contemporary India. The experience of being a member of a dalit caste, for example, is very different from that of being a member of the ‘upper’ or land-owning ‘dominant’ caste. The dalit politics became a viable force only during the 1980s, nearly two decades later. Dalits were marginalised not only for their lowly status; their subordination was also marked by material servitude. Even when caste has lost its ‘moral basis’ ideologically, the subjugation of dalits in the agrarian economy remained nearly intact. Dalits in majority are part of the rural economy as dependent groups, working on land or doing menial jobs.

Sachidanand (1977) in Bihar has found that the dalit elites or the elected legislators play positive roles in bringing about social change among the dalit masses. His work on the ‘dalit elite’ tends to support the common view that reservation policies have created a privileged dalit elite devoted to its own petty advancement and uncaring about the wider dalit community. Such criticism has grown also among some dalits themselves, who have also expressed concern about the stigmatisation of SC occupants of reserved position as inferior.

Guru (2005) analyses the movement of dalit youth towards the Hindutva forces. He holds that the forces of globalization and the lack of capital to create conditions of secularism are responsible for the involvement of the dalits in the infamous genocide of Muslims in Gujarat. In the past the stubborn ideological makeup of the Dalit movement had rather rendered the Hindutva forces impotent. Why then, of late, have Dalits been found drifting towards the Hindutva forces and becoming their foot soldiers, questions Guru. He gives three reasons: First is the decimation of the public sector under the
onslaught of globalization and consequently abolition of the site of caste conflict. The second reason is in terms of Hindutva satisfying the cultural need of dalits. The third is in the terms of the depletion and destruction of the structures (e.g., industrial units, workers’ chawls, and so on) that harboured caste conflict in obliterates their class content. At the end he observes that since mainstream dalit politics has lost the moral stamina to withstand the powerful forces of Hindutva and globalization, dalits should think about revolutionary politics as an alternative.

Omvedt (1995) opined that for most people, even scholars, “Hinduism” has been a taken-for-granted concept. She has explored and critiqued the sensibility which equates Indian tradition with Hinduism, and Hinduism with Brahmanism; which considers the Vedas as the foundational aspects texts of Indian culture and discovers within the Aryan heritage the essence of Indian civilisation. The image, encompassing the cultural diversities of the subcontinent and subordinating them to a Vedantic core, has pervaded both popular scholarly writings on India. Nowadays, large sections of left and democratic forces and all new social movements are trying to argue and organize against the growing influence of Hindutva or Hindu-nationalism. It is sufficient to see dalit politics as simply the challenge posed by militant organisations such as the Dalit Panthers, the factionalized Republican Party, the rallies of the BSP, or even the insurgencies carried out by low-caste based Naxalite organizations. Dalit politics as the challenge to Brahmin hegemony took on wider forms throughout the 1970s and 1980s, its themes sweeping into movements of “backward castes”, peasants, women, and tribals. Dalit politics in the sense of a challenge to Brahminic tradition has been an aspect of “several new social movements”.

Jharta and Sneh (2007) have identified the following causes behind dalits conversion to Christianity in the state of Himachal Pradesh, Hindu caste system, Forcible conversion, allurement to money, superstitious beliefs of Hindus, Dr. Ambedkar’s emancipatory role and spread of secular education. Dalits are converting to Christianity in order to gain equality in the society. In religious conversion, it is not religion but the caste factor which dominates. The study has suggested that upper castes should get over their caste prejudices and change their attitudes to help the dalits to achieve their respectful place and dignified status in the society for which they have been struggling for centuries. By ensuring dalits a sense of equality and a feeling of brotherhood in the sense that they are
loved by the members of the religious groups, we can keep them within the folds of the Hindu society and prevent them from conversion.

Singh (2012) has analysed the general assumption that transnationalism is creating new divisions and iniquitous social hierarchies in caste-based social movements. As per him, organisations such as the Dera Sachkhand Ballan (DSB), which are engaged in modes of subaltern religiosity, transnationalism can be a powerful agent of religious and social change. By cultivating its transnational links, especially in the UK, the DSB has now emerged as the main driver of Ravidassi identity in Punjab. This achievement would not have been possible without the material support of overseas followers for whom the building of social and religious institutions in Punjab has been intimately linked with the search for a separate Ravidassi identity and the need to demonstrate to higher castes in Punjab their sense of collective achievement. Transnationalism has thus been central to a process of differentiation between the followers of the DSB and Sikhism and has accelerated this trend since the Vienna incident in 2009. Ad-dharmis who happen to be the main followers of DSB take pride in Ravidassi identity and they have a sense of achievement in the diverse fields of education, politics and upward mobility. The efforts of the DSB to use these networks to promote social equality, dignity and social mobility illustrate that for marginalised groups self-respect from the south, transnational connections have a significant “liberating” and empowering effect, instilling a sense of self-respect through the remittance of new ideas and social investment in major institutions which can become symbols for challenging their subordination in their home and host lands. In a deeply hierarchical society, this is the first serious step towards social equality.

Rao (2009) asserts that the enormous growth of consciousness and awareness regarding caste can be considered as the outcome of identity politics, for example the Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti in Andhra Pradesh and the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. Issues like growing level of consciousness, contentions, legalities, role of intellectuals have been described. He’s taken the example of Madigas vs. Malas in Andhra Pradesh. Malas, the second largest and the sole beneficiary of reservations, had five contentions against the sub-classification of reservations. The issues like ‘selfless hard work’, ‘consequent capability’ and ‘efficiency’ were raised. There was an apprehension raised that due to sub-categorisation, there will not be any unity amongst the dalits. The prime example of this case is sub-categorisation of dalits in Haryana and
Punjab and the worse fallout on their unity. On the contrary, some scholars opined that there was no unity anyway among the dalits in various spheres such as the cultural and social and therefore, there is no basis for arguing that dalits sub-categorisation will bring disunity. A third viewpoint is that there is exploitation in the name of unity, but dividing them is not the solution either.

Omvedt (2003) has analysed the large-scale conversion of dalits to Buddhism, albeit as a protest movement, which this movement seems to maintain is indeed a challenge to Brahmanism and caste, both of society. She has given a message to the dalit masses who are still victims of extreme forms of social prejudices, atrocities and discriminatory and exclusionary practices that there is an effective alternative in Buddhism.

Mahajan and Jodhka (2012) have examined the dynamics of religion, democracy and governance by analysing the political mobilisations (regional parties like Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, caste-based organisations like Dera Sachkhand Ballan, Muslim OBC movement in Maharashtra, the Balmiki-Mazhabi movement in Punjab and the demarcation of quota for SCs into Group-A and Group-B, etc.). Indian society is heterogeneous as far as caste and religion is concerned. It argues that even when religious identity remains the bedrock of social life and individual experience, democratic politics brings out new combinations, in which neat boundaries of religious difference are occasionally blurred or overwritten by identities. Religious identities remain important, but religious groups are internally differentiated and unequal. Democratic politics, on the one hand, provides space for marginalised populations to mobilise and voice their demands, while on the other hand it compels political parties to woo groups by raising and attending to their demands. In Punjab, the development needs of dalits were raised by the secular political parties in order to fracture the supposed unity of Sikh community and win electoral support from at least some sections of it.

Jain (2010) has analysed the role of religious sects in social development, taking into consideration factors such as age, education, occupation and income. She has studied Roman Catholics, Protestants, Degambar and Swetambar sects of Jainism, and Sikhs. It is observed that sect affiliation and socio-economic background of a person influences social attitudes, sect affiliation helps to shape attitudes of an individual in a varied way and the effects of social development are also multifarious.
Kamble (2008) in *The Prisons We Broke* is written with deep-rooted urge to engage with the history of the Mahar community’s oppression. The political edge of such a critical scrutiny comes obviously from the radical, self-assertive politics of Ambedkar, a major source of inspiration for Baby Kamble, as he is for many radical and Dalit writers in Marathi. In her foreword to the original Marathi autobiography, she asserts, today, our young educated people are ashamed of being called a Mahar. But what is there to be ashamed of? We are the great race of the Mahars of Maharashtra. We are its real original inhabitants, the sons of the soil. The name of this land is also derived from our name. I love our caste name, Mahar it flows in my veins, in my blood, also reminds me of our terrific struggle for truth. The work also brings to the fore that the tremendous transformative potential of oppressed people to change the world.

**Differential empowerment of dalits**

Gosal (2004) gives a graphic account of the widely variant rural-urban caste/jati spread of the scheduled castes in Punjab. Out of the total 37 scheduled castes in Punjab, only two major groupings of Chuhra (Balmiki and Mazhabi ) and Chamar (including Ad-dharmi, Ravidasia, Raidasia and Ramdasia) together constitute 80 percent of the total scheduled castes population. Ad-dharmi Chamars are on the top of virtually every parameter-education, urbanization, jobs, occupational changes, cultural advancement, and political mobilization.

The leading religiously-oriented activists of Sachkhand Ballan seemed disinclined to approve of what the people of Doaba had allegedly learnt in foreign countries and the arrogant and violent manner in which the new rich Chamars behaved, thereby disturbing the village “peace and harmony”’ (Vairagi,2003:5).

Casteism within dalits is still widely prevalent (Judge, 2003: 2990-91).The field study by Sharma and Aggarwal notice brought up an unusual finding that the deprived section of Dalits seemed to hate their Dalit elites, “ more than they hated the upper castes.”

A study of the depressed scheduled castes reported that the number of those living below the poverty line could be as high as 96 percent of their total population. Some of these groups (such as Bangali, Bauria and Bazigars) had only 10 to 12 percent literate population (Kumar and Kumar, 1996:11-14).
Jodhka and Kumar (2007) have examined the internal classification i.e. quota within quota in jobs for Dalits in the state of Punjab. The question of internal classification was recognised to be an important issue long back in 1975 in the state of Punjab, much before it became an issue with the more depressed Dalit groups in the other parts of the country. The experience of internal classification of the Dalits in Punjab and Haryana is certainly much more than instances of competitive vote bank politics. The value of the Punjab case also lies in the fact that it has been in operation for more than 30 years and does ask for a close and systematic examination, and perhaps extension to other regions of the country.

International Emigration of Dalits

Jayaram (2011) has re-emphasized upon the heterogeneity amongst the Indian diaspora. The patterns and phases of the Indian diaspora have been influenced by the following variables, namely, demography of population movements, causes of and conditions for migration, the background of emigrants, the process of emigration, the changing composition of the settlement country, the dynamics of the settlement country, the social organization of the diasporic community, the social organization of the diasporic community, the cultural dynamics of the diasporic community, the question of identity, the struggle for power, and finally, the secondary emigration. In addition, he has classified the Indian diaspora into three types, namely, the colonialism-induced diaspora, the colonialism-facilitated diaspora and finally, the post-independence diaspora.

Gardner and Osella (2003) have studied the inter-linkage amongst migration, modernity and social transformation in South Asia. Migration involves relations of power, whether these are between cities, states and rural areas, or regions; between migrants and non (or would be) migrants; or between individuals within a migrant’s family or household. It is impossible to make generalisations concerning whether or not migrants and their places of origin benefit from the movement, for each case has to be carefully placed within its historical, political and economic context. The effects of migration are far from homogenous, even within the same community or household if we consider caste, class and gender.

Nanda and Veron (2011) have explained the social costs that are involved in international migration. Unregulated mobility leads to negative economic, social,
political and cultural consequences at the place of origin. There is no effective legal redressal mechanism dealing with overseas movements, NRI marriages being the prime example. The study concludes by emphasising that emigration should be harmonized with the needs and capabilities of the sending and receiving regions.

Besides support from the state, in certain parts of Punjab, particularly Doaba, remittances flowing back from abroad has played an important role in the economic empowerment of the dalits, often translating into political empowerment. Judge (2003) did a study to highlight the international migration of the scheduled castes from Punjab which special reference to the Ad-dharmi caste. Though the caste-based discrimination has continued to exist in Punjab till today, yet the practice of untouchability declined considerably due to various factors in history.

Mcleod (1986:111) has highlighted the prevalence of caste consciousness among the Punjabis in New Zealand. A section of Chamars experienced prosperity as a result of changes in the economy. Secondly, the Jatt landlords played an important role in helping the Ad-dharmis to migrate to North America in the early 20th Century. The Ad-dharmi respondents in England seemed to be resenting casteism among the Punjabis in England, but showed inclination towards maintains their caste identity. Is it possible for an in-egalitarian system, which has been in existence for centuries in India to alter its character even for those who live in an alien society is an important area of enquiry?

Interrogating received views of caste and the Dalits, Judge points out not only to the evidence of their autonomy but also to their assertiveness which includes a readiness for confrontation in cases of discrimination and insult. Looking into the impact made by economic prosperity in the Doaba region through remittances from the dalits in foreign lands, he points to a prominent tendency in that section to flaunt their wealth so as to underline their high social status. It is significant to note that between the dalits who are Hindu or Sikh there is a ‘permeable boundary that is easily and inconspicuously crossed’ (Chandra, 2000:30).

Ghuman (2011) observes that dalits on emigration to the UK and other Western countries have faced a double disadvantage: caste discrimination and racial discrimination from ‘white’ society. However, in the late 1990s, second-generation dalit professionals challenged their caste status and Brahmanism in the West and in South Asia. Also, he opines that education is providing a means for dalit upliftment.
Judge (2011) has talked about the migration of Punjabis to the foreign countries since independence. There’s no country on this planet where no Punjabi has emigrated to. There is a marked cultural and religious diversity amongst the dalits who have migrated to the other countries, ad-dharam and Buddhism being the prime example.

**Empowerment of dalit women**

Singularly positioned at the bottom of India’s caste, class, and gender hierarchies, largely uneducated and consistently paid less than their male counterparts, dalit women make up the majority of landless labourers and scavengers, as well as significant percentage of the women forced into prostitution in rural areas or sold into urban brothels: (Human Rights Watch, 1999:166).

Sharma and Aggarwal (2004) notice a close connection between higher levels of education in Dalit families and a higher incidence of recourse to Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) and female foeticide, in precisely the same way as among the educated and better-off sections of the higher castes. Ironically, there is evidence of a decline in the gender ratio among the highly educated section of dalits.

Kumar and Dagar (2004) study brings out how the dalit males taste of prosperity led them to emulate the upper castes not only in tightening control over their women but also in terms of violence against women. There is also negative fallout of educational achievement of dalits, whose roots are in middle class values.

Singh (1989) has examined data for the decade of 1971-1981 in the state of Punjab. She observed that more scheduled caste females were pushed into agricultural, low paid, low status and unskilled jobs as a consequence of development.

Irudayam (2011) observes with pain that legal measures for the dalit women are not being implemented to protect them from violence, nor are allowed to legal redressal when the violence has taken place. As per the study, the responses to violence against dalit women in the study are a clear indication that Indian state currently fails in its duty to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and prosecute violence against dalit women, and compensate /rehabilitate the victim-survivors. She has advocated the following measures for checking rampant violence against dalit women: legislative measures, enforcement measures, rehabilitation measures, cap citation measures, public
education measures and other socio-economic measures like land reforms, providing dalit women vocational training, etc.

Ahlawat and Ahlawat (2008) observed that dalits remain marginal in rural power structure. The dominant caste like Jaats, Brahmins resists the power-sharing process with the Dalits whom they consider as their clients. Nevertheless, constitutional provisions in the form of reservations for the dalits have uplifted them politically to some extent.

Singh (2000) has tried to analyse the problems of the scheduled caste female sweepers working in the Municipal Bodies of Uttar Pradesh. The problems faced by the women sweepers are as follows: awareness of employees, educational level, social status and their low economic status etc. The suggestions given by the researcher are as follows: a) removal of traditional disabilities suffered by the different sections of population on various counts; b) elimination of exploitation in all forms and protection of women’s rights and interests, with formulation of gender sensitization programmes, c) Equity for and protection of those engaged in the traditional sectors of economy including artisans and traditional services. Last but the most importantly, a comprehensive well-knit programme needs to be formulated for the rehabilitation of dalit women more specifically the women bonded labourers. Samel (2006) has discussed in detail the rights of dalit women. Her focus has been on education, reservation policies and its implementation, position of women in tribal society, socio-legal status of the dalits.

Singh (2004) has highlighted the status of Other Backward castes (OBC) women and discusses the scope of their educational empowerment for overall socio-economic development. It also presents critical review of recommendations of various commissions and committees set up by state governments while special emphasis has been laid on analysing the status of OBC’s in India and particularly in Uttar Pradesh. The steps recommended for OBC women’s empowerment are as follows: imparting proper training for their skills up gradation, formation of women’s co-operatives, mass media should be used for enhancing women’s awareness, state governments should identify the districts in the state with poorest women’s literacy and they should be targeted for increasing women’s literacy. In addition to the above mentioned measures; voluntary organizations, political leadership as well as enlightened public specially elders should bring attitudinal changes and break the resistance of OBC parents towards sending their girls to the schools. Last but most importantly; the overall village
infrastructure like access to safe drinking water, electricity, sanitation, roads, education
and health should be improved on war footing.

Rajawat (2005) has elaborated in her study that within the heterogeneous category of
women, there is inequality between dalit and non-dalit women. Within the category of
dalit women, there are further inequalities. Dalit women have contributed to country’s
growth and development throughout history. And even then they have remained at the
lowest rungs of the society, lowest of the low. They are suffering from social,
economic, political and sexual exploitation at the hands of the privileged of the higher
caste as well as their own caste men at will. Even the most desperate and bold measure
taken by the dalits to go for religious conversion also does not bears fruit as the other
religions like Christianity, Islam, Sikhism are also afflicted with the caste system.

Banu (2004) argues that the tribal social structure is different from hierarchical caste
Hindu structure. In fact, there are multiple ethnic groups in the country, such as caste,
tribe, religious, regional and linguistic sects and each structural unit has its own identity
and therefore, autonomy. She has studied the Bhil tribe in the state of Rajasthan.
Thanks to the 73rd Constitutional amendment, tribal women have gained higher status
and leadership but they have regressed in few areas like gender equality within their
community.

Arunachalam and Kalpagam (2006) have taken up various burning issues as far as rural
women’s development and empowerment is concerned. While the rural women have to
perform multiple roles and are confronted with role conflict as a result; they in general
do not possess access to resources and entitlements. Their caste and class exclusion
from the development process further compounds the nagging problem of their human
development like nutrition, health and education. Raju (2006) has argued that the
development-related indices are showing some improvements but the pace has been
very slow. There are few radical interventions and constitutional reforms but they are
few. She further argues that the women are restricted to the reproductive health domain
only. To legitimize gender equity, women’s empowerment should be located in broader,
social and political structure.

Kar and Kar (2002) have critically analysed the various factors which promote girls’
schooling in Orissa. The conclusions of the study are as follows: the promotion of girls’
education will not be at the cost of boys’ education or vice versa. In the educational
system the role of schools is instrumental in promoting secondary schools education, but not in the case of primary school enrolment. As regards primary school enrolment, an economic variable represented by agricultural development plays a major role while in the secondary stage educational factors like the number of schools and literacy rate become predominant.

Reddy and Snehalatha (2011) have studied two slums of Hyderabad. Whether tribal or low caste, women of the slums observe and believe in the general rules of cleanliness, hygiene, modesty and pollution as anybody in the upper echelons of society. Despite their squalid surroundings and their extreme poverty they try to do their best to maintain standards of cleanliness. The lack of an underground sewage system caused problems in both colonies affecting levels of cleanliness and hygiene. When the Integrated Low Cost Sanitation Scheme (ILCS) latrines are located on unsuitable soil they are not used; rain worsens the situation, the worst time for health being the wet season. The ILCS latrine is poorly designed and disliked by the people. It is a truism that decisions related to sanitation needs are made by expert others, far removed from the people living in poverty and for those ‘benefit’ decisions are made.

Prasad (2004) has conducted a study on the manual scavenging in the various colonies of Rohtak city from women of different age groups. They were engaged in low paid jobs. They were all Hindus dalits. The human rights provisions have little provision for the dalits engaged in scavenging work. It further becomes a source of appalling poverty and powerlessness of dalit women engaged in such humiliating and lowly paid work. The dalit’s deprivation stems from both inhuman conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony and unless strategies are worked out to remove these structural conditions, the provisions of human rights will have no impact on their precarious existence. There have been hardly any changes in the attitude of upper caste towards them. The opportunity of work for the women members of their community remains confined to scavenging and a decent living for them and their families, safe and healthy working conditions, equal opportunities for promotion, etc., remain a distant dream for them. Therefore, the dalit women engaged in scavenging work simply demonstrates that the human rights provisions for them are nothing but rhetoric.
State Welfare Measures

Hooda (1999) conducted a study on the upper caste perceptions of “affirmative action” for Dalits in Haryana. As per the study, the forward castes exhibited unfavourable attitude towards reservations while the backward classes including dalits exhibited favourable attitude.

Providing infrastructural facilities to the members of scheduled Castes under the Special Component Plan which broadly categorized these thrust areas under following four heads namely: Health, Housing and Environment; Education; Social Security Programme; Economic Development Programme may be quite exhaustive but its actual implementation by the executive machinery is the major challenge before the Government. In addition, the Central and state Government must focus on the poorest among the poor in Punjab.

Wangyal (2003) in his paper argued that implementation of reservation quotas is a myth and not a reality. As per his analysis, the job quotas have been filled only in Class III and Class IV jobs and not in more important, crucial class I and class II jobs. In addition, dalits face a very harsh and prejudiced work culture in the public offices.

Beteille (1981) has argued that it is fallacious to assume that the ‘equalization of castes’ can be achieved by means of job reservation in the public sector (such jobs are too few in number to materially alter the conditions of any caste as a whole). He states that in the case of untouchables, backwardness is not solely a matter of poverty, the extent to which might vary from one individual to another. It is due also to the stigma of the pollution which attaches to the caste or community as a whole.

Ram (1986) has suggested the emergence of a new middle class consisting of the salaried persons among the scheduled castes, as an outcome of the “protective discrimination policy”, is quite different from the old middle classes in the country due to its specific social background and distinct historical origin.

Sharma (1989) evaluates the impact of target group planning on the leather workers in the state of Haryana. He discovers various lapses in the implementation of the scheme and concludes that simply making jobs available is not enough. The Welfare schemes require to be backed by effective and organized efforts to improve the lot of the workers, which the state has failed to do so. Reservations in jobs, education and political institution for scheduled Castes have also made an impact. Out of the Special...
Central assistance (SCA), 100 percent of which was granted by the Union Government, only about 1 percent was released and spent during 2001-02 (Awasthi, 2003).

An overview of allocations and expenditure on various schemes over a period of 11 years in Punjab, from 1991-92 to 2001-02, showed a shortfall of Rs. 1547.66 lakhs, i.e., more than 50 percent of the allocation. The issue relating to distributive justice may well be naively analysed by identifying the forward and the backward among the dalits. Nevertheless, some occupational upward mobility has indeed been experienced by some of the dalit families but that has not conferred upon them the corresponding status and dignity. The pro-poor policies are being replaced by the ad-hoc schemes that have been implemented in a piecemeal manner. There is a need for attitudinal transformations amongst the upper castes for facilitating the dalits in acquiring appropriate space in the social hierarchy (Kundal, 2004).

Gudavarthy (2012) in his paper on “de-stigmatising reservations in India” has discussed the politics of recognition that Other Backward Classes are talking about nowadays. The OBCs reservation discourse is in contrast with the dalits’ political discourse. He has analysed the impact of Ambedkar’s argument for reservations, OBCs as the new democratic force, re-appropriating merit, regionalism and linguistic assertion as impact reservations. OBC reservation discourse has its own terms and dynamics that need to be factored as indispensable to any process of democratisation. Overcoming the stigma of reservations is most likely to impact not merely the OBCs and other beneficiaries of such affirmative policies but it is in fact set to influence the very grounds on which public institutions, policy and political processes have, so far, been perceived and pursued in Indian politics.

Prasad (2004) critically analyses structural deprivation of scheduled castes in Punjab. The dalits in Punjab face two paradoxes, one, and the structural paradox which has been the cause of their proletarianisation, due to their relative deprivation in economic field and second, is the feudal agency of the caste-based discrimination which has subjected them to institutional bondage.

Bhardwaj (2000) did a study on welfare of Dalits in Punjab from Gandhian perspective. As far as Punjab Government’s Special Component Plan (SCP) is concerned, the success of special component plan in the removal of atrocities and social disabilities has been satisfactory. Substantial progress has been made in the fields of health,
housing, and environmental improvement, etc. However, in the areas of educational and economic development of dalits, their still remains lot to be done.

Ramotra (2008) has analysed the impact of various developmental schemes and plans on the scheduled castes in the state of Maharashtra the most disadvantaged and underprivileged section of the society. It was found out that the scheduled castes were mainly engaged in the primary sector particularly as agricultural labourers. The proportion of SC workers in the secondary sector has declined marginally but there share in the tertiary sector has considerably increased. Another disturbing finding was that due to their poor economic status, their housing condition was also poor. Majority of the SCs live in one-room and two-room houses. Regarding literacy, the male SC’s literacy was many notches higher than female’s.

Thorat (2007) has raised some pertinent questions. He adds that due to the age-old discrimination and oppression of SC/STs and presently, due to discrimination in various markets and non-market exchanges, there is an urgent necessity for remedial measures against this rampant discrimination in the private sector. Henceforth, affirmative action for SC/STs must be implemented in private sector too.

Shah (2002) has elaborated that the Indian state under the directives of the Constitution is expected to play the role of interventionist to bring social transformation. It aims at eradicating the feudal hierarchical social order based on brachmical ideology and building an egalitarian secular modern society providing all citizens social and political justice, equality, liberty and dignity of life. The dalits, socially and economically most oppressed of Indian society look upon the State not only to provide equal opportunities but also to provide positive conditions for improving their socio-economic status. They perceived the state as a saviour to liberate them from shackles of bondage and deprivations based on birth.

Hasan (2009) differentiates and comes up with the thesis that the religious minorities are also disadvantaged and socially deprived alongwith the disadvantaged castes in Indian society. But, successive governments, public policy framers and academia have paid more attention to the latter than the former. In the changing scenario, what matters is relative deprivation, and not always absolute deprivation, as in the past. Relative deprivation in case of Muslims in turn breeds greater aspirations and also greater resentment over exclusion. For the same reason we need to shift and reorient policies of
affirmative action in order to extend its reach and benefits to the more deprived within beneficiary groups like maha-dalits and to include categories outside its preview like the Muslims and Christians. Affirmative action needs to be sensitive to complex criteria such as income disparities, minority disadvantage, and gender. Failure of the trickle-down approach compounded with the single-minded emphasis on one dimension of group disadvantage has served to obscure these issues.

Duggal (2003) has conducted a survey of villages in two districts of Malwa region. The list of 12 schemes surveyed are as follows: Training of rural youth for self-employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Attendance scholarship to SC girls, old-age pension, financial assistance to old and destitute women, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Mahila Samradhi Yojna (MSY), National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS), Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP), National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Indira Awas Yojna (IAY). Government of India has been floating schemes after schemes for uplifting the status of women. The resources utilized so far in the launch of various welfare schemes have been colossal indeed and have benefited the women in substantiating their household income and improving their social status to some extent, however the change has not been that noticeable to bring about any change in the attitude of their family members towards these dalit women.

Krishnan (2009) has elucidated elaborately the following cause behind the dalits marked and continuous backwardness, namely: landlessness, poor wages, rampant bonded labour, manual scavenging, denial of social security, denial of quality education, denial of access to market opportunities, poor outlays in the budgetary heads of Welfare/Social Justice Ministry, half-hearted implementation of the reservations, tampering with and diluting pre-existing reservation rules, denial of normal service benefits and progress for scheduled castes, deprivation of scheduled castes of reservation in PSUs while privatising them, continuance of atrocities, continued imposition of “Untouchability”, sidelining of dalit leadership in different parties. And the foremost problem is the trivialization, routinisation and truncation of Special Component Plan (SCP) for scheduled castes.

Trivedi (1996) has found out that the quest for land for cultivation and housing has been a long cherished goal of dalits in the state of Gujarat. That is one of the means of
attaining social equality with the people of higher strata in society. Social and educational backwardness from which they are suffering since ages can be removed considerably by economic betterment with land for cultivation and educational uplift of scheduled castes man and woman. However, these cannot be attained without adequate shelter and healthy living conditions. The spread of education among the scheduled castes has not commensurated with the increase in population of these communities. The study has also revealed that there were a handful of viable landholders among scheduled castes and very few of them were able to earn their full livelihood from cultivation of land. It was also reported that the mortgage of land of scheduled castes and other weaker sections of the society was replete with irregularities and underhand dealings by the moneylenders. It was also reported that the system of administering Land Ceiling Act was very sluggish and time consuming. One of the main finding of the study was the awareness and knowledge of the Special Component Plan providing easy facilities from the Scheduled Castes Economic Development Corporation, Scheduled Banks had not reached the needy households.

Singh (2008) has studied the impact of state welfare schemes like Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Jawahar Gram Samriddhi Yojana (JGSY), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), Pardhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) and Credit-cum-Subsidy Scheme for Rural Housing (CCSRH) on rural development in Punjab. From the study, it was found that poor people were in a bad need for development funds. Also, there was under-utilisation of available funds.

**Inferences drawn:**

Dalits are largely disempowered because of lack of education, landlessness, faulty implementation of reservation policy, atrocities perpetrated on them and incidence of untouchability. Dalit women are at the worst position. Also, dalits lack solidarity amongst themselves, there’s hierarchy, differentiation and discrimination among them.

**Gaps:**

There are spates of studies undertaken on dalits in India as well as Punjab. One of the limitations of these studies is that they are left wanting as far as representation of all cultural and geographical zones of Punjab is concerned. Secondly, there was lack of
studies taking up the most numerically preponderant castes as well as the most depressed castes amongst dalits at the same time. Thirdly, a study taking up multivariate impact of various factors like education, owning land, impact of welfare schemes, emigration and remittances, impact of religious sects/deras (shrines), social mobility, political empowerment and dalit consciousness, religious conversion at one place was missing altogether.

Objectives of the study:

In the light of the literature reviewed, some gaps in the pre-existing studies have been found. In order to fill the gaps, the following objectives have been listed:

1. To find out the socio-cultural, economic and political empowerment of the dalits in rural Punjab and the major impediments in the path of empowerment.
2. To find out the inter-caste variations within dalits in terms of empowerment, if any.
3. To map the extent of international dalit emigration and its impact on their socio-economic life at the place of origin.
4. To find out the occupational mobility: inter-generational and intra-generational among the dalits.
5. To evaluate the effects of the State Policy of welfare on the dalits and to suggest the policy measures for the future action of the State.

Research Methodology:

Geographically, Punjab can be divided into three regions from the natural ecological point-of-view: Foothills of Shivalik range, Chos and Plains. Empirical data was collected from the four development-cum-cultural zones of Punjab i.e. Doaba, Mazha, Malwa and Kandi region.

There are total 39 scheduled castes in Punjab. Rural Punjab was the focus of our study because 62.51 percent of the scheduled caste population lives in villages (Census of India, 2011). Secondly, Dalits in rural areas are comparatively underdeveloped and lesser empowered in comparison to their urban counterparts. The condition of dalits, though relatively better than many other states, is not that rosy as expected in a developed state like Punjab. Dalits are still deprived of ownership of crucial assets like land, capital, etc. and access to basic social infrastructure. On an all India basis, Punjab
ranks rinth in the Human Development Index (HDI) but is sixteenth as far as the Gender Development Index (GDI) is concerned.

The total districts in Punjab are 20. The four districts were purposely representing, namely Jalandhar (Doaba region), Amritsar (Mazha region), Mansa (Malwa region) and Hoshiarpur (Kandi region). Jalandhar and Mansa’s districts were selected for field work as dalits of these districts are poles apart on development scale. These two districts will help to give a comparative analysis. Also, Mansa is the most underdeveloped district in Punjab and the dalits of rural Mansa are one of the most disempowered dalits in Punjab. Amritsar district is selected for the study because being a border district, it is comparatively lesser developed. But the most important reason in favour of selection of Amritsar is the predominance of Mazhabi Sikh (one of the most populous dalit caste) which would incorporate the caste/cultural differences in the study. The last development zone i.e. Kandi area is also lesser developed because of the hill terrain and hence, Hoshiarpur district was chosen from this area. From each of these four districts; two blocks from each district were selected on the basis of level of development, i.e. one most developed block and another least developed block. From each district; further, most and least developed blocks were selected taking 16 development indicators and the data provided in the “Block-at-glance” published by Economic Adviser to Punjab Government.

The rationale behind choosing one village from the most developed block and one from the least developed block was that we will get the mean/average. Further, one village from each block was selected in such a way that it has at least forty percent dalit population, it is also and is relatively free from urban influences. A sample of fifty households was selected through stratified (proportionate) random sampling technique. In all, 415 households were interviewed by an exhaustive interview schedule taking 100 households from each district. In order to give a complete picture in the light of the

The 16 development indicators employed to find out the most developed and least developed blocks in the chosen districts of study were the following: Number of villages having road facilities, Number of Banks, Number of Co-operative societies and their members, Amount of Loans/Subsidies advanced by rural development agencies and number of Beneficiaries; Number of educational institutions and the number of students; Number of teachers in the school; Number of Medical Institutions, Private Practitioners and Doctors; Villages covered under Drinking Water Supply Schemes; Number of Veterinary Hospitals, Number of Tractors and Thrashers, Irrigated area and Irrigated Intensity, Number of tubewells/pumping sets, List of those Blocks where rest houses are available; Number of villages having miscellaneous facilities like market committees, sub-yards, purchase centres, Post Offices, Libraries/Reading rooms, sports stadium, Cultural institution, railway station, police post, panchayat Office and Milk Collection Centres.
objectives mentioned above, more than twenty case-studies of *mahadalits* (most depressed scheduled castes) was also conducted. A separate Interview Guide was prepared for the case studies. Also, relevant information regarding the general profile of the village was collected through comprehensive village schedule. Apart from the primary data, secondary data was also used. After data collection, the data was coded and processed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Two types of cross-tables were generated from the quantitative data, one, featuring head of the households and two, all the members in the household excluding head of the household.

**Chapterisation**

The chapterisation of the thesis is as follows: the first chapter titled Introduction deals with the formulation of the research problem, review of literature, objectives and research methodology. The second chapter deals with socio-demographic profile of the dalits. The third chapter deals with inter-caste variations and dalit empowerment. The fourth chapter discusses emigration and its impact on dalits at the place of origin and social mobility: intergenerational and intragenerational. The fifth chapter deals with the State’s Intervention Policy and Political Empowerment of dalits. The sixth and the final chapter deals with the main findings and policy recommendations.