CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

All societies are stratified. However, the Indian society cannot be fully understood without understanding the role of the caste system. Caste plays a very important role in Indian society at all levels such as arrangement of marriages, lineage, kinship and occupation. Caste even affects the institution of family and the community. Also every day social relationship and personal rapport while selecting friends often depends on caste background. Social interaction is therefore defined by caste in every day life.

Many societies are based on single culture or one value system in the world. In India, society is so culturally rich and diverse that there are several regional variations of the central culture. India is a multi-cultural society, yet the caste system cuts across these variations and the scheduled castes in whatever cultural sub-system they are born, suffer commonly almost the same type of cultural, social and economic disabilities. They have become marginalised through centuries of exploitation and illiteracy. They often plays a very insignificant role in decision making and enjoying little political privileges of the country. Atrocities on the weaker sections of society are quite common especially in rural areas while incidents of discrimination have not ended inspite of enactment of several laws.

In spite of the Constitutional Provisions and Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, the exploitation still continues. Though the scheduled castes are not concentrated in any one pocket or area in the country but are scattered and are dispersed all over the country, they commonly suffer from discrimination in all parts of India from caste Hindus.

"Caste cannot be abolished in India, and to attempt it would be one of the most hazardous operations that was ever performed in a political
body. As a religious institution caste will die; as a social institution it will live and improve” MAX MULLER (1869).

The caste system in India is as old as the vedas, whether or not it was practiced during the pre-Aryan period, is a debatable question. But it is almost certain that features of the caste system began to appear and operate as soon as the Aryan race established its hegemony over the northern part of the Indian sub-continent.

It is noteworthy that in the vedic period ‘sudras’ were treated at par with other classes of society. There are innumerable examples of social equality, as may be seen in the case of vedic king Sudas, Rekhab (the chariot driver and the vedic teacher of Janasruiti), Kawach Alish (the author of many Rigvedic hymns), Vishwabhandu and Ashwinikumar, who were highly respected ‘Sudras’ of their times. But this situation did not last long, because one of the major problems faced by the early Aryans was how to amalgamate a large number of non-Aryan tribes into their social system. By and large the non-Aryan stock was designed as ‘Sudras’ to serve the superior Aryans. Further, there was the problem of how to fit it into the social hierarchy of Aryans those people that were the product of the mixing up of the Aryan and the non-Aryan stock. This mixed race was assigned a lower place in the social ladder by the caste conscious and powerful Aryans. This is one of the theories which attempts to explain the origins of the caste hierarchy in India.

In the later periods Manu, the author of ‘Manusmriti’ made the system of caste and social segregation, a stable feature of Indian society that persists even now. From the days of Lord Budda to the present time a large number of reformists and social humanists have tried to revolt against the social inequality imposed by the caste system from time to time, but they have not succeed in undoing it (Singh, 1986).

The existence of scheduled caste today is the outcome of the historical unfair treatment of groups of service class by the upper caste Hindus. In ancient times the under privileged people were known by
various names such as Dasyu, Avarna, Panchama, Sudra, Asprushya, Anthyaja etc.

Many scholars have tried to explore as to how the custom of untouchability came to be practiced by Hindus. There is no mention of such a practice in the Hindus Dharmashastras, where one finds some historical perspective of development of Hindu ethos. Dr. Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Constitution of India made vigorous efforts to study Hindu scriptures and to find out whether there is any mention of the practice of untouchability either in the treatise called Dharmashastra or Smritis of the Hindus. The term ‘out caste’ does not indicate in any way that the Scheduled Castes were thrown out of the Hindu fold. On the contrary it simply signifies that they do not have the privilege to mix in the day to day social life of the people of the other three varnas based on specialized occupational structure of the society.

To-day the term “Scheduled Castes” refers to a list of castes prepared by the British Government in India. During the ancient period and medieval periods they were known as ‘Panchamas’, Chandalas and Anthyajas. During the British period they came to be first called as ‘Depressed classes’ or ‘Exterior castes and later as ‘Harijanas’ and finally ‘Scheduled castes’. It was Gandhiji who first used the term ‘Harijan’ or “Children of God” to the lower castes to integrate them into the society.

Untouchables were subjected to various types of humiliation before they came to enjoy the same social and economic privileges along with the other castes of India.

During the vedic period there were four classes (Chatur-Varnas) namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. In the post vedic period these four classes became rigidly structured, closed hierarchical groups, with each following its own occupation and its rules of endogamy. Each one of them included a number of sub-castes. Each class was rigid in observing its rules. Marriage of people from one class with those of another was treated as violation of norms. Children born of
such unions were called mixed breed (varna-sankara) or of impure origins. They were not given the caste of either of the parents but were placed outside of the four castes. They were not permitted to associate with the four castes. Nor were they allowed to take up professions of the four classes. They had to take occupations that involved dealing with dirty or unclean things. They were debarred from attending the social and religious ceremonies of the four upper classes. Persons from the four classes thought it improper even to touch them, as they had unclean occupations and led inferior socio-religious life. They were classified as untouchables.

The ever-increasing conservatism of the four fold caste system gave stability to the phenomenon of untouchability. The untouchables considered themselves as such since their birth. They were designated as the ‘fifth caste’ or ‘Panchamas’. They lived outside villages, in isolated areas that were not clean. They were prohibited from entering the village temples, from drawing water from public wells, from approaching the wards inhabited by clean castes and from following any occupation other than their own. Thus they suffered many socio-economic disabilities.

The scheduled castes have remained socially, economically and educationally backward since the beginning of the caste stratification of Indian society. The problems of scheduled caste students are not merely social, economical and educational. They are, rather complex, involving many factors. Since the beginning of caste stratification of Indian society, the persons of scheduled caste have remained not only backward but were considered untouchables and discarded. Their living quarters were located in the lower part of the village. A habitation site which was unhygienic and susceptible to the spread of diseases.

The caste system as a form of social stratification is peculiar to India. It is an inseparable aspect of the Indian society. The hereditary occupations, ideas of exclusive family, ancestor worship, the sacramental meal etc. was a design of the Brahmans to keep themselves pure.
Many attempts have been made to understand how the caste system originated. Some of these ideas have been advanced as "theories" of the caste system. Because of its all-pervading nature, it has drawn the attention of social scientists, especially sociologists and anthropologists. Iravati Karve (1961:53-58) says that, Manu, the mythical Hindu law-giver, has ascribed the origin of caste as the progeny of inter-varna unions and the number of castes growing as the mixtures and permutations thereof increased in variety. While Aryans did not have caste, there nevertheless may have been castes in India prior to the Aryan period. She also opines that caste is a social process and that processes of caste making is going on throughout history and is happening even at present.

In ancient times the three higher castes were allowed to take wives from the lower castes, while the upper caste women were not allowed to marry beneath them (Prabhu, 1961). The inter-marriages between various castes led to the formation of new castes till a time came when restrictions were imposed on inter-caste marriages.

J.H. Hutton (1946) has said that "caste was an endogamous group, often with an ascribed occupation and ranked relative to other castes".

Berreman, G.D. (1967:51) has said that "caste system is a system of birth ascribed groups each of which comprises for its members". The maximum limit of status equal inter-action and between all of which interaction is consistently hierarchical. It is a social process.

Herbert Risely says that, "caste is a collection of families, bearing a common name, claiming a common descent, from a mythical ancestor, human and divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community".

From the above discussion we may cite a few theories regarding the origin of the caste system in India. Some of the prominent theories are as follows:
1. **Traditional theory**: This theory which attempts to explain the origin of the caste system is one of the earliest. It was advanced by the Hindu Law giver Manu. This theory advances the idea that each of the castes were born from the different parts of the supreme creator Lord Brahma. Therefore he says that the Brahmins emerged from the head of Brahman and therefore were entitled to indulge in intellectual pursuits. The Kshatriyas were thought to have emerged from the shoulders of the God and hence were considered to be strong and their duty was to protect the society from invasion by outsiders. They were of the soldier caste.

The third caste, the Vaishyas were created from the thigh, and as the legs or thigh stands for movement they were to go all over the society buying and selling commodities. They were required to engage in business and commerce.

However, the Shudras were supposedly created out of the feet and were considered suitable only for menial and unhygienic occupations. They were therefore denied access to any superior virtues in life. They were consigned to the lowest rungs of the society.

The inter marriage between all the castes were prohibited by Manu. Any inter mixture was called "Varna Samkara" and such people and their progeny were excommunicated and were called Chandalas or untouchables. The idea is further explained in the Chandogya Upanishad and various other folk tales of the vedic period. Such excommunicated population suffered extreme disabilities. Therefore inter mixing of caste was strictly prohibited and over the centuries the Varna system or caste hierarchy became hardened.

2. **Occupational theory**: Many sociologists have attributed the origin of the caste system to the nature of vocation chosen by a person. Thus in the initial stages the Varna was thought to be flexible and one could choose one's occupation.
In this context Nesfield says “Function and function alone is responsible for the origin and structure of caste in India”. Over the next few centuries vocation became hereditary and the Varna system became inflexible. This limited the vertical mobility and the descendants of the illiterate population who did menial tasks could not change their vocation.

3. **Political theory**: According to this theory caste is said to be a clever device engineered by the upper castes, especially Brahmins to protect their own high status. Gharye says “caste is a Brahminic child of Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganges and thence transferred to other parts of India by Brahmin prospectors”. This theory seeks to explain that the aristocrat blue-blooded Indo-Aryan Brahmins of fair skin who had migrated from Central Asia dominated the local people and did not allow them to rise up in life.

4. **Religious Theory**: This theory gives importance to the Durkheimian idea of purity and pollution in religious rituals. Thus the Brahmins being mainly priests, who were strict vegetarians and knew how to worship the gods, began to dominate society. The non-Brahmin caste due to non-vegetarian food and less clean vocations were graded lower. The Chandalas who cleaned carcasses and did polluted vocations became untouchables due to their unhygienic nature of work.

5. **Evolutionary theory**: According to the supporters of this theory caste was the outcome of an evolutionary process. As some people were born intelligent, strong and capable they slowly began to dominate the society while the less gifted were given statuses according to their level of intelligence and capacity to do work. Thus the educated priestly class formed their own guild and prevented others from taking up their vocation which ultimately resulted in the formation of the caste system.
6. **Racial theory** : Risley was considered as the main proponent of this theory which later became very famous, though it is now being criticised. Dr Majumdar was also one of its supporters. Accordingly, the caste is the result of Aryan migration. The Aryan conquerors were made up of three castes such as Brahmins (administrators) the Kshyatrias (soldiers) and the Vysias (Traders) when the Aryans migrated to India and defeated the local population who were dark skinned, they were used as slaves and called “Dasas” or “Dasyas”. The destruction of the Indus valley civilization is attributed to this era.

7. **Varna theory** : Lastly some sociologists attribute the origin of caste to the colour of the skin, That is Varna also means “colour” in Sanskrit. Hence the Brahmins who were white were considered superior, the Kshatriyas were thought to be reddish or of Bronze colour and the Vaishyas were yellow. The Shudras were dark skinned and were looked down upon, much as the Negroes in the west.

Inspite of all these elaborate theories of the origin of the caste system, the matter is of unsettled discussion. Various thinkers have approached it in their own way. But one fact which emerges is that the Shudras have always emerged as the most disadvantaged section of society for whom there was no way to redeem themselves from their low position nor any way in the right to better their status in society.

Today caste has received social, economic and religious sanctions and has become an unspearable part of Indian society. Neither democracy nor modernization has been able to eradicate it. Caste has today only become modified. Due to Indian politics caste on the contrary has become highlighted.

Untouchability is one of the outcome of caste system. The scheduled castes occupy the bottom most rung of the social ladder. These castes have been discriminated against by the superior castes through the ages. They have never had any kind of social acceptance from the majority of the people, who belong to the upper castes. This has
been the unique feature of Hindu social system that there has been in existence a large group of people known as untouchables or scheduled castes. This system has no parallel elsewhere in the world.

Untouchability refers to the practice of avoidance of contact with them by other castes. Even the physical contact with the members of these groups was considered polluting by members of other castes. Until recently, they were not allowed to draw water from the common well in the village, nor were they entitled to enter the temples. A person who would be touched by an untouchable was required to take a bath immediately afterwards, in order to remove the pollution. Ideas of occupational and ceremonial purity, which have been important factors in the genesis of the caste system were the very soul of the practice of untouchability. There are some instances: The Paria caste in South India, the members of which were “obliged to carry warning bells” to announce their presence, so that the high caste members would not be polluted by coming into contact with them. On the Malabar coast, the people belonging low castes were “forced to go almost naked” for fear that the others may be touched by the billowing of their clothes. These disabilities forced the untouchables into practically inhuman conditions. Ghurye (1957) observes, “Even a modern Brahmin doctor, when feeling the pulse of a Shudra, first wraps up the patients’ wrist with a small piece of silk, so that he may not be defiled by touching his skin”. This idea of pollution was, until recently, so strictly observed in some places that even if the shadow of an untouchable fell on a member of a higher caste, the pollution was considered to be conveyed.

Untouchability has become closely identified with the caste system. It is a hereditary aspect where the child of an untouchable automatically becomes one due to no fault of his own.

This abhorrent system came into effect in historical times due to the nature of the vocation taken up by some of the scheduled caste sections scavenging, shifting and disposing off the dead carcasses of
animals, leather tanning and such other unclean vocations consigned the people to untouchability. Hence it came out of cleanliness and to keep away the polluted people at a distance. However, this was taken to extreme limits leading to unhuman practices in Indian society. The Panchamas and Chandalas were especially of this section. The Pratiloma marriages led to their progeny being denied a high status and were forced to take up unclean vocations.

Even as long back as 700 B.C. there are mentions of untouchable castes in ancient Hindu literature. Patanjali, Narada, Manu and others who wrote the Shastras or social and legal laws mention the existence of the Chandalas.

The Smiritis enumerate social groups undertaking the lowest kinds of occupations such as scavenging, leather work, removal of carrion, message conveying and sweepers sweeping dead cattle as untouchables. Such classes were required to live on the outskirts of the village or town.

The term "scheduled castes" was first coined by the "Simon Commission in 1928 and later in the "Government of India Act, 1935". This Act listed out a few of the castes as the most inferior ones which required some special attention. This list of castes was designed as "scheduled castes". When India became independent, this term was adopted by the new Constitution for the purpose of providing them with special facilities and constitutional guarantees. However not all scheduled castes suffer from the disability of untouchability such as for example the Bhajantri, Bhovi, Lambani etc. However, a vast majority of the scheduled castes do suffer the stigma of untouchability. Before Independence the term Depressed classes was also often used. Today however the term scheduled castes is officially used for these castes, both "touchable" as also "untouchable" and this is in common usage. However, it may be noted that the term scheduled castes is not defined in the Constitution. The Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution expressly empowers the President of India, who is consultation with the various
state governments can notify the list of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes from time to time.

Today the term “Dalit” is also often used to identify the scheduled castes. First used in literature, it is now quite extensively used as in “Dalit movement”, or “demands of the Dalits” etc. They are the large group in the Indian population who have suffered from social, cultural, religious, political, educational and economic, disabilities since centuries and have been denied a proper status in Hindu society.

In spite of several reform movements, the scheduled castes or the Dalits have always remained on the fringes of society. Even the British were careful not to give them any rights immediately for fear of offending the caste Hindus. Reforms to help the Dalits had to come from within the Indian society. Education was the only instrument from outside which could help them.

Many sociologists have tried to define the term scheduled caste in their own way, according to D.N. Mazumdar (1961:59) “The untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities, many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes”.

G.S. Ghurey (1957) “Scheduled castes are those groups which are named in the scheduled caste order in force from time to time”.

Criteria of Scheduled castes

Many disabilities were attached to these low caste people by caste Hindu to differentiate them; they are as follows;

1. They are not served by clean Brahmins.
2. Barbers, water carriors, tailors, hotelers, who serve caste Hindus, do not serve them.
3. They were not allowed to take up occupation opted by caste Hindus
4. They could not use wells, schools and bathing ghats used by caste Hindus.
5. They were not allowed to enter Hindu temples
6. They could not serve water to the caste Hindus.

Upper caste Hindus expected from the scheduled castes that they should not sit or remain sitting on cots, while a caste Hindu is seen passing infront of them. In different parts of India there are different criteria for maintaining the distance by caste Hindus from scheduled castes.

It is an established fact that the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas are man-made. The upper caste Hindus wanted the right classification in society in which they could maintain their supremacy over the low caste Hindus. They, therefore, proposed for a class based on the ground of birth in a particular family and advocated as such through the sacred Hindu religious books.

The main reason behind this strict caste system appears that caste Hindus wanted non-interference in their trade and occupation. Thus the idea of lower caste and upper caste developed. The lower castes were treated as untouchables and kept depressed or deprived of education, prosperity and gracious trades. They were not allowed to use those public places which caste Hindus forbade them. These caste Hindus even kept themselves away from the shadow of the low caste Hindus.

It cannot be denied that the foremost disability of the scheduled castes stems from their occupations. The most degrading filthy and laborious occupations are carried out by the members of these castes. Therefore, today they want to change their occupation. But it is a problem from psychological point of view. Since they pass from occupation to occupation, from one economic and political status to another, the establishment of very rigid habits is hindered because a form of behaviour suitable for one occupation becomes unsuitable for another.
The scheduled castes in India suffer from not only social and economic but also religious disabilities as they were not allowed to enter temples. For centuries the scheduled castes were not allowed to have land and business of their own. The scheduled castes hardly participated in the political matters for centuries. They were not given any place in politics, administration and the general governance of India. Political rights and representation were denied to them. The Backward Class Commission in 1955 was an important step to identify the criteria of backwardness.

The commission has also given the following description of communities and castes which have been classified as backward:

1. Those who suffer from the stigma of untouchability or near untouchability.
2. Those tribes who are yet sufficiently assimilated in the general social order;
3. Those who owing to long neglect have been driven as a community to crime-including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes;
4. Those nomads who do not enjoy any social respect and who have no appreciation of a fixed habitation, and are given to mimicry, begging, jugglery, dancing, etc.;
5. Communities consisting largely of tenants without occupying rights and those insecure land revenue;
6. Communities consisting largely or agricultural or landless labourers;
7. Communities consisting of a large percentage of small land owners with uneconomic holdings;
8. Communities engaged in cattle-breeding, sheep-breeding or fishing on a small scale;
9. Artisan and occupational classes without security of employment and whose traditional occupations have ceased to be remunerative;

10. Communities, the majority of whose people do not have sufficient education and therefore have not secured adequate representation in Government service;

11. Social groups from among the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs who are still backward socially and educationally; and

12. Communities occupying low position in social hierarchy".

Reform Movement

How deeply entrenched the caste system is and how the age old traditions come in the way of the upliftment of the scheduled caste, can be understood from the failure of reform movements and social and religious reformers to integrate the untouchables within the fold of Hindu society.

The earliest reform movement perhaps goes back to the times of Gauthama, the Buddha. Lord Buddha as a compassionate religious reformer made sincere attempts to propagate complete equality before god. He established a new religion and a new order of monks who came from all sections of society. Even women were not debarred from spiritual attainment. The untouchables were given an opportunity to lead a respectable life and improve their status. Buddhism proliferated for a time and a few centuries later after the death of Lord Budha it was again overtaken by Hinduism.

Much later in the 12th century, A.D. Lord Basavanna again made attempts to propagate equality. This founder of Veerashaivsm brought about far reaching social reform. He was indeed a revolutionary who was a far sighted visionary. Basavanna, as he was popularly known wanted to break the caste system, though he was himself born in the Brahmin caste. He gave importance to “Kayaka” or “Bread-labour”. Through his philosophy he stressed the importance of doing hard work, irrespective of
one's caste. Such was the appeal of his new faith that the common folk flocked to him.

Basavanna even arranged the marriage between a Shudra boy and a Brahmin girl, who were the children of his followers, though this created a furore in the society. Many of his well known contemporary followers came from Dalit background though they were leading figures in the Veerashaiva movement. Allama Prabhu used to beat the drums at the Madhukeshwar Temple of Banavasi before he became a Veerashaiva, Dohara Kakkayya was from the Shudra caste, so also was Haralayya who was a cobbler. Hadapada Appanna was from the barber caste, while Madivala Machayya was from the waterman caste. Similarly Medara Ketayya made a living by making bamboo baskets and Nuliya Chandayya made and sold ropes. Again Urilinga Peddi was a Shudra who went on to establish a Veerashaiva Matha.

The above are only a short list of Shivasharanas or Veerashaiva devotees. More than eight hundred years later they are still remembered due to their spirituality which shows that Dalits are not devoid of spiritual learning. Basavanna had the courage to provide them individual freedom and gave the right encouragement.

After Lord Basaveshwara during historical times, it was Mahatma Gandhi who was also keenly aware of the need to bring the scheduled castes into the mainstream of Indian society. He observed that freedom from British rule meant nothing if the marginalised groups were not given their rightful place in free India. He called the practice of untouchability a blot on the face of Hindu society.

Gandhiji organised a stringent campaign against untouchability. He called the Dalits as the true children of God or Harijans. He made attempts to include the Harijans in his freedom movements. He led them in his prayers, both morning and evening. He took up the job of cleaning latrines and urged the upper castes to do the same to show that it was a basic hygienic duty.
Gandhiji started the ‘Harijan Sevak Sangh’ and a mouth-piece called the ‘Harijan’. Schools and health clinics were established to help the Harijan overcome their natural diffidence. He made attempts to rehabilitate them both socially and politically. It is for this reason that he was against separate electorates for Harijan, for he saw it as a ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British Indian Government. It is here that he had a difference of opinion with the great Dalit leader – Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Gandhiji made sincere attempts to make the Dalits socially better and restore to them their rights.

Another great leader who came from the scheduled caste group themselves was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He was from the Mahar caste and suffered the greatest disabilities. Despite this he acquired western education and even went abroad. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a social humanist.

Hailing from Maharashtra, he took over from where Mahatma Phule had left. He became a symbol of revolt against caste Hindus. He led a social movement which engulfed the whole of India and his message to the Dalits reached the far corners of India. Political and social empowerment of the weaker sections of society was his life mission, while eradication of the pernicious system of untouchability was his goal.

Dr. Ambedkar instilled a sense of dignity, self confidence and a definite identity status among his followers. He established several institutions to achieve his aim. He called his movement the “Self Respect Movement”. He established the “Bahishkrita Hitakarni Sabha”, the “Independent Labour Party” and the “Depressed Classes Education Society”. It was a three pronged attack on traditional society to uplift the untouchables.

Dr. Ambedkar even made a scientific study of the caste system in order to find out its roots and how it could be eradicated. In this attempt he wrote several books on the caste system, on untouchability and on Hinduism. Hence he was even called the Modern Manu.
In 1956 Dr. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism and embraced Buddhism at Nagpur. This place was then called “Deeksha-Bhoomi” and every year many Dalits embrace Buddhism.

As a member of the committee to frame the Constitution for independent India, Dr. Ambedkar was responsible for incorporating several measures for the upliftment of the Dalits. He was awarded the ‘Bharat Ratna’ the highest title in India for his efforts.

Today Dr. Ambedkar remains a beacon of light for the scheduled castes. He is an example to show how education can bring about a transformation and restore civil and political rights to educated scheduled castes.

Another movement for the upliftment of the Dalits was headed by Sri Narayan Guru in Kerala. Though it was started in Kerala it spread all along the western coast and into Karnataka.

Sri Narayan Guru (1854-1928) started the S.N.D. P. movement in 1902 with the message “One caste, one religion, one god”. He started a number of schools as he saw education of the Depressed classes as the most potent instrument to fight untouchability. He also built a number of temples where the Dalits could pray, conduct marriages and other rituals. He also established an order of monks or Sanayasis. Thus he modernised and Sanskritised the Dalits within a short period of 30 years. Though the appeal of this reform movement was limited and regional, nevertheless it is an important landmark.

Indeed the President of India Sri. K.R. Narayanan who comes from an extremely poor Dalit family form Kerala is yet another example. With a good education he succeeded in the Indian Foreign Service. He was a successful Ambassador to China and ultimately became the President of India.

Education and freedom are therefore two important avenues for the betterment of the Dalits in India.
Strength of the scheduled castes

A study of the population of the scheduled castes shows that there is a steady and immense increase in their population.

In 1921 the total number of scheduled castes in India was 52.7 million. In 1931 there was a marginal decrease to 50.2 million due to starvation and poverty brought about by famine in the north-eastern parts of India. In 1941 they had increased to 48.0 millions while in 1951 the figure stood at 55.30 million with 818 sub castes. In 1961 the increase was 64.50 million. Ten years later in 1971 the population of the scheduled castes was 89.50 millions. A sudden increase is thereafter perceived with 104.75 millions in 1987 and 140.0 millions in 1991. Though the number is steadily increasing the main reason for their backwardness is that a vast majority still reside in rural areas where traditions and customs still victimise them.

The following Tables show their numerical increase and the levels of literacy.

Table 1.1
Growth of Scheduled Caste Population in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of census</th>
<th>Total population of S.C.'s in Million</th>
<th>Percentage of the S.C. Population out of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>48.00 millions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>55.30 millions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>64.50 millions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>89.50 millions</td>
<td>15.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>104.75 millions</td>
<td>15.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>140.00 millions</td>
<td>16.48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Census Abstracts: 1941-91.

Literacy rate among scheduled castes

From the following table it is understood that the literacy rate of scheduled castes throughout the country is unsatisfactory.
The southern state of Karnataka has a sizable scheduled caste population. This is depicted in Table 1.3 from which we may note that the population of Karnataka in 1971 was 29,29,014. Among them the scheduled caste population was 38,50,034 thereby accounting for 13.14 per cent. A decade later in 1981 the total population had risen to 3,71,35,714 while that of the scheduled caste was 55,95,353 which was 15.07 per cent. Finally in 1991 the population of Karnataka was 4,49,71,201 of whom the scheduled castes were 73,69,279, that is 16.30 per cent of the total population.

From this Table we may infer that the population of the scheduled castes in Karnataka had increased very rapidly, even out pacing the national average growth.
INDEPENDENT INDIA

After the advent at democracy in India for the first time a special consideration was made for the education of the scheduled castes. Due to the age-old rigid caste system existing in India, the scheduled caste people had suffered from distinct social, economic and educational disabilities. Even today the caste system is still holding a unique position in Hindu society.

After independence the central and state governments have undertaken various plans, programmes, projects and schemes to promote the welfare of the scheduled castes.

After Independence there have been several constitutional safeguards and legislation passed to protect the rights of the scheduled castes.

Constitutional safeguards

The Constitution of India provides protection and safeguards for these classes, either specifically or by way of general rights of citizenship with the object of promoting their educational and economic interests and of removing certain special disabilities to which these people are subject. These are:

i. Article 15 (1) prohibits the state from discriminating against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. This right under Article 15 (1) is available to the citizens against the state only.

ii. Article 17 of the Constitution states, 'Untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'untouchability' shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law.
iii. Article 23 (1) prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour and thus aims at 'recognition and restoration of the dignity of man'.

iv. Under Article 32, any citizen whose fundamental rights, including the right against Untouchability under Article 17 are violated can move the Supreme Court directly by writ proceedings for the enforcement of the rights conferred by the Constitution. Public spirited individuals, lawyers, social workers, journalists and voluntary organizations can on behalf of the scheduled castes. Public interest litigation petitions in the Supreme Court under Article 32 or in the High Courts under Article 22 of the Constitution.


v. Article 46 directs the state to promote with special care the interests of the weaker sections, especially of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and protect them from social injustice and exploitation.

3. Provisions in the Constitution to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes: Article 338 provides for appointment by the President of a special officer for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for them under the constitution.

Article 341 empowers the President to specify castes, races, or tribes to be Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.

An important landmark legislation was the enactment of the Untouchability Offences Act 1955 which made the inhuman and pernicious custom of untouchability a punishable offence. The Act is as follows:
Protection of civil rights, 1955
(Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955)

1. The fundamental rights pertaining to the abolition of untouchability:

Statutory Provisions

4. The relevant Act is the 'Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955', formerly called the Untouchability (offences) Act, 1955.

5. The following practices on the ground of Untouchability are forbidden:

   Enforcement of disabilities with regard to entrance and worship at temples, access to shops and restaurants; the practice of occupations and trades; use of water sources, places of public resort and accommodation; public conveyances, hospitals, educational institutions; construction and occupation of residential premises; holding of religious ceremonies; use of jewellery and finery etc.

   Therefore those who compel a Scheduled Caste person to do any scavenging or sweeping; to remove any carcass or to flay any animal or to do any similar job on the ground of untouchability is an act forbidden under this Act and punishable according to law.

6. Inciting or encouraging the practice of untouchability an offence:

   If any person directly or indirectly, preached untouchability or its practice in any form of justifies its practice on historical, philosophical or religious on the ground of any tradition of the caste system or on any other ground punishable accounting to the provisions of this Act.

(ii) The promotion of the educational and economic interests of these classes and their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Art, 46);

(iii) The throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus (Art : 25).
(iv) The removal of any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels, and places of public entertainment, the use of wells, tanks, water taps, cisterns, bathing ghats, burial or cremation ground, any sanitary convenience, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of the State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public (Art. 15).

(v) The forbidding or any denial of admission to educational institutions maintained by the state or receiving aid out of the state funds (Art. 29).

(vi) The obligation of the states to consider their claims in making the appointments to the public services and reservation of them in case of inadequate representation (Arts, 16 and 335);

(vii) Special provision for the administration and control of scheduled and tribal parts (Art. 244).

(viii) The setting up of Advisory Councils and separate departments in the States to promote their welfare and safeguard their interests (Arts. 164, 338);

(ix) Special representation in Parliament and State Legislatures for a period of ten years (Arts, 338, 332 and 334).

It will, thus, be observed that a three-pronged attack, legislative, executive and educational has been launched to eradicate the evil of untouchability which still continues to be practiced in some form or the other in certain parts of the country.

Measures to Eradicate Untouchability

The Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, came into force on June 1, 1955. It provides penalties for the following offences:

(i) Preventing a person, on the ground of untouchability from entering a place of public worship, offering prayers therein or taking water from a sacred tank, well or spring.
(ii) Enforcing all kinds of social disabilities, such as denying access to any shop, public restaurant, public hospital or educational institution, hotel or any other place of public entertainment the use of any road, river, well, tank, water tap, bathing ghat, cremation ground, sanitary convenience, dharamshalas, sarai or musafirkhana or utensils kept in such institutions and hotels and restaurants.

(iii) Enforcing occupational, professional or trade disabilities or disabilities in the matter or enjoyment of any benefit under a charitable trust, in the construction or occupation of any residential premises in any locality or the observance of any social or religious usage or ceremony.

(iv) Refusing to sell goods or render services to a Harijan because he is a Harijan, for molesting, injuring or annoying a person or organising a boycott of or taking part in the excommunication of a person who has exercised the rights accruing to him as a result of the abolition of untouchability.

Since 1954, the Central Government have been giving financial assistance to the movement of eradicating untouchability. Both official and non-official agencies are being utilised for this purpose. Harijan Days and Harijan Weeks are observed in almost all the states to focus public attention and enlist people's co-operation in the eradication of untouchability. Publicity media such as books; pamphlets, handbills and audio-visual aids have also been pressed into service.

The assistance and co-operation of voluntary organisations, such as the Harijan Sevak Samaj, Harijan Sevak Sangh, Bhartiya Depressed Classes League, and the Harijan Ashram of Allahabad have been obtained in the fight against untouchability.

Article 45 of Indian constitution has laid down that "The state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the
commencement of the constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years*. In order to promote education among them the government is giving concessions such as free education, free tuition, stipends, scholarships, free supply of text books, mid day meals, free boarding and lodging facilities etc. to the scheduled caste students.

In spite of providing all such facilities the educational gap between the scheduled castes and the rest of society is still very wide and the rate of improvement is very slow. In this context D'Souza (1980:56) noted that “The state is endeavoring to bridge the educational gap between the scheduled castes and the rest of society, but on the other hand as an un-intimated consequence of that endeavor, the educational gaps among the scheduled castes themselves are widening”.

Hence Ambedkar recommended that the best scheduled caste students who was selected from primary schools be kept away from their parents and be given all the facilities till they complete their education. As per Article 45 of the Constitution of India, the reservation policy was first implemented in Jammu and Kashmir. Chalam (1990:23) has said that “It was the Jammu and Kashmir government which for the first time after independence resorted to a large scale communal reservation policy in 1952”. The first all India effort to recommend reservation on caste basis (other than SC and ST) was attempted by Kaka Kalelkar Commission in 1953.

The government of India grants liberal concessions in the field of education because education plays an important role in the advancement of the scheduled castes. Education alone can remove their social, economic and educational disabilities.

The Government of India setup various commissions and committees from time to time considering the significance of education for the socio-economic regression of the lot of scheduled castes. Special provisions were made to protect their interests and provide safe guards to
them. As a result the enrollment of scheduled caste students is increasing day by day. Hence Yadav (1991:26) has said that “Today a significant proportion of dalit families are ready to send their children to school and do so as reflected in class 1 enrollment”. It is due to various facilities, following are the facilities provided to them.

1. PRE-MATRIC SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship is an incentive to promote education among scheduled castes of pre-matric. The rate of scholarship varies from state to state.

2. POST-MATRIC SCHOLARSHIP

The scheme of post-matric scholarships to scheduled castes is very important scheme for the educational development of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. It was started with the objective of providing financial assistance to them studying at post-matriculation stages in the different schools and colleges in the country so as to enable them to complete their education.

3. HOSTEL FACILITIES

The government has provided funds for the construction of hostels for boys and girls belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, so that they may get better environment and facilities for their studies.

4. MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS

Under this merit scholarship scheme 7.5 per cent scholarships are reserved for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students.

5. BOOK BANK SCHEME

The scheme is for SC’s and ST’s students studying in Medical and Engineering and degree courses in the country so as to provide text books to those, who cannot afford expensive education without state support.
6. ADMISSION TO EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS

In most of educational and technical institution, seats are reserved for SCs and STs. A minimum qualifying standard is prescribed for admission.

7. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Under the government of India Scheme of scholarships residential secondary schools, which include public schools. 500 Rs. and above scholarships are awarded to those students whose parents income is very least.

8. COACHING AND ALLIED SCHEME

This scheme has been provided both at central as well as state levels to the SCs and STs. The students are given training at different parts of the country in preparing for admission to various courses and also enabling them to appearing to competitive examinations.

9. ADMISSION TO MEDICAL COLLEGES

In all medical colleges in the country seats are reserved in under graduate courses for SC and ST students.

10. RESEARCH AND TRAINING

The government provides cent per cent financial assistance to reputed social science research agencies/institutions which have proven expertise in studies in the economic development.

11. AGE LIMIT

The maximum age limit prescribed for direct recruitment to a service or post shall be increased by five years in the case of candidate belonging to SC and ST.
12. RESERVATION IN EMPLOYMENT

Article 16(1) of Indian constitution envisages equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state, irrespective of their religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or residence. However, in order to ameliorate the socio-economic backwardness of scheduled castes the constitution provides reservation in the service.

Along with the above facilities they received special attention through the constitution of India with special provisions in education, employment and political representation. Article 46 for instance, dealers, “The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”.

Thus educational advancement is accelerating towards scheduled caste people. Today, significantly a larger number of children from lower caste groups attend schools as compared to the situation that prevailed even five decades ago.

Suggested Measures for Social and Economic Amelioration

The social disabilities of the Scheduled Caste people spring partly from prejudices of high caste Hindus and partly from the economic cleavage between the high castes and the depressed classes. They can be removed by the spread of education, by propaganda for their removal and by an improvement in the economic conditions of these classes. They have to be induced to abjure hard drinking, eating carrion or vermin which are so repugnant to high castes. Where, they indulge in extra marital license and give up their women to prostitution, the standard of morality has to be raised and new marital customs introduced. The ministration of a Brahmin priest at the time of marriages may contribute towards the approximation of their marital standards to those of other
Hindu castes. Economic advancement of the untouchables can only be stabilized with opportunities for improvement of social status. Social reform and economic uplift must aid each other in a collective, planned drive in the villages.

The appalling ignorance of the untouchables is often a hindrance to their advancement in the social and economic sphere. But their extreme poverty, their backwardness and their social disabilities conspire to prevent them from making full use of the existing educational facilities. The vicious circle must, therefore, be ended. Residential schools should be provided. Intensive propaganda in favour of education is also necessary. This work can be entrusted to societies or associations interested in rural welfare and the village officials.

It should be noted that no substantial improvement in their economic condition is possible without bringing about an improvement in the condition of Indian masses in general. To do so, concerted action in three directions is necessary; First, a vigorous policy of industrial and rural reconstruction to utilise fully the resources of the country. Secondly, propaganda in favour of birth control to check an abnormal increase in population, and Thirdly, education in the widest sense of the term and encouragement of social reform must be taken up. Specially important it is to bring about a reduction of expenditure on social ceremonies.

Finally, more imperative is the change of the social attitude of the high caste Hindus to these classes. No nation can be strong and efficient which has doomed about sixty million people to economic and social degradation. A country wide campaign of land reclamation and vocational education of temperance, cleanliness and social purity of removal of untouchability and better living among the less favoured and depressed castes can alone contribute towards eliminating one of the darkest blots on the face of the Indian civilization.