Social inequality has been a vital structural property of almost all human societies. It manifests in different forms and degrees, and varies from one society to another, because of the primordial differences in ability, prowess, power, wealth and status among individuals or groups.

Untouchability is one of the myriad issues of social inequality which has uniquely been a feature of the traditional Indian social system. The real victims of untouchability in the contemporary Indian society are some of the Harijan jatis, who are categorized as 'Scheduled Castes' by the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India guarantees them, along with other citizens, justice, social, economic and political liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, and equality of status and of opportunity. Besides these, the Constitution provides a number of safeguards in order to bring them to the level of the advanced sections of the society. All these provisions have been incorporated in the Indian Constitution so as to remove their age-old social disabilities and give them social justice. Nearly forty years have passed since the Constitution of India came into force. And it is incumbent to study the status of Harijan jatis in Indian society. Some studies have been conducted here and there in India to assess
this problem. But no comprehensive study has been carried out in this part of the country, that is, Orissa, where a sizeable number of Harijan jatis live. This has drawn me to study the status of Harijans, the erstwhile untouchables in the State of Orissa through anthropological investigations, that in, through empirical inquiry.

My interest was primarily aroused and sustained in this problem when I happen to study intergroup relations in a village in Sambalpur, early in my anthropological career as a field-investigator of the SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Programme) project. While working in this project the problem of discrimination against the Harijan communities in rural Orissan society attracted me most. But since I had little scope to probe into the details of this problem, I decided to devote myself to a scheme of investigation about this problem at a later phase, and this constitutes the content, structure and objectives of the present piece of work.

In consultation with Professor N.K.Behura, Professor of Anthropology, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, I undertook the present project with a hope to throw some light on the status of Harijans both in caste and tribal contexts, making it a comprehensive and comparative study in Orissa for which an arduous task of staying in the study villages for
more than two years was an inevitable necessity, so that the total spectrum of interaction could be observed and recorded. During my study, I have received ample suggestion, inspiration and guidelines from my guide who has devoted a large chunk of his valuable time to help me out whenever I was in sore need. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Professor N.K. Behura who has also accorded me enough sympathy and generosity during all the phases of my work upto the write-up and has undertaken the heavy burden of correcting and finalizing the entire thesis. How much I have gained from his deep learning and keen intellect is beyond my capacity to express!

But such a project would have remained a remote objective had not the University Grants Commission (U.G.C.) offered me the Teacher Fellowship for a period of three years. This came as a relief to me in undertaking field-studies as well as enabling me to visit different libraries at Calcutta and Bhubaneswar. The research and writing have been supported in part by the U.G.C.'s financial assistance. Hence I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to the U.G.C. I owe my gratitude largely to Professor L.K. Mahapatra, Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, who permitted me to carry on research in the department with all possible help. My thanks
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