Chapter-IV

Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalits in India: With Special Reference to Kalahandi District in Orissa
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_The Hindus wanted the Vedas and they sent for Vyasa who was not a caste Hindu.
The Hindus wanted an Epic and they sent for Valmiki who was an Untouchable.
The Hindus wanted a Constitution, and they sent for me._


India is considered to be the most stratified of all known societies in human history with its peculiar form of caste. The caste system is 'peculiar' in the sense that it is one of the greatest separating forces that have been used to divide human beings, mainly into two categories: higher castes and lower castes. This simple division is backed by certain religious sanctions, which yield to what sociologists' term 'purity' and 'pollution' concepts. These religious sanctions make possible a renewal of legitimacy of Indian caste system even after it is challenged throughout the course of history. Thus, the caste system with its myriad variations of super-ordination and subordination still exists in all the regions of India with different degrees of rigidity

It is due to this irrepressible caste system that the untouchables of India, who number more than 220 million and are known today as Dalits, have been systematically neglected and ostracised in Indian society throughout ages. The dalits in our country are known by many other names given to them by others, mostly to despise them or to show contempt. A man is not a mere label but a disclosure of a reality. They are _Avarnas_, colourless and non-descript; or _panchamas_, those left over as it were after the four castes have been counted; or

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1 Raj Kumar, “Dalit Culture: A Perspective from Below,” _Social Action_, vol. 50, no.1, January-March 2000, p. 16.
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aspirations of a vast victimised section of the Indian population right down the ages.

The term Dalit is a past passive participle of the Sanskrit root dal meaning to crack, split, open, etc. Dalana means tearing or causing to burst. Dalit means split, broken, destroyed, scattered, torn asunder. The noun dala, besides meaning the splitting, has also the positive connotation of something unfolding itself (dala -komala, a lotus, dala-kosal, a jasmine).

The Marathi word dalit, like the word Black, was chosen by the group itself and is used proudly; and even in the English press, the unfamiliar Marathi word had to be used. None of the normal words-untouchable, scheduled caste, depressed classes, Gandhi's euphemism, Harijan- had the same connotation. Dalit implies those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, Karma, and justified caste hierarchy.

The clearest definition of Dalit in its contemporary usage comes from Gangadhar Pantawane, a Professor of Marathi at Milind College and founder editor of Asmitadarsh (mirror of identity), the chief organ of Dalit literature: "To me, dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy Books

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5 Prakash Louis, Political Sociology of Dalit Assertion, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2003, p. 146.

teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution”.\textsuperscript{7} The Marxists, however, would define Dalit in terms of class, generally including women, tribals, workers and agricultural labourers.\textsuperscript{8}

The word gained currency in public sphere during the Scheduled Castes-caste Hindu riots in Bombay in the early 1970s. Dalit Panthers used the term to assert their identity for rights and self-respect. Later the term came to be used to include all the oppressed and exploited sections of the society. It has essentially emerged as a political category. Dalitness is essentially a means towards achieving a sense of cultural identity. The inferiority complex based on ‘to be a dalit’ has now disappeared. Now Dalitness is a source of confrontation. This change has its essence in the desire for justice for all mankind.

According to Gopal Guru, the category Dalit has faced criticism, particularly by the urban, educated middle class Dalits, as socially regressive, derogatory and undesirable. These middle class Dalits argue that this category forces Dalits to carry the load of their historical past, and hence offers a socially reactionary agenda. There are others who argue that the category shares the same reactionary agenda as the one invoked by Manu, the Hindu lawgiver. These opponents argue that the ontological basis of the category of Dalit is a class, which is undesirable. Instead, they prefer to define the category on an

\textsuperscript{7} Eleanor Zelliot, op.cit., p. 268.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 269.
individualistic basis and foreground the category Buddhist. Ultimately, these attempts posit the category Dalit in opposition to the category Buddhist.

It is interesting that the category Dalit was used by Ambedkar in his fortnightly *Bahishkruit Bharat*. He defined it comprehensively: ‘Dalithood is a kind of life condition which characterises the exploitation, suppression and marginalisation of Dalits by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper caste Brahmanical order’. Ambedkar, however, did not use this category often, preferring to deploy different terms depending upon the changing context. For example, when dealing with the imperial state he used the category of depressed classes. When addressing high caste Hindus he used the category *Bahishkruit* meaning totally outcaste. In the arena of competitive politics, he preferred the term ‘Scheduled Caste’. It was evident when he used this term for establishing the political party, ‘Scheduled Caste Federation.’ However, he also tried to provide a class identity to the Dalits during the late 1940s. Finally, in an effort to politically radicalise his own social constituency, he used the term Dalit, meaning those who are crushed under the feet of the Hindu social order. In recent years the category Dalit was first comprehensively deployed by the Panthers, thereby combining the caste, class and gender dimensions which were also part of Ambedkar’s mode of thinking and his revolutionary politics.9

**Origin of the Term Scheduled Castes**

The term Scheduled Caste has a long historical origin. Prior to the year 1935, when the Government of India Act, 1935 was enacted, the communities suffering from the stigma of Untouchability were being referred to as untouchables or

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9 Prakash Louis, op.cit., p. 146.
exterior castes or depressed classes or by various caste names most of which were derogatory. As a part of the social and political changes to be introduced in the year 1935, the various castes, which suffered social disabilities, were listed in a Schedule and from that time onward they came to be described as Scheduled Caste. After the Constitution of India was enacted, the list of Scheduled Castes was notified by the President of India in accordance with the provisions of Article 341 of the Constitution. The SCs thus represent a constitutionally declared collection of castes, communities or groups, their defining characteristic being the suffering from the traditional practice of Untouchability. In terms of the provisions in Article 341, the SCs have been specified separately in relation to each other States and Union Territories.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Practice of Untouchability}

By the practice of untouchability, we mean the avoidance of physical contact with persons and things because of beliefs relating to pollution. Many kinds of superstitious notions relating to pollution prevail in Hindu society. For example, the belief that people are polluted if they touch a menstruating woman or one in parturition. Similarly, there is a belief that when a person dies, all those with the same surname are polluted and even others who touch these persons will also be polluted. There are many more such superstitions! But the effect of all these forms of pollution lasts only for a few days. Untouchability, on the other hand, is not a temporary form of pollution at all. That whole population in question remains untouchables throughout life. There won’t be any change in this kind of pollution, namely, Untouchability.

This evil practice is not confined to any particular region in the country. Until recently, it was quite widespread. It was more widespread in villages than in towns. Though the situation has changed to a considerable extent, Untouchability is still a reality in villages even today. Nobody knows when and why this evil practice started. Historians offer different reasons. None of the reasons appears correct or satisfactory.\(^{11}\)

Dalits are outcastes, too impure to belong to the caste hierarchy. The pollution-purity principle operates so strongly that their touch, and sometimes their shadows and even voices are believed to pollute the caste Hindus! Avarnas are not simply human beings. No need to talk about them. They have neither any rights nor is there any possibility of liberation. They exist either as objects of pleasure for the higher castes or as a means for their welfare and luxury. They are caste out and left out, they are dalits. Determining a person’s humanity on the basis of birth is the speciality of Indian culture. Hindus behave as if untouchables are born to serve them. They believe that they can forcibly make untouchables serve them. They call such forced and free labour ‘Begar’\(^{12}\). The grim reality of untouchability appears inescapable. It is there in schools, in teashops, while labouring, while walking on public roads. The fear of indignity, humiliation and rape is always present.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{11}\) Ranganayakamma (Telugu original), B.R Bapuji (English trans.), *For the Solution of ‘Caste’ question Buddha is not enough Ambedkar is not enough either Marx is a must*, Hyderabad, Sweet Home Publications, 2001, p. 66.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.144.

\(^{13}\) Bela Malik, “Untouchability and Dalit Women’s Oppression,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXXIV, no. 6, February 6-12, 1999, p. 323.
There are many empirical studies, which indicate that untouchability continues to be an important component of the experience of dalithood in contemporary India, especially the countryside. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, April 1990 undertook a sample study in several states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, and found that untouchability was prevalent in the following forms. The summary of the report is as follows:

(i) SCs did not have access to temples and other places of public worship to a large extent in U.P, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Karnataka.

(ii) A sizeable section of SCs in Tamil Nadu did not have access to drinking water resources. A similar situation existed in U.P, Rajasthan and Kerala.

(iii) Untouchability in the form of non-access to tea stalls and hotels was still found in U.P, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Kerala.

(iv) Barber services were not available to a section of SCs in Tamil Nadu and to a larger degree in U.P, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala.

(v) Washer men services were not found to be available to a section of Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu. To some extent this disability existed in U.P, as well.

(vi) In Tamil Nadu, Bihar, U.P, Kerala, and Karnataka, SCs were found to be discriminated against in the matter of participation in social ceremonies.

(vii) Discrimination in matter of participation in sittings at village chaupals and gram sabhas existed in Tamil Nadu and U.P, and to a lesser extent in Rajasthan.

(viii) In Rajasthan a section of SCs were discriminated against in educational institutions, public health centres, etc.
Discrimination in respect of use of utensils meant for the general public existed in U.P, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Forced practice of occupations like removal of carcasses, etc., by SCs was prevalent in Tamil Nadu, and to a lesser extent in U.P.

SCs were discriminated against in the use of public cremation/burial grounds, public passages, etc., in Tamil Nadu, and to a lesser extent in Maharashtra and U.P. SCs were at a disadvantage in the matter of construction/acquiring occupational residential premises in Tamil Nadu, and to a lesser extent in U.P. This includes access to dharmashalas/sarais.  

Reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1977-78 admit that the Scheduled Castes in many parts of the country—are humiliated, insulted, manhandled, assaulted, burnt alive, tortured and their womenfolk molested. “Their miseries are aggravated when they are boycotted socially and economically.”

There are so many glaring examples of the practices of untouchability; to pick one of them is always an arduous task. Not even a judge is spared. In July 1998 Uttar Pradesh witnessed a despicable scene. A district judge on being transferred and taking charge of his new office washed the entire office space with ‘Gangajal’ (water from the holy river Ganges) to purify it. Why? The previous occupant to that office was a judge from the dalit community.
In another such case, a dalit in Bihar was handed over to the police because he “dared” to wear clean clothes and enrol in college.\textsuperscript{17}

**Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalits in India**

The population of SCs in India according to the 2001 Census is 166,636 ('000), which is about 16.20 per cent of the total population of the country. (Census 2001, India, 2005, p.14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table no. 4.1: <strong>Scheduled Castes Population in India: 2001 Census</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Census of India 2001*

The SCs live mostly in rural areas, with only about 14 per cent of them found in urban agglomerations. The habitations of SCs are scattered all over the country generally in parts of villages or small villages. While some of them are small and marginal farmers, most of the scheduled caste families in rural areas work largely as agricultural labourer. Almost all primary workers in leather industry come from SCs. Fishermen belonging to SCs are found in the eastern region of the country. There is a large concentration of weavers belonging to SCs in the western India. In the urban areas, a large proportion of unorganised workers are from the SCs. The scavengers and sweepers constitute one of the most vulnerable sections among the SCs. The SCs suffer from the inhuman practice of untouchability, which is the most extreme form of the denial of human dignity and social oppression. The proportion of the SCs among poverty groups is high and

\textsuperscript{17} *Hindustan Times*, June 30, 2005.
they are among the poorest of those below poverty line. Two third of the bonded labourers identified in the country are from SCs and STs.

The Reports of the National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are a grim reminder that the vast majority of the dalits remain poor, illiterate, lack of requisite skills for competing in the modern world, enjoy unequal access to productive resources, and remain deeply tied to land and traditional occupations which offered limited possibilities of upward mobility. Untouchability though banned under the law, continues to be widely practised. And despite the emergence of middle class, and a steady (if small) encroaching in the arenas of education, jobs and professions, there is little evidence of a roti, beti, vyavahar across the caste rubicon.\(^{18}\)

**Dalit Women: Dalits among Dalits**

From the time immemorial man as compared with women has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over women his wishes have always been consulted. Woman, on the other hand, has been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man as a maker of injunctions is most often above them all.

The joint family system, which is one of the other major social institutions of the Indian society, emphasizes inequality between the males and females. The females in the Indian society equated with the Shudras, having no rights, and

subjugated to the males of the family, women had very little freedom of any kind whatsoever. They had no option but to follow the dictates of their male members, father, husband or even their son, without raising any question.

Even the patriarchal system manifested in *Manusmriti*, Hindu festivals, Hindu pantheon of gods victimized and preyed women. *Chaturvarna* treated women as born dalits. She led a life of deprivation and subjugation. As a woman she was also in a slave like situation *vis-à-vis* dalit man. Psychological, social and cultural prescriptions unleashed by Manu restricted her autonomy. The entire dalit society including men and women did not have equal economic rights. *Shudras* were slaves and *shudra* women were doubly enslaved; were also slaves of their slave husbands. Manu upheld this slavery.

The explanation for the different and discriminatory attitude of high caste male towards dalit women is also found in the social and religious system of Hindus. It is apparent that the Hindu society does not give women enough space to be free and all sources of her material development is closed. Similarly, they are deprived of the right to education and to acquire property. In fact, the dalit women are seen to be at the bottom sanctioned by the caste system.

This makes the position of dalit women more deplorable, compared to their male counterparts. A dalit woman is doubly oppressed. Firstly, from the sense of security, since she is dependant on the man and secondly caste wise. Illiteracy, lack of awareness and poverty makes her helpless, voiceless and completely oppressed. Dalit women are more prone to the social evils of

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untouchability. They are deprived of their basic survival needs and vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual abuses. Especially rural dalit women become the first and worst victims of rape and other atrocities. The police, who should prevent such crimes, are also parties to such inhuman crimes. Despite the adoption of legislation against most of these crimes, oppression and violence are subjected to dalit women.

There is no dispute that Dalit women are twice disadvantaged or they are the Dalits among Dalits: Dalit women are subjected to discrimination due to the gender bias that is deep rooted in the Indian society as well as in the Dalit community. This two-fold oppression and exploitation drives them to the periphery. But this is only one side of the story. The equally important aspect of Dalit women is the enormous resilience they have to carry on their lives, the lives of their families, the struggle of their community, in spite of the insurmountable hardships and hurdles. Over 90 per cent of the Dalit women are illiterate and uneducated, an equal percent of them are landless agricultural labourers, who are denied access to resources both by the non-Dalit and Dalit society. Further they are kept away from centers of power. Yet, irrespective of all these structural constraints they continue to struggle to liberate themselves.20

Although women from the lower strata enjoyed greater freedom as compared to women from the upper strata, yet the lower caste women had to live a life subject to the authority of the males of the family. The SC women were required to perform all the menial and impure duties for the upper class women during menstruation, child birth, a low caste women was asked to look after the

20 Prakash Louis, op.cit., p.160.
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cleanliness of the place where a woman was kept in confinement. Even today, the indigenous dai or mid-wife in rural areas belongs to a scheduled caste. At the time of marriage also, the low caste women were called upon to perform certain menial services of carrying and disposing of the waste. At the time of someone's death, the message was conveyed to relations only by messenger who was an untouchable, because the very idea of death was looked upon as impure. Thus, we find that in the social structure and in their functions, the scheduled caste women were considered much inferior not only in the society but also in their own families.

Dube, noted social scientist, observed: woman is regarded as more susceptible to pollution, her defilement is easy, and purification is difficult. Man, on the contrary, is not so easily defiled, and when defiled the removal of his pollution is not as difficult as it is in the case a woman. Hence, structurally and functionally, the scheduled caste women suffered from double disabilities-they were deprived members in the society because of their caste status and were deprived members in the family because of their sex status.

For instance, dalit women participants in the "Convention against Untouchability and Dalit Women’s Oppression", organised by the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) on December 20, 1998 at Delhi, reported that food was thrown to them as if they were dogs. The abuse were casteist "she looks like a 'chura'. Speakers also pointed out that casteism was practiced by people across religions. Caste becomes convenient in reinforcing existing inequalities. Control over resources that fulfil fundamental human necessities is established unequally, in conformity with the coercive power of

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22 Ibid., p.17.
class. Its distribution, therefore, can only serve the ends of extended coercion. Women participants were keenly aware that caste pollution, by either presence or touch, that operated so strongly in the case of conflict over public resources seemed not to matter at all in the extraction of labour. When it comes to taking water from the hand pump, notions of ritual purity are invoked, when it comes to the extraction of labour in the field, it does not matter at all that the seed is planted, the crop tended and the grain harvested by the same untouchable. The same applies in the case of rape as social revenge/punishment/coercion. By a curious quirk, the untouchable becomes socially touchable in more ways than one.\(^{23}\)

**Sexual Violence**

For dalit women, the fact that their labour outside the family is crucial for the survival of the family, leads to the lack of stringent control over their labour, mobility and sexuality and this renders them impure or lacking in virtue. In several instances the rape of dalit women may not be considered as rape at all because of the customary access that the upper caste men have had to dalit women's sexuality. In almost all regional languages of India, the word for rape in equivalent to the phrase ‘stealing the honour of’ and still lower caste women by virtue of their double oppression have no honour to speak of the rights to redressal. In an incident at Birati in West Bengal,\(^{24}\) the police argued that since the women crying rape were prostitutes the matter could be overlooked. Likewise dalit women suffer rape as a part of the ongoing caste confrontation. In rural India,

\(^{23}\) Bela Malik, op.cit., p. 323.

defiance of caste restrictions by the dalits has most often resulted in arson and
gang rape of the women of lower castes.

In a country where sanitation is a scarce facility, and since what is scarce
is subject to public disputes, the principle of distribution operates along a caste-
class axis. The landless suffer, the dalit landless suffer even more and dalit
landless women suffer the most. Dalit women are often forced to use fields that
belong to upper castes, leaving them susceptible to physical and mental
harassment.

While a comprehensive legislation, the scheduled Caste and Scheduled
tribe (Prevention of) Atrocities Act, 1989, exist on paper, social and political and
economic pressures ensure that it remain ineffective. Of the innumerable cases of
rape of dalit women, only a fraction of the victims lodge reports, an even small
fraction is filed by the police, while actual conviction is negligible. The problem
lies not so much in the law itself as with the context in which it exists.

Sexual violence may be a general problem from which women in general
suffer; in case of dalit women, it is far more intense and widespread. Because of
lower social attitude towards dalit women and their economic dependence, they
become victims of high caste sexual violence, on a scale far greater than that of

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26 Bela Malik, op.cit., p. 324.

27 Ibid., p. 324.
the non-dalit women. If we see the data the hard reality would come to the fore. But this is only a tip of the iceberg.

Fig. 4.1: Rapes Committed against Dalit Women

![Graph showing the number of rapes committed against Dalit women in India from 1998 to 2000. The number of rapes in 1998, 1999, and 2000 are 923, 1000, and 1083 respectively.]


The most shameful aspect of this reality is that the incidence of such violence is not decreasing. The recent data shows that the crime against women is still looming large. There were 923, 1000 and 1083 rape cases in the year 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively.

**Education of Dalit Women**

The educational status of dalit women is miserable if compared with others. This lack of literacy distract from women their dignity, keeps the women economically poor and mentally isolated and does not allow them to play dominant role in society. It acts as breaks on the social development, economic progress and political maturity of women. Also due to illiteracy dalit women fail to bring up their children properly. They could not educate them properly. The inferiority complex is developed among them and they are incapable to build confidence.
among themselves. Their latent capacity is not used properly for national
development. The following tables will give a proper idea about their educational
status.

Table No. 4.2: **Female Literacy Rates for All India and SCs from 1961-1991**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All-India Total</th>
<th>All-Indian female</th>
<th>SC male</th>
<th>SC female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>24.02</td>
<td>12.95</td>
<td>16.96</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>29.46</td>
<td>18.72</td>
<td>22.36</td>
<td>6.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43.67</td>
<td>29.85</td>
<td>31.12</td>
<td>10.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>49.91</td>
<td>23.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table No. 4.3: **Dropout Rate at Two Different Time Periods**

| Time period | Primary | | | Middle | | | Secondary | |
|-------------|---------|---|---|---------|---|---|-----------|
| 1988-89     | 53.39   | 47.24 | 47.69 | 73.6     | 64.37 | 68.31 | 85.62 | NA | 79.46 |
| 1990-91     | 46.27   | 46.27 | 45.97 | 73.24    | 64.34 | 65.13 | 83.38 | 74.23 | 76.96 |

Note: NA = Not Available.


**Economic Status of Dalit Women**

Owing to illiteracy and poverty among dalits, as an economic necessity, dalit women belonging to these communities have to seek work outside their poverty stricken households. They mostly perform agricultural jobs. Their low status, illiteracy, unskilled forces them to undertake manual jobs. They work both in organised and unorganised sectors.
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Women work for longer hours than their male counterparts. Most of the women spend a great deal of time working outside the home; they fail to fulfil the responsibility towards their children. In spite of hard work, inside and outside they are humiliated, beaten up by their husbands. Although women work for long hours and add to their family income, others do not perceive them as workers. Hence, their income is always undervalued.

There is a high degree of discrimination in the wage rate. In most cases the dalit women workers are paid unequal wages. They are paid lower wages for similar work than the male workers. They are often discriminated against wage employment programmes; they do not get continuous assured work, which they need badly but generally find work in times of scarcity of workers. More than 80 percent of dalit women work in agricultural sector. This sector is unorganised and does not have facilities of social securities found in other industrial and other organised sectors. Dalit women are not benefited by maternity/child leave, medical support, P.F gratuity, etc. even as labourers of the industrial sector they do not enjoy many schemes of social securities. Some time women are not allowed to go to their children for feeding them during working hours. And sometimes landlord’s employer do not prefer them as agricultural labourers.\(^28\)

In 1991 about 70 percent dalit women workers worked in rural areas as agricultural labourers. Only 19 percent of them owned land. Similarly, in urban areas the unemployment rate for the dalit women was 3.27 percent. This was only 1.98 percent of non-dalit women. “Moreover lack of income generating assets and

heavy dependence on wage employment of dalit women of high caste landlords provide a situation for the later to exploit them sexually and otherwise. Thus the economic situations of dalit women compel them to surrender their civic political and economic rights. There is also gross denial of child rights due to predominance of girl child labour who generally come from dalit families. A micro-level study made in Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh revealed: almost all the dalit women workers enter the labour market before the age of 20; 31.6% of all girl children from dalit communities are child workers. It is due to the lack of permanent and secured income in the family, the girl child is forced into such situation where she not only has to substitute the labour of parents at home, but also supplement the family income as a girl child worker.

Reservation for Dalits

If democracy has to succeed both political and social equality are equally important. When India became independent the country became politically free. The SC/ST population as citizens like all others acquired the right to vote and other political rights. Yet along with political rights, society was not willing to provide them with social equality. That is why Dr. B. R Ambedkar on 26th November 1950 in his address to the Constituent Assembly observed:

"On 26th January 1950 we are entering into a world of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in society inequality. In politics, we will be recognising the principle of one man, one vote and one vote, one value. On the social plane,

29 Vimal Thorat, op.cit., p. 170.

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we have a society based on the principle of graded inequality, which means elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against many who live in abject poverty. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure continues to deny the principle of one man, one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."

The Constitution of India provides many securities and protections for Dalits. Right from the Preamble and across the Directive Principles of State Policy as well as the Fundamental Duties, one can find a special treatment given to those downtrodden or lagging behind in a process of development. In preamble, it has been provided that the people of India would secure to all of them the justice, Liberty and Equality together with the Fraternity. To maintain the above-mentioned ideals, and above all the equality of status and of opportunity, State pledges to bring the downtrodden the oppressed people into the race at par with the frontrunners.

It should be remembered that reservations are part of a much larger policy package. It addressed to three sets of policy goals. First, to remove social and religious disabilities of certain specified groups suffering disabilities on account of their social segregation and spatial and cultural isolation, namely, the SCs and

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STs. Second, to facilitate and promote equal participation with others of all socially disabled and disadvantaged groups in organized sectors of the country's economic and political life. This is sought to be achieved through provisions of preferential treatment in education, in government employment, reservation of seats in parliament, state legislatures and local bodies and through other ameliorative measures and schemes designed to improve their life chances. With exception of reservations in legislatures the other preferential measures are not confined only to the SCs and STs; they also extend to the category described in the constitution as socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, better known as the OBCs. Third, to protect, if necessary through legislative action and executive orders, all these groups, also described in the constitution as weaker sections of society, or simply, the backward classes, from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. Therefore, reservations along with other measures of protection and upliftment of the weaker sections of society should be viewed as an instrument of a larger social policy of the state addressed to a long-term goal of creating a civil society through extending effective citizenship rights to the vast sections of the population who have been historically deprived and marginalized.³²

The founding fathers were quite sensitive to the aspirations of the SC/STs. In order to provide them socio-economic equality, the policy of affirmative action was introduced. The following Articles in the Constitution were introduced to provide empowerment to SC/STs.

Article 14: Equality before law: The state shall not deny to any person equality before law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth:

i) The state shall not discriminate against any citizen or grounds only of religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

ii) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—

(a) Access to shops, public restaurants, hostels and places of public entertainment, or

(b) The use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

Article 16 (4): Nothing in this Article or in clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

The general principle of equality laid down in Article 14 is spelt out in greater detail in Article 15. The crucial word in Article 15 is ‘discrimination’.

Article 17: Abolition of untouchability: “Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘untouchability’ shall be offence punishable in accordance with law.
The Article has been implemented by the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955. The object of the Article is to ban the practice of untouchability, social disabilities imposed on certain classes of persons by reason of their birth in certain cases.

**Article 46:** 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 the scheduled tribes, and shall protect these from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

**Article 335: Claims of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to services and posts:** The claims of the members of the SCs and STs shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointment to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.

**Reservation not Implemented:**

In spite of all the loud rhetoric on the empowerment of SCs/STs, there has not been a total transformation in their lives. What has been the impact of reservation policies? While there are hardly a handful who question the need for reservation, the policy has not been fully implemented even after 50 years of the Constitution. Though the SCs/STs constitute around 25 per cent of the country’s population, they have been provided with 22 per cent reservation, 15 per cent for SCs and 7 per cent for STs. And yet the implementation has been shocking.

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34 Ibid., p. 637.
The situation is no different in colleges and universities. Even those universities that claim to be progressive and more democratic have not filled up quotas. "Though the constitution has provided 22 per cent of reservation for SCs/STs, less than 2 per cent out of the 67,500 reserved teaching posts have been filled in 239 Universities and 7000 Colleges country-wide, a study by the Forum of Academics for Social Justice has revealed."

Table No.4.5: Reservation in Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Reserved Posts</th>
<th>Filled Posts</th>
<th>Vacant Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi University</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jawaharlal Nehru University</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligarh Muslim University</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamia Millia Islamic</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viswa Bharati</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab University</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodhpur University</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banaras Hindu University</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmania University</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharshi Dayanand University</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guwahati University</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad University</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondicherry University</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-east University, Shillong</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birla Institute Of Technology</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even the enrolment of students is not impressive. The enrolment of SCs/STs in various courses of higher education is much below their respective percentage. It means that SCs/STs have not been able to break into the mainstream of Indian society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>ST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The National SC/ST Commission Report 1996-97 & 1997-98 (page.82) states that in the year 1993-94, SCs below poverty line in the urban area were 49.48 percent in the rural area 48.11 per cent while the percentage for the total population was 37.27 per cent for urban population and 32.36 per cent for rural population. This sudden increase is in stark contrast to the declining rates in the preceding years. This is quite significant. Due to globalization, privatization and liberalization, the dalits have lost out. This indicates how vulnerable dalits are to the market forces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population below poverty line</th>
<th>STs below poverty line</th>
<th>SCs below poverty line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of literacy, SCs/STs have not still come to the level of general population. According to the Census of 1991 the literacy rate for SCS/STs was 37.41 per cent, while it was 52 per cent for the entire country. The Indian
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constitution has mandated the state to wipe out illiteracy within ten years (1950-60) and yet majority of SCs/STs are still illiterate. This is a clear proof of the failure of the constitution. If the group is not literate, it cannot really fight for its rights. Besides, where illiteracy is present, there is greater infant mortality rate, under nourishment, lack of employment and thus greater poverty. The UNDP Report 1997 said: “Taking into account the gulf between human development among SCs/STs and rest of the population, the Ministry of Welfare has noted that even if proportionate resources of the central and state governments are earmarked and utilized for the development of these communities, it would take many decades before they will be able to catch up with rest of the population.” The following table shows the SC/ST literacy rate during 1961-1999 which is very low in comparison to the general groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All groups</th>
<th>SCs</th>
<th>STs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census Reports.

Is Reservations an Answer?

Those who oppose reservation do it in terms of their own interests. They keenly feel that they are denied something because of reservation forgetting the fact that the oppression of SCs/STs for centuries has been the cause of their power, status and wealth. The central question is not whether reservation should continue or not, but will reservation alone lead to SC/ST empowerment? That reservation has helped individuals is no doubt. Several among the SCs/STs have helped their own
communities as a result of reservation. Several dalit leaders spearheading *dalit* causes and asserting for equality have been beneficiaries of reservation. Of course, there are others who have merely used reservation for social mobility. But no one can deny the fact that the dalit consciousness in society today is as a result of reservation. And yet reservation is not the only answer. The larger issue is how to empower the entire community and put them in the path of development\(^{36}\).

The reservation policy is under attack from various quarters. The truth of the matter is that more aggressive policies than mere paper reservations are needed if equality has to become reality. It is unfortunate that nobody seems to have paid attention to what the Mandal Commission has said in paragraphs 13.14 and 13.55 of its report wherein it has emphasised the need to take a number of steps in order to bring about a radical change in the existing production relations. It has especially exhorted the government to enact and vigorously implement progressive land reform laws and set up financial and technical institutions to help the members of these castes. The appropriate method to ameliorate the conditions of these castes is to pursue a comprehensive development programme. What we need is a comprehensive policy which will enable the overall growth of an individual by providing at least the basic requirements and also ensuring that the basic needs of all are met before the luxury of a few are met. This will require the political will to implement radical measures such as land reforms, rural industrialisation, agricultural diversification, intensive education and the like because reservation without all-round economic development will only remain a palliative. The nature of these programmes should be such that over a period of time reservation should become unnecessary. In other words, reservation should

\(^{36}\) Ambrose Pinto S.J., op.cit., pp. 644-45.
be only a part of this package. Politicians should be blamed for their lack of will power to take structural measures, which will usher in true social justice and for conveniently equating the problems of the deprived castes with reservation alone. Making reservation a permanent policy has in fact become an alibi for evading a comprehensive programme.

Reservation plays a very crucial role in transforming a hierarchical social order into a participatory and pluralist society. Marc Galanter summarizes its importance when he suggests that: “The compensatory discrimination policy is not to be judged only for its instrumental qualities. It is also expressive: through it Indians tell themselves what kind of people they are and what kind of nation... Compensatory discrimination embodies the brave hopes of India reborn the animated the freedom movement and was crystallised in the Constitution” (Galanter, 1984). Even if we have faced tremendous frustration and at times self-inflicted wounds, we have at least started the quest for the brave world. It is left to the present generation to take it further and help wipe out the tears from the eyes of the person Gandhi had so eloquently called the “poorest of the poor”. It is worth remembering that the lower castes require parity not a charity as a matter of right.37

According to S. C Behar there is an important distinction in the public eye between the reservation of seats in state legislatures and Parliament, on the one hand, and government services, on the other. For contesting an election, no qualifications have been prescribed and, therefore, merit does not seem to be the criterion for the elective posts, whether the candidates are from SCs and STs or

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from the general population. In respect of government services, however, merit is generally perceived to be the most important criterion and, therefore, repeatedly the argument of dilution of standards of efficiency and merit is advanced against the policy of reservation. In this, strength is derived from Article 335 of the Constitution. While it provides for taking into consideration the claims of members of the SCs and STs for appointment in government services, the articles also point to the need to consider the maintenance of the efficiency of administration. The issue of merit is also raised in the context to reservations in educational institutions. In this whole debate of merit, certain misconceptions are widespread. Most importantly, it is ignored that merit is defined by those who are in a position to decide policies, the framework of evaluation, and the system of judging merit. The amazing knowledge of tribals about plants, animals and stars, and their unusual and rare skills which enable them to survive in the most difficult conditions are not acknowledged by all those who advocate the cause of merit and argue against reservations on this ground.\(^{38}\)

Ghanshyam Shah argues that an egalitarian social order cannot be built by mere policies, promises and pious hopes. What is needed is the political will to translate perspectives into practice. It is certain that protective discrimination by itself cannot solve the problems of the oppressed sections of society. It can give merely a helping hand. In a competitive inegalitarian society, such opportunities obviously remain confined to a small stratum of deprived communities. These provisions of protective discrimination have provided scope to a tiny section of the SC and the ST to become a part of the mainstream of national life. Like all

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upwardly mobile groups, among the SCs and STs those who have improved their condition start imitating the norms and life style of the upper castes. They give up their traditional life style and loosen the bonds that bind them to their caste followers. As regards economic and political matters, they often join hands with the middle class caste Hindus. In this sense, the process of their integration in the larger society has begun. Do we want to put an end to this process of change and reverse it by abolishing protective discrimination? To be sure, such action will not lead to the building of an egalitarian social order. It will strengthen further the socio-economic position of the upper stratum of the society. To root of inequality is in our social and economic structure; and equality cannot be attained without uprooting that structure. The protective discrimination *per se* is not as adequate instrument to bring equality in this society.\(^{39}\)

Dipankar Gupta\(^{40}\), Professor at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in his interview maintains: “I think that government’s policy of reservations is something we should be proud of. In my view it was a very bold step. We must commend the founders of our Constitution for thinking of it and implementing it. Yes, there were many hiccups on the way and problems still exist. Today the numbers of SCs who are in Grade One of the I.A.S cadre have gone up. I think, to 14 percent, from less than one percent in the 1950s. In the next few years they will touch 17 percent. It’s a huge success story”.

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\(^{40}\) “Caste is losing its importance,” *Civil Society*, January 2005, p. 25.
Socio-Economic Condition of Dalits in Orissa

The plight of dalits is same everywhere in India. The practice of untouchability is prevalent in every nook and corner of the country. It is more severe in rural areas than the urban areas. Dalits are socially ostracised, economically poor and politically ignorant and bear the burden of the caste system. Their position is not different in the state of Orissa also.

For hundred of years the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe populations of Orissa have been living in serious economic, social and educational backwardness. In social context, the SCs belong to the lowest rung of the Hindu caste society. These are the castes who have been traditionally the weakest, without any meaningful privilege accorded to them by the general mass of the Hindu society. Often termed as ‘shudras’ or untouchable castes, they are considered impure and, hence, are compelled to digest the emotional stress of facing a series of social prohibitions such as restriction to study sacred literature, enter the public places, own a piece of land or change the traditional occupation. They are also not allowed to take part in decision-making process of the traditional village panchayats but are coerced to obey its decisions. As a consequence of such social exclusion, the SCs have remained alienated from the Hindu society in general. To save themselves from the tentacles of these social disabilities, many of them have embraced Christianity.\(^{41}\)

The total SCs population in the state is 6,082,063 out of which 3,073,278 are males and 3,008,785 females, and they constitute 16.5 percent of the total population.

population of Orissa. The following table shows the category-wise population of the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>% of the total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>36,804,660</td>
<td>18,660,570</td>
<td>18,144,090</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>6,082,063</td>
<td>3,073,278</td>
<td>3,008,785</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>8,145,081</td>
<td>4,066,783</td>
<td>4,078,298</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Census of India* 2001, p.21.

In this state SCs are identified into 93 types as per clause (1) of Article 341 of the constitution of India (Orissa Gazett Ext. no.539 dated 13.10.1956). 42

Types of Scheduled Castes in Orissa:

Part XIII-Orissa:


Orissa is one of the poorest states in India. Hence, the dalits are the poorest of the poor in comparison to the general population. They have a little land or no land at all. Nearly 75 per cent of the SCs primarily depend on agriculture for employment. In view of the nature of agricultural operations they remain underemployed for most of the year and the wages paid to them are lower than the prescribed minimum wage rate. Their poor economic condition makes them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, such as their compulsion to work as bonded labourers and send their children to work for just getting small food. A large number of them also migrate to distant places in search of work where they are subjected to even greater exploitation, particularly brutal in certain occupations like stone quarries and brick kilns.

In the recent past, Rayagada district witnessed despairing efforts to survive - the sale of children by families. In Jajpur district, a mother, a daily wage earner in a stone quarry, sold her 45-day-old child for Rs. 60 only. These measures have not evoked reflection and commitment on the part of the State. Rather, unconscionable attempts have been made to show that such action is emblematic


of Adivasi and Dalit cultures. At the same time, caste oppression prevails in the mistreatment of Dalits in Orissa, who have been assaulted for participating in Hindu religious ceremonies. In April 2001, a Dalit community member was fined Rs. 4,000 and beaten for entering a Hindu temple in Bargarh. The dalits of Bolangir district being driven by poverty migrated to Andhra Pradesh as contract laborers with the contractors, but the way they were treated and exploited, they had to flee back home from there living aside their hard earned money. The hope of earning a good sum of money to provide their children and old parents some food and new clothes were shattered. The hunger death of dalits and adivasis of Kashipur from eating the mango kernel was another shocking news for the country.

An ambitious national survey of the status of the practice of untouchability in 12 major Indian States was recently conducted by Action Aid India, with the collaboration of leading social scientists Ghanshyam Shah, Sukhdeo Thorat, Satish Despande and Amita Baviskar and Dalit activists from across the country. One of the findings of the survey was that Dalits in every State continue to be ensnared into categories of work that are culturally regarded as most intensely polluting, unclean and socially degrading. Most of the so-called unclean occupations are associated in one way or the other with death, human waste or menstruation, all of which are engulfed by the dense cultural beliefs of pollution. The unclean occupations forced upon Dalits that are related to human death include the digging of graves, collection of firewood for the cremation of dead

bodies and setting up the funeral pyres. Death is considered so impure and unclean that, in many regions it is Dalits alone who are required even to communicate the news of any death to the relatives of the deceased person, whatever maybe the distance. There are a large number of unclean occupations that derive from the death of animals. In every State that was surveyed, villagers expect Dalits to dispose of carcasses of animals that die in their homes or in the village, whether cattle or dogs or cats. They skin the bodies of dead animals, flay and tan these and develop them into fine leather, and sometimes even turn them into footwear and drums. A third category of unclean occupations derives from the culturally polluting character of human waste. In every State surveyed, the manual removal of human excreta, often with bare hands, survives as a deeply humiliating vocation despite it having been outlawed. This pollution extends in many cases to cleaning of sewage tanks, drainage canals and the sweeping of streets. Drum beating and the removal of carcasses in many States are unpaid tasks. Orissa reports payments of leftover food, old clothes, fistfuls of food grains or petty cash.

Similarly, in Orissa the survey showed that the Ghasis, Panos and Doms involved in leatherwork and scavenging are landless and most non-Dalits and even some of the Dalit farmers refuse to employ them for agricultural wage work. In several cases, Dalits who persist in unclean occupations do so as they feel powerless to resist, or even because they accept their caste roles. In Babufasad village in North Orissa, the elected ward member, Chamayu Pathar Khamia, who belongs to the Ghasi caste, sweeps the roads, removes the carcasses and skins dead cattle. In return, he is given a handful of rice, and occasionally money, by the villagers. "If I do not do this kind of work, the non-Dalits will threaten me and force me to leave the village. And because of my work, even Dalits of the Ganda..."
caste despise me even though we are all Scheduled Castes." Economic compulsions prevent most Dalits from escaping humiliating hereditary occupations. They may earn Rs.200 from skinning a dead buffalo. Scavenging may secure them regular employment in the local bodies.

According to the case study of Puri, Orissa by Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, The Dalit communities here include the Hadis, Panas, Kandaras, Bhois, Dhobas, Domas, and Bauris. From the last ten years or so Hadis have not worked in the land for agricultural activities, as this is the case of every urban phenomenon - the lack of agricultural field for cultivation? However, their major occupation was - few years back - scavenging, street sweeping, drain cleaning, removing carcasses and rickshaw/trolley pulling etc., which are considered as ‘dirty’ occupations by the upper caste Hindus. Besides that, Hadis also used to be invited by upper castes during the time of marriage in order to beat drums or dholas, to play Mahuris (flutes) and so on, sometimes they made things from bamboo and sell to local people too. This was considered as additional income to their families.

The economic structure adopted by the Dalits of today have immense importance in understanding the changes that have taken place in their traditional caste structure. Compare to few decades’ back when the Dalits were in the shadows of poverty, illiteracy and ignorance, today their life-pattern has gone upward mobility. Better economic opportunity, urbanisation, better communication facility, and exposure to mass media etc., have reinforced the motivation of Dalits to achieve higher social status. Earlier in Puri, there was a

46 Ibid.
strict barrier in touching Hadis, even when they cross the road there were strict prohibitions for maintaining distance. They used to be excluded from the public places, especially from the small hotels, teashops, and grocery shops. However, modernisation and globalisation has made tremendous changes in the socio-economic and cultural life of Hadis. Today, roughly sixty percent of the Hadis in Puri have their pakka houses with available electricity and modern devices such as TV, VCR, computer, tape recorder and so on. Hadis now know the latest fashion in the market, latest hero and heroines in the film, and often listen to the latest pop music in the market. No one can identify today whether a person is a Hadi or an upper caste in the social gatherings or in the public places. In several instances, inter-caste marriages are taking place, though not so open, but marriages like love marriage especially among the younger generation is permissible within the community. The second generations Hadis now are well aware about their traditional, hierarchical and occupational status, thus they are carrying out different occupations altogether, what their parents and grandparents had in earlier days. Most of them are now keep busy in opening small businesses like grocery shops, tea shops, pan shops, cycle shops etc., in their own colonies financed by the local co-operative banks under different welfare schemes, besides other being engaged in government and municipal services, some enter into spare parts shops - electronic and computer. Pragmatically it can be said that, the second generation Hadis not only want to put an end to their ascribed status - which they considered socially, ritually and occupationally ‘inferior’ - but also want to achieve higher status through education and government employment - which they considered ‘secular and prestigious’. Improved access to education has resulted in the
emergence of a substantial group of educated Dalits who able to take up white-collar occupations and fight for their rights.  

So far as the dalit women are concerned, according to the Census 2001, women constitute 49.30% of the total population of the state. In Orissa, the total population of SC women is 3008785, which is 49.47% of this community. In this state the dalit women are not developed as compared to the dalit women of other states. The basic problems of these women are illiteracy and low income. These people are also excommunicated from society in different areas of the state. Hence untouchability has broken their social status to compete in the present society.

Das and Parida in their study of the dalit women of Nayakhandi village of Balasore district in Orissa, maintain that the dalit women of that area are socially humiliated and economically backward. 83 per cent of the dalit people depend on wage and they are below poverty line, because landless and insufficient land is the cause behind it. Women work in the cornfield during rainy season in weeding, planting and in winter during reaping. So far as health is concerned, seven dalit women suffered from malnutrition, 37 women from anemia and dyspeptic disease, 4 women were affected from dyspepsia. As dalit men consume liquor, it disturbs the harmony of the family. These people beat and abuse their wives and children. Along with it affects their economic condition and thus they are forced to borrow money from the moneylenders.

Dalits are humiliated, exploited, murdered, raped, molested in every parts of India. In Keralagarh village in Kendrapara district of Orissa, four dalit women

48 Prafulla Kumar Das and Gajendra Prasad Parida, op.cit., p.110.
who entered the Jagannath temple were beaten and later fined Rs 1,001 by the village panchayat. Although there were several criticisms against it, the head priest of the temple, however, remained unmoved. He defended the practice saying, “The entry of scheduled caste people has been prohibited for many years.” In another incident a women was allegedly stripped naked and five others were molested in public for refusing to wash the feet of upper caste people in Bhubanpati village in Orissa’s Puri district. Besides, several men- all of barber families who revolted against the age-old practice of washing the feet of Brahmins at weddings- were beaten and driven out of the village.

The state of Orissa ranks IX in the figure of atrocities committed against dalits among all the states of India. The number of cases reported per unit of population, e.g., one lakh population of Scheduled Castes. The figure for the year 1998 is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orissa</th>
<th>Cases of atrocity 1998</th>
<th>Cases per lakh of SC population per year</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>703</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table No. 4.11: *Cases Registered by Police and their disposal under the SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, during the year 2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orissa</th>
<th>No. of cases registered During 2000</th>
<th>No. of cases with police During 2000</th>
<th>No. of cases closed after investigation</th>
<th>No. of cases charge sheeted in courts</th>
<th>No. of cases pending with police at the end of 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1354</td>
<td>2464</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>1052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The successive governments have tried to ameliorate the condition of dalits by distributing the surplus land, poverty eradication programmes, etc. However the condition of dalits has remained the same due to erratic nature of rain fall, scarcity of irrigation facilities, drought, cyclone and above all due to large scale corruption at the administrative levels therefore the money or funds meant for them do nor reach them.

**Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalits in Kalahandi**

Kalahandi means "black pot," suggesting that indigenous artisans made these of the rich black cotton soil that is indeed found in part of the district. The name itself suggests a kind of wealth. Yet today "Kalahandi" has become synonymous with the opposite: with drought, starvation, and child selling. Kalahandi has become once again a symbol of the natural calamities that many people feel are pervading India today. The Kalahandi (or western Orissa) drought situation has once again been providing images to feed the newspapers and journals of India: images of bone-thin human beings, desperate men hanging themselves, women lying exhausted with their children at railway stations, villagers by the hundreds holding out begging bowls. 51

**Population (General, SC/ST)**

Total population of the district according to 2001 census is 1,335,494 persons, comprising of 667,526 males and 667,968 females. Rural population of the district is 1,235,275 persons (615,612 males and 619,663 females) and urban population is 100,219 persons (51,914 males and 48,305 females). The total SC population of the district is 236,019 persons, out of which 117,344 are males and 118,675

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females. The following table show the total population of Kalahandi both in rural and urban areas.

Table No. 4.12: Distribution of Population in the District of Kalahandi: Census 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kalahandi</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,335,494</td>
<td>1,235,275</td>
<td>100,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>667,526</td>
<td>615,612</td>
<td>51,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>667,968</td>
<td>619,663</td>
<td>48,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SC Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>236,019</td>
<td>218,897</td>
<td>17,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>117,344</td>
<td>108,834</td>
<td>8,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>118,675</td>
<td>110,063</td>
<td>8,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ST Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>382,573</td>
<td>375,796</td>
<td>6,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>188,646</td>
<td>185,207</td>
<td>3,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>193,927</td>
<td>190,589</td>
<td>3,338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is a common knowledge that the district of Kalahandi in Orissa is facing a serious problem of hunger, malnutrition and abject poverty due to various man and nature made causes and underdevelopment. Recurrence of droughts, starvation, epidemics and mass migration are daily facts of life for majority of the inhabitants of the district. Kalahandi experienced massive drought in the years 1954-55, 1965-66, 1974-75, 1985-87, 1992-93 and 1996-97. As a result the district remains poor and bulk of the population are deprived of access to the minimum means of livelihood.

Among the important factors contributing to the perpetuation of poverty in Kalahandi are: unequal distribution of land and other rural assets, recurrent droughts, colonization of outsiders, depletion of forest resources and decline of rights of the population over community resources. According to 1991 Census just 1 per cent of large farmers were found to have possessed 8.25 per cent of landholdings. Although the number of marginal and small farmers has increased, the share of the landholdings by the small farmers has almost remained the same.
Thus, the main reason for today's poverty and hunger in Kalahandi is its skewed distribution of assets.\textsuperscript{52} The worst affected people of this region are the dalits because they are poor with no land, no food, and no work.

With miserable income from forest, agriculture, and road construction, what is left for the people of Kalahandi is only migration. According to a Dom woman from Harijanpara, "Four women died from diarrhoea in our hamlet when the men went away. They migrate to Raipur, Delhi, Nagpur, and Mumbai. About 50 percent have gone to Raipur now. Land? The government has given us \textit{pattas} for two acres for each family. People have been migrating for generations to Raipur, which is closer to Kalahandi than Bhubaneswar. This migration, started on a large scale after the drought of 1965; it has been mainly of Dalits and poor. They are also now going to Nagpur, Mumbai and even Delhi, while some are permanent settlers in Raipur itself in a colony known as the "Kalahandi Narka."\textsuperscript{53}

As for women: it is women and girl children who disproportionately die and live stunted, malnourished lives in most of these areas, whether they come from \textit{adivasi}, Dalit or OBC communities. The fact that "food insecurity" or more bluntly hunger, starvation, and diseases, disproportionately affect women is an old, old story and with some old and fairly simple reasons. In spite of relatively greater equality, women in almost all communities in India, including Dalits and \textit{adivasis}, are deprived of significant property and political rights. The \textit{Khonds}, \textit{Gonds}, Dalits, OBCs, etc., of Kalahandi are as patrilineal and patrilocal as elsewhere, and women's labour remains gender stereotyped and underpaid. It is no


\textsuperscript{53} Gail Omvedt, op.cit.
mystery why women and girl children are dying in greater numbers in the current drought. A huge section of bonded labourers in this country are dalits. It follows that they are amongst the most debt affected people in India, along with adivasis. Dalit women and children pay a huge price for this. It is these children who labour from a very early age, "paying off" a debt that will never end because it is so patently fraudulent in the first place. There are girls forced into the sex trade in Kamatipura in Mumbai because their grandparents took a loan of Rs.10 or 12 decades ago in some distant village in the countryside of Kalahandi, Orissa.

The Socio-Economic Condition of Dalits in the Koksara and Dharmagarh Block

The dalits of the two blocks (Koksara and Dharmagarh) selected as the case study of the research are also in the same condition as the dalits of Kalahandi district or else where in the country. The SCs of these areas are mostly ‘Dom’, ‘Satnami’, and ‘Ghasi’ and Dom being the majority. The dalit of these two blocks are very poor with little land property or no land at all. Very few dalits are well off economically. Few dalits own 5 to 10 acres of land where as others do not have any land. They live in houses made of clay, thatched huts or recently few live in pukka houses provided to them by the government through Indira Awas Yojna. They depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. However, due to frequent occurrence of drought and scarcity of any irrigation facility, they live in utter poverty. Most of them work as agricultural labourers, manual labourers, kuli, dish cleaners in hotels, sweepers, rickshaw pullers, selling vegetables, chudi (bangles), firewood, etc. The Dalits also dispose of carcasses of animals that die in

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54 Ibid.
http://www.geocities.com/husociology/dalit5.htm

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their homes or in the village, whether cattle or dogs or cats, etc. and also manually remove the human excreta. Their poor economic condition drives them even to migrate to various places of India like Raipur, Andhra Pradesh, etc. looking for work as laborers living their womenfolk and children behind. In most of the case in Raipur every rickshaw puller you interact turns out to be a poor dalit of Kalahandi. Most of the time they have to borrow money from the moneylenders with higher interest rates because the bank never pays loan without mortgage and government sanction every time.

Even today the dalits of these two areas suffer from the curse of untouchability. They were not allowed to sit with other higher castes men in hotels and used to wash the plates they had food. The dalit children were not allowed to sit in the same line with other higher castes students in schools. During various pujas in schools, the dalit children were not allowed to touch *prasad* (offerings to gods). Even today in Ladugaon, a village near Koksara block, the barber belonging to the Gaud caste refuses to cut the hair of dalits. The notion of untouchability prevails more among the higher castes women than their male members. Till date they scold dalit children coming near them while returning from taking bath or bringing water from the village pond or well. As if their touch might pollute them. However, this situation is changing day by day.

The condition of dalit women is more precarious. They bear the burnt of being untouchable more than their male counterparts. They suffer from triple handicaps being women, dalits and under the male dominated social system. Poverty in their households compel them to work as *naukarani* in the houses of upper castes, as agricultural laborers, as manual laborers thereby neglect their own
Socio-Economic Conditions...

households and children. They are even paid less in comparison to the male members. While the male members get Rs. 20/- per day as agricultural laborers, they get only Rs. 10-15/- for the same work. They work as naukarani in the houses of the upper castes only to get the left over food for their children or some used clothes to drape themselves. Some times they get beaten by the higher cases males for some minor faults. In their households also they are beaten, castigated, as most of their husbands are drunkards. Whatever money they get by toiling hard though out the day, spend for preparing food for their children, whereas the male members squander them away in liquor and boozing. Although the dalit society is more liberal to women in comparison to the upper castes, however, the male ego and the process of sanskritisation has made the dalit males to suppress their women folks.

As sanitation facility is scarce, they mostly use the fields to answer the call of nature. However, during the agricultural season they use the side of public roads, which makes them wait for several hours till the roads become clear. This is the common sight in every village in Orissa.

Poverty also hinders the dalits to send their wards to schools. Instead of reading and playing the dalit children are compelled to work in hotels as dishwashers or as mechanics in cycle stores or motor garages. Although the government of Orissa has been trying to bring these children to schools by providing free books, slates, pencils, chalks and the mid-day meal etc. most of the children come to schools to get the mid-day meal only. Therefore, the drop out rates among dalit children from schools is very high. The literacy rate for the dalit girls is very low. During the course of the fieldwork some dalit males, when asked
why they are not sending their wards to schools? replied that 'when we do not
have the food to eat, how can they read. When the stomach burns, nothing matters,
forget study'. Dalits, in Kalahandi however, maintain that education is important
to lead a better life. Therefore, those who are well off send their wards to schools
and colleges. The provision of reservation in education by the government also
helps them in this regard. There are few examples of dalit in Class I and Class II
jobs in these two blocks. In both the blocks there are few dalits who are well off
being doctors, principal in college, school teachers, nurse, bank officers, police,
etc. Those dalits who are well off have all the modern gadget like fridge, cooler,
television, motorcycle, car, etc. and their sons and daughters are studying in
schools and colleges across the country.

However, in majority of cases due to scarcity of jobs and unemployment
dalit youths are wandering without any future hope. Youths (both dalit and others)
waiting to get a contract job (thika) is the common sight in both Koksara and
Dharmagarh block offices. Some of the graduate youths of these two blocks are
working as hotel boy or dish cleaner in Raipur.

Due to ignorance about various medical facilities and family planning
programme, etc. most of the dalit families have four to five children. And due to
poverty, hunger and starvation most of the children and the women are suffering
from malnutrition.

So far as marriage is concerned, it happens in the traditional method to
marry in their own caste as in the case of high caste Hindus. However, there are
certain cases where boy boys and girls (from the same caste) marry by falling in
love. The practice of elopement by boys and girls is still prevalent. However, such cases are very few.

The most interesting fact, which came out during the fieldwork, is that higher castes males/females are now interested in education looking at the dalit students. Earlier they were happy working in their own lands and live peacefully. They now feel inferior to the dalit boys and girls in terms of acquisition of knowledge.

Another interesting fact is that even the dalits are not immune from the practice of untouchability. This heinous practice is also prevalent among them. There are few castes like Ghasi who are not allowed to enter into the houses of the ‘Dom’ dalits. These Ghasis do the work of manual cleaning of human excreta and removing the carcass of the dead animals.

Conclusion
From the above discussion it can be inferred that the position of dalit women is more deplorable, compared to their male counterparts. They are doubly oppressed, i.e., from the sense of security, since they are dependant on the man and secondly caste wise. Further, illiteracy, lack of awareness and poverty has rendered them helpless, voiceless and completely oppressed. They are deprived of their basic survival needs and vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual abuses. Especially rural dalit women become the first and worst victims of rape and other atrocities. Therefore, it is rightly said that they are the dalits among dalits.