Chapter-1

Introduction

The present social awareness and assertion of identity among Dalits is a result of social change, historical developments and various attempts by the Dalits themselves to overcome their ‘untouchable’, ‘marginalised’ and deprived status into the contemporary Dalit identity.¹ The various factors that contributed towards this include the religious movements during the Bhakti period, the social reform movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, the anti-caste movements led by Jyotiba Phule and Periyar, the Dalit movement initiated by Ambedkar and, in the post independence period, a number of Dalit movements in various states asserting Dalit ideology and identity.²

In the last two hundred years, Dalits have availed every opportunity within their reach to rise from the subjugation, marginalization and various other exclusions imposed by the caste system. This modern awakening began with the utilization of the nominal representative provisions under British rule and the various constitutional safeguards available to them later in the post-independence period. Since then, resisting the increasing opposition to their social mobility and the growing number of atrocities being committed upon them by the ‘upper castes’, the Dalits have come together as a collective identity.³

The social consciousness engendered by various forces and factors like the Dalit movements, government welfare programmes, modern education, contact with wider society etc., have resulted in rising aspirations among the Dalits. Having realized their rights, the Dalits now participate in all the important spheres of national life. The last few generations of the Dalits have been consciously nurturing a fascination for a modern lifestyle, democratic values and a secular outlook, that have accorded

them a distinct identity - the Dalit identity.\(^4\) Since then, the Dalits have been incessantly taking to modern education, it being a source of increased economic and social status.

Dalits today are not mere 'passive participants'- they now have a systematic programme; their aspirations for social, economic and political equality lead them to strategies and the means for their realization. They have not restricted themselves merely to government jobs; they have entered various other occupations and professions as well and achieved a considerable level of improvement in their socio-economic status. However, they are now also nurturing aspirations equal to that of caste-Hindus in educational, occupational, political and cultural fields, though their entry has had a short and sometimes unsuccessful history compared to the caste-Hindus.

**Dalit Identity**

Evaluating the various facets of the Dalit identity, Kananaikil (1993: 401) observes that, Indian society has witnessed the 'emergence of a new consciousness and a new identity among the 'untouchables'' in the last two hundred years. “Today the Dalits- the new name they have coined for themselves- demand aggressively their share in the shaping of the destiny of the nation.” Further, he observes, “The term Dalit is no more another name for ‘untouchables’. It connotes dignity, pride and self-identity of a people.”\(^5\) Similarly, KL Sharma, delineating on the implications of Dalit identity, observes that,

The notion of Dalit is not the same as those of ‘Harijan’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’. The terms ‘Harijan’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ connote ‘socio-cultural’ and ‘legal’ meanings, respectively. The word ‘Dalit’ symbolises ‘knowledge’ and ‘power’ of the oppressed people, particularly belonging to the untouchable caste/communities. It refers to the genesis and expression of their consciousness. ‘Identity’ of the ‘oppressed people’ is central to the term ‘dalit’. Thus, the emergence of the identity of the dalit has created a new social language, a language of protest and struggle, of deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings of social situations, contexts and status parameters. It is an ‘oppositional’ side in creation of new cognitive structures (Sharma, 2001: 98).

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\(^5\) Kananaikil, Jose, (1993: 410). Further, referring to the coming together of all Dalit Parliamentarians in 1992, and its significance to Dalits, he opines that, “in recent years, they have become a people in their own right. This is but the beginning of the emergence of a new identity. (and it has) ..to find a new meaning in the identity of the Dalit as dignified.”
Webster (1999: 68) traces the origin of the term Dalit historically and argues, “Dalit (‘oppressed’ or ‘broken’) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of the ‘Depressed Classes’, the term used by the British for what are now called the Scheduled Castes.” The term 'Dalit' is a politically loaded term. Zelliot (1992: 267) explicates Dalits as "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."

Providing an alternative perspective to the conscious, programmatic approach of the term Dalit as defined by others, KL Sharma (2001: 100) opines,

...the notion of ‘dalit’ is a new arrival; it is an ad hoc concept; it is a culture-bound construction; it is a reactive and not a generative ‘concept’. Squeezing between caste and class reduces its ‘atomistic’ existence as a concept. It has more emotional and effectual appeal than rational and logical message. Lastly, it is a concept in making.

There are many studies on Dalits, which dealt with their social mobility, economic development, socio-economic and political status; atrocities; ideology and identity, and so on. Among them, the process of social and economic mobility of the Scheduled Castes has been paid much attention to by various scholars. The focus of such studies range from their socio-economic status and mobility (Prakash, 1989; Selvanathan, 1989) to Dalit movements (Omvedt, 1994; Zelliot, 1993), to Dalit ideology (Gore, 1993) and identity (Shah, 1985; Oommen, 1968), both during the pre-independence and post-independence period.

Such studies focused on either socio-economic status or mobility. In a changing context of Dalit assertion and the caste-Hindu opposition to Dalit mobility, it is essential to understand the rapid changes occurring not only in their economic status, but also in their own perceptions of their socio-political status, along with their ideology and identity. This would help us not only in estimating the socio-economic and political changes and the mobility process the Dalits are undergoing but also enable us to understand the general process of social change in India.
Evolution of Dalit Identity and Ideology: A Historical Overview

In different phases of the Indian caste history, the Dalits were addressed differently in relation to the then Hindu religious and societal conservatism. However, at the pan-Indian level, the Dalits had not faced the same degree of untouchability or the other forms of oppression uniformly; they were called by different names in different parts of the country and were assigned different economic roles. To trace historically, the different phases of untouchability and the nomenclatures used to refer to them helps in the understanding their socio-economic position in those times. Quoting Bougie, Prasad (1970:121) observes “the untouchable is not hated primarily; he is feared for his power to defy any class of men with whom he may come into contact.”

As a result of the continuous efforts to search for a self-identity and for the articulation of a collective political interest, the term 'Dalit,' for the first time, was used in a cultural context in Marathi literature by the followers of Babasaheb Ambedkar or the neo-Buddhist writers, the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra in 1972, with the inspiration taken from the American Black Panthers. Since then the term has been gaining popularity and is being widely used. Zelliot observes that today, "... 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 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" (Gangadhar Panthwane, as quoted in Zelliot, 1992: 172).

This definition gives an account of who is a Dalit and what is s/he. The emerging identity i.e., Dalit, negates the past impressions and positions given to them and denotes the aspirations to evolve as a new political force with a distinct identity. According to Shah (1994: 1133), Identity is concerned with the self esteem and self-image of a community.

6 Sachidananda (1977:4) observes that, “the Scheduled Castes in different parts of India do not form any solid mass. They are split up into hundreds of castes and sub-castes. There are about eleven hundred such groups spread all over India. In different regions of India some of them retain and share a common identity and some times a common name. Each group in this Scheduled Caste population has a name, a separate occupation, its own set of rules and, more often than not, its own mechanism of social control. These groups are not equal in social status. They are arranged in strictly hierarchical order as caste sub-units and they practice untouchability among themselves. Endogamy is widely practiced among them.”

Seeking political power is the crucial significance of Dalit identity, argues Oommen (1994). He further adds, this identity is the product of a long historical process rooted in a collective conscience specific to them. It is a consolidating identity.

Webster (1995: 77) states in definite terms that,

“Caste alone has determined who is a Dalit, not class or religion. Social stigma and a variety of disabilities were based on caste; these were and, to a significant degree, still are the defining characteristics of a Dalit, even if a Dalit moves up in social class or changes religion.”

Locating the origin of the category 'Dalit', Zelliot (1992: 170) points out that, in the 1970s, some writers from the "untouchable" castes compared Indian ‘untouchables’ with the Blacks of America, took inspiration from Black Panthers movement, and called themselves 'Dalit Panthers'. It soon became a dominant trend in Marathi literature and later inspired Dalit politics. According to her, the term 'Dalit' seems to be more secular and self-respect oriented than other categories such as the Scheduled Castes or Harijans. However, Zelliot feels that the term Dalit overemphasizes aspects of culture and fails to explain the changing trends among them, i.e., social status, political identities and economic aspirations.

Dalit identity arose as a result of exposure to modern education, social reform movements, Bhakti movements and finally Ambedkar’s Mahar movement for social equality. The followers of Ambedkar spread his ideology not only in Maharashtra, but also in states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Those who are politically conscious of the ‘untouchables’ position in society searched for a solution in a political identity such as ‘Dalit identity,’ which is more secular and self-respecting than the other names used for the Scheduled Castes, which do not explain the changing trend among them i.e., social status, political identity and economic aspirations under the cultural identity of Dalit.

Nagaraj (1993: 4) observes, “...the Dalit movement was a product of the mental state that believed in the firm rejection of the Gandhian model of tackling the problems of untouchables, and that has shaped the contours of its themes and patterns.”
Dr. Siddalingaiah in his play “Panchama” (The Fifth-one) portrayed Dalit identity at two different levels, (1) The upwardly mobile Dalits who present different faces of the making of modern Dalit identity in all its unauthentic forms, who lie and are caught in the act and show an attitude of willful amnesia towards their past. (2) The new Dalit, who not only refuses to forget his past, but also remembers it deliberately. The first category, according to him, needs “a radical atmosphere which will accept and respect their Dalit identity, which only a strong movement could provide. The entire Dalit movement at one level starts from the assumption that the first four will be eventually transformed as Panchama.”

There are different Dalit movements and not a single movement, says Shah (1990: 108). He further argues that different movements highlight different aspects of caste oppression and use different ideological frameworks for articulating their politics. However, “all of them overtly or covertly assert a Dalit identity, though its meaning is not identical and precise for everyone.” ”Identity”, he says, ”is concerned with the self-esteem and self image of a community.” He identifies the weakness of the Dalit movements as: internal social hierarchy, economic differentiations and dispersed populations. He argues that the ideology of Hinduism, i.e., hierarchy, plays a major role against a unified Dalit identity.

KL Sharma argues that Dalit movements have a class character. He further elaborates,

Dalit Movements may be seen in terms of (1) the sociology of knowledge and communication paradigms, and (2) neo-Marxist view emphasising the class-caste approach. In the first case, the social context of Ambedkarian is highlighted, where as in the second approach emphasis is on the understanding of the broad situation of the underdog mainly in class terms without losing the sight of the specific caste situation in India. As such, dalit movement is an anti-systemic movement. Both manifest and latent consequences of the dalit movement are observable in the socio-economic spheres of life (Sharma, 2001: 99).

For the first time, the Bhakti movement facilitated the Dalits to raise their voice against religious restrictions on worship. During the British rule, the grip of Karma ideology loosened with the changes in economic and political structures and during

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8 Dr. Siddalingaiah is a famous Dalit writer from Karnataka. Quoted in Nagaraj, (1993: 8).
9 Ibid.
the freedom movement, a struggle for social equality was launched. Shah (2002: 36) suggests that, gradually a middle class has developed among the Dalits. For these middle class Dalits, the question of a new social and religious identity and reservations are more important than the problems of poverty and exploitation. For the poor Dalits, poverty and exploitation are more important problems than the search for a new identity.

Oommen (1994) deals with questions of Dalit identity and its contexts and content. He identifies five phases in which the collective identity was made up through the ages, with different contexts and contents and through the dichotomy of the self and the other.

In the first phase, the pre-Aryan categories were caught up in the process of assimilation in and exclusion from Aryan/Hindu identity. The non-assimilation and loss of identity led to their entry into Hinduism with a stigmatized status as 'untouchables' or *Panchamas*. In the second phase, Bhakti tradition tried to enhance Dalits by professing human equality and rejecting the authority of the Vedas, Brahmin priesthood and ritual practices. In the third phase, the 19th century British rule began recognizing Dalit problems, and the terms 'depressed classes' and 'exterior caste' were coined during this period. This was the time of social reforms in India. Status mobility was initiated in this period. Sanskritization and conversion to Christianity and Buddhism were the distinct features of this phase. The term Scheduled caste was also coined in this period to group them together for legal purpose and give them some specific benefits. The fourth phase involved Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi called them Harijans. He wanted to absorb Harijans into the Hindu fold to fuse their identity with Hinduism. Ambedkar opted for alternatives other than Hinduism to renounce caste status. Gandhi aimed at a change *in* caste system whereas Ambedkar aimed at a change *of* caste system. In this context, Gandhi was a reformer and Ambedkar, a revolutionary. The final phase starts with a new self-definition as 'Dalits' from within, with the formation of Dalit panthers in Maharashtra in the 1970s. The content of contemporary Dalit identity is primarily political and its orientation is militant and rebellious. Seeking political power is the crucial significance of Dalit identity.
Ambedkar and Dalit Ideology

Ambedkar is the most prominent articulator of Dalit rights. He caused a paradigm shift in the Dalits' social vision, ideology, identity and political action. He propagated 'social revolution' as the solution to Dalit development; the annihilation of caste system, and the creation of a new society based on social, economic and political equality. He was multifaceted; he was a professor, lawyer, journalist, educationalist, social reformist, great economist and visionary, the architect of the Indian Constitution and leader of downtrodden classes in India. He, being one of the few highly educated among the depressed classes, led the movement among them for social reform and political education (Desai, 1989:198). For the first time, Ambedkar planned a systematic approach for the economic as well as the social development of Dalits. Combining these two, Ambedkar visualized that only the socially and politically developed Dalits could destroy the caste system. “Ambedkar,” in his new ideology of integration, “provided a totally different perspective on an autonomous social and cultural space for the Dalits, markedly different from the one they had in Brahminical Hindu society” (Singh, 1995: 114). Ambedkar is also seen as a ‘dynamic and charismatic (but fettered) leader in life, who posthumously became a cultural hero, a demigod for ‘untouchables’ having led them through the processes of counter-caste demarcation, competition, confrontation, and routinization of politics’ (Khare, 1984: 143).

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar transformed the Dalit vision. He prepared the ‘untouchables’ to fight the caste system and its discrimination. He led the Dalits with a vision, envisioning an ideology to educate Dalits politically. He not only fought for the economic development of Dalits, but also argued for the thinking of an alternate identity as against the Hindu identity, which kept them low and degraded. Ambedkar's vision and initiatives continue to inspire and guide the contemporary Dalit movement.
For the first time, Dalits fought the caste system in a systematic manner, with a supreme ideology under the leadership of Ambedkar. He organized the 'untouchables', the Mahars of Maharashtra, to fight the caste system. The programmes he took up in his anti-caste movement include:


Ambedkar believed that as long as the Dalits remained within the fold of the Hindu religion they could not escape the caste system and, therefore, doing away with Hindu religion was the solution to limit caste discrimination. During the nationalist movement, he fought for Dalit rights, he made a number of representations to the British Government to take steps to develop Dalits and to award separate electorates for Dalits (which resulted in the Communal Award, 1932). The Congressmen refused to accept that the problem of 'untouchables' was a political matter; they always dubbed it as social. Nevertheless, in changing India, the 'untouchables' were also assuming a political force (Vakil, 1985:7).

Ambedkar realized the importance of education for Dalits, and he opened schools and hostels for them. While he was a practicing barrister, he helped poor Dalits with legal aid. As early as 1919 itself, he made a representation to the South Borough Election Reforms Committee on Dalit political rights. He started weeklies, fortnightlies, journals etc. to voice Dalit issues. He started 'Mook Nayak' a fortnightly in 1920, Bahishkrut Bharat in 1927, and the weekly Janata in 1930.

Ambedkar worked in state and central ministries before and after independence. Though Dalit politics remained his main concern, he utilized all the positions he reached to benefit Dalits. He demanded separate electorates, gave a call for a separate state for Dalits', Dalitstan, and finally, as the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, he took care to provide concessions and development programmes for the Dalits' economic development, along with reservations in education and employment.
He also took measures regarding the abolition of untouchability, action against caste discriminations and political reservations for Dalits.

Ambedkar largely influenced all the clauses in the Constitution of India relating to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In many of his speeches and writings, he made it clear that education, employment and economically stable life are the preconditions of social reform.

The other major contributions of Ambedkar to Indian society include: (1) The Economics of Flexible Socialism in the early 1920s and his ‘problem of the rupee’, (2) The cultural revolutionary theory of Indian History, (3) Crucial questions posed related to the identity of Dalits, Shudras, and other high castes, (4) Examining the relevance of ‘Hinduism’, (5) The attempts to understand ‘Hindu India’ and ‘Buddhist India’, (6) The reinvented Buddhism – a Rational and Social Religion, and (7) The Strategy of Fighting Brahminism and Capitalism.

The importance of Ambedkar in framing the Dalit movement and ideology is well captured by Omvedt (1994). She compares the models of class revolution (Marxism) and social revolution (caste annihilation of Ambedkar) in addition to assessing how both of these influenced and was utilized by Ambedkar. The caste system, Brahminical superiority and the significance of ‘Hinduism’, particularly the way it had developed and was made sacred was questioned by Ambedkar. Alternatives were offered, to benefit not only the Dalits but also others, mainly those who were inside the caste system. Towards realizing this goal, Ambedkar adopted a few specific measures like the Dalit movement, mass conversion of the Dalits to Buddhism and the theory of ‘indigenousity’ (in Ambedkar’s words Indian nation or Indian people). The rejection of the idea of the nationalist school of thought, the ‘Hindu India’ and, in its stead, the identification of three Indias in Indian history, (i) Brahminism (the Aryans), (ii) Buddhism (rise of civilization and human equality) and (iii) Hinduism (reactionary / counter-revolution to Buddhist discourse and subordination of women and Shudras), formed Ambedkar’s understanding of the relevance of ‘Hinduism’. In his struggle to

10 Ambedkar’s writings on Indian history begin with the construction of an ‘Indian nation’ or ‘Indian people’ contrary to ‘Hindu identity’.
gain equality for the Dalits, Ambedkar had to face many obstacles such as Gandhi’s integration policy, the Nehruvian approach to development along the mode of Socialist heavy industry, which could neither address Dalits problems directly nor contribute to their development. For Gandhi, ‘Hinduism’ is the religious-cultural identity and for Nehru, ‘secularism’ is ‘exalted modernity’, both appear to be promoting a ‘nation’ contrary to Ambedkar’s demand of ‘Dalitstan’, a separate nation for Dalits. In this context, Dalit movement under Ambedkar’s leadership could be only a passive observer, with limited influence to achieve a few gains and concessions. The Dalit democratic liberation movement was led by Ambedkar in colonial India in the face of the secularist and nationalist discourses which claimed to be broad based in including all Hindus, Muslims and backward classes, and Dalits even though it is against the very basic idea of segmentary interests and promotes nationalism, secularism without facing the interests of the weaker sections into consideration. Omvedt (1994: 223) observes, ‘Ambedkarism’ is a living force today as much as Marxism. It defines the ideology of the Dalit movement, and to a large extent, an even broader anti-caste movement. The main significance of “Ambedkarism” is equality, fraternity and social justice, in a way Ambedkarism is general movement ideology.

Dalit movement has had a political thrust. A share in power is a precondition for Dalit liberation and reservations should not be limited to economic gains but should lead to access to power and a rejection of the politics of patronage. Thus, Ambedkar insisted, “we (Dalits) must become a ruling community.” He further reiterated that ‘Brahminism’/Hinduism and ‘Capitalism’ are enemies; Dalits as the ‘super oppressed’ must maintain their autonomy with the alliance of the other oppressed (sometimes Shudras and minorities, and sometimes the working class).

In forging political alliances, during the 1930s Ambedkar allied with the Samyuktha Maharashtra Samithi. As for forming a separate political forum for Dalits, he formed the Independent Labour Party, his first political party, (a worker and peasant party with a red flag with Dalit leadership). However, it was limited to only Marathi speaking districts. He wound up the ILP into Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942, which sought the alliance of Shudras and Muslims. Finally, the Scheduled Castes Federation wound up into the Republican Party of India, which aimed to be a party of
all the oppressed and all the exploited. He converted to Buddhism in 1956, along with hundreds of thousands of untouchable masses, to gain a new identity other than Hinduism (which he opposed in each aspect). He thus took the ultimate political step in giving Dalits a new social and political identity.

Thus Omvedt’s (1994) comparison of class revolution (Marxism) and social revolution (caste annihilation) clearly shows how B.R. Ambedkar effectively utilized both and how Ambedkar's ideas on issues such as social equality and national integration or development were different from Gandhian and Nehruvian approaches.

Zelliot (1993) charted out the contributions of various Dalit movements, in a social space provided by one movement to another. Religious protest (Bhakti mode) to social revolution (Mahar movement) were constructed in a form of social history. The religious reformers from Scheduled Castes who created a liberal social space, the non-Brahmin movement against Brahmin ideology by Jyotiba Phule, the Mahar movement led by Ambedkar, and finally the Dalit Panther movement of Maharashtra are the issues she deals with.

Zelliot argues that Dalit identity arose as a result of Bhakti movements, exposure to modern education, social reform movement, and finally Ambedkar's Mahar movement. The followers of Ambedkar spread his ideology not only in Maharashtra but also in states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and other parts of the country. In Maharashtra, as a result of Bhakti modes of consciousness, non-Brahman movement and Ambedkar Mahar movement, Dalit consciousness emerged in the 1960s to derive inspiration from the Black Panthers which laid the path to Dalit identity, initiated a trend in Marathi literature and inspired Dalit politics.

**Social Stratification and Mobility in India**

According to Aiyappan (1965:37) the term 'untouchability' denotes 'the socio-religious practice by which the Hindus keep a large number of lower castes from touching or coming near persons, houses, temples, tanks and sometimes even public roads.' About the theories regarding the origin of 'untouchables', Mukherjee (1988:12-13) states 'there are number of hypothesis explaining how it had come into
existence’. The first one and most popular one is that of the Tribal origin, which is supported by Oppert, Fick, Bose, and Sharma and by Ambedkar who called them ‘broken men’. The second one says ‘untouchables’ originated from the family and village slaves. The third hypothesis is, of *Varna sankara* theory based on *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages.

Throughout the Indian caste history, those social groups who controlled economic resources and wielded political power became the privileged upper castes while others were treated as social outcastes. Without access to the ritual and economic resources and bargaining power, the Dalits became the most exploited peripheral group in the Indian society. According to Ghurye (1969:180), the idea of untouchability and ‘unapproachability’ arose out of the ideas of ceremonial purity, first applied to the aboriginal Shudras in connection with the sacrificial ritual, and then expanded to other groups because of the theoretical impurity of certain occupations. As Ambedkar observes:

> The outcaste is a by-product of the caste-system. There will be outcastes as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste-system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of this odious and vicious dogma (Cited in Nagaraj 1993:12).

The earlier nomenclatures of Dalits, viz., 'Untouchables', 'Outcastes', 'Panchamas', 'Atisudras', 'Avarnas', 'Antyajas', 'Namasudras', 'Pariahs' - basically as 'un-seeables' and 'un-approachables' were in use during different phases of Indian history and in different parts of the country. As an effect of being made ‘untouchable’, Dalits suffered socio-cultural, economic and political sanctions imposed upon them by the caste system. It was during the British period, the first concerted efforts by state to end their apathy had begun. The British used the terms ‘Depressed Classes’ and ‘Exterior Class’ to notify Dalits, meaning they were kept away from Hindu Society (Singh SS, 1987:2). Gandhi preferred to call them ‘Harijan’, which he borrowed from

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12 Kananaikil, 1983: 79.
13 Dalits in Indian society suffered socio-cultural, economic and political disabilities and were not allowed to take part in any religious, social or political activities at par with the caste Hindus. Dalits were treated as 'Untouchables', 'Dalits (Broken men)', 'Out castes', 'Panchamas', 'Atisudras', 'Avarnas', 'Antyajas', 'Namasudras', 'Pariahs' - basically as 'unseeables' and 'unapproachables' (Shah, 1990:107).
a Gujarati Brahmin, Narasinha Mehta. Many leaders from these caste groups including Ambedkar had objections against calling them Harijans because they found it derogatory and insulting to be called fatherless. Ambedkar demanded a change of nomenclature at the first Round Table Conference in London. He proposed referring to them as 'protestant Hindus' or 'nonconformist Hindus'. However it was the term 'Scheduled Castes' (coined by the Simon Commission in the year of 1935) that was officially recognized by both pre and post-Independence states. Until recently, the term 'Harijan' was also widely employed in common usage.

Traditionally, the caste system was non-competitive in its character, which meant that each caste had its own occupation and distinct lifestyle and none of them were allowed to trespass into the other’s arena. Though, some degree of social mobility was allowed for the non-Dalit castes, it was virtually impossible for the ex-untouchables to move up in the caste hierarchy. Values of caste hierarchy, purity, pollution and untouchability segregated the Dalits in all spheres of life, with respect to physical touch or social contact with others for centuries together. However, as observed by many scholars, in the recent past, there has been a shift from ritual status to secular status in patterns of social stratification at most levels in Indian society. At present, different castes aim at the same goals such as education, employment, and various kinds of mobility, including occupational and socio-economic status. Consequently, individuals belonging to different castes compete for similar kinds of positions. Many studies dealing with mobility among the Scheduled Castes suggest that the Dalits today are a changed lot. Their ritual status in caste hierarchy does not bind them any more to their traditional occupations.

14 Mehta used it to denote the 'fatherless children, see Zelliot, 1992.
17 Tripathy (1994) describes, “Dalits are discriminated against with references to living wage, share cropping, money-lending, drawing water from public wells, entry into the temples, service of tea and snacks in the hotels, service in the grocery shops, services of the barber men, washer men, cow herdsmen, priest community, feasts and marriages with caste Hindus.”
18 Damle and Nair (1982: 6-7) for example discuss this process taking a manifest shape forcefully after framing of the constitution.
19 Damle and Nair, (1982: 6) observe this as a result of the replacement of the non-competitive caste society with a partially competitive caste society (See, p.7 also).
20 Charsley and Karanth (1998) provide a depiction of changing social environment of Dalits in Karnataka with reference to their growing ability to ‘challenging untouchability’ and other forms discriminations.
Social Mobility: Theories and perspectives

Pimpley (1990), opines that the movements (c.19th century) aimed at the improvement of the 'untouchables' did not succeed, and would not have succeeded because they were directed towards changing the 'superstructure' of the caste system (the bundle of attitudes and beliefs) instead of correcting the system, with appropriate cognitive restructuring of caste. He observes,

The practice of untouchability and the various disabilities imposed upon many castes has an economic function (1990:161).

Further, he states that,

No reform movement till date has attempted to link cognitive restructuring with economic restructuring. The inadequate success of reformist movements can be traced to the above-maintained promises (1990:161).

The struggle against the caste system goes back to Buddha. Muslim culture gave rise to Bhakti movement, which preached egalitarianism and rejected the caste system and the practice of untouchability. British rule gave rise to social reform movements (Pimpley, 1990:162). The doing away with untouchability and the social disabilities of the 'untouchables' in the recent past sprang up because of the contact with British liberalism. The hold of ritualism lessened with these movements to some extent and the latter were successful to create some level of sensitization in the case of untouchability. However, Hinduism again lapsed into ritualism and exclusiveness after some time. With the entry of British in the 18th century, Hinduism once again woke up to resist the British stronghold and Christian expansionism. For their supremacy and cultural hegemony, the British started the conversion of the lower castes and 'untouchables' into Christianity. He feels,

This was a threat to the Hindu elite as the latter's status position could only be maintained vis-à-vis the lower castes. And if the lower castes and untouchables get out of Hindu social system, elite can no longer be elite; their position would further slide down the ladder of the social system (Pimpley, 1990:162).
Again, because of the new technology, the artisan castes among the 'untouchables' like carpenters (Barahi) and Blacksmith (lohars) raised their material position vis-à-vis the same upper castes. The untouchable individuals rose from the lower caste status creating dissonance and inconsistency in social relations. He notes,

As a result of these changes, the Hindu elite to retain its position at the apex was forced to widen its base and recreate a myth on equal footing. The socio-religious reform movements of the 18th and 19th century were probably a consequence of this struggle for power between the British and the Hindu elite (Pimpley, 1990:162).

The programmes of the Brahmo Samaj like the congregational form of worship, the Prithi Bhojans, and inter-caste marriages, though not successful, were far ahead of the times. The general criticism against Brahmo Samaj was the acceptance of European culture. The caste-Hindus did not accept social reforms as they were too daring an act for those times. Similarly, Arya Samaj took up 'shuddhi' - reconverting those who converted to Christianity back into Hinduism and purifying the lower castes by offering them 'dvija' status with in the Hindu social system – as the main programme. The Arya Samaj opened schools and colleges for the education of outcastes, mainly providing technical know-how to complement their traditional occupations, like weaving, tailoring and carpentry according to their traditional occupations. However, the Arya Samaj mainly concentrated on artisan castes than 'untouchables', so it could provide neither a better social status nor educational facilities and thereby better occupational status to the 'untouchables'.

Since most of these movements were initiated by educated high caste Hindus, they were not expected to disrupt their own power positions within the caste system. Therefore, none seemed to really attack the legitimized ascriptive hierarchy of the Indian caste system. Among the many precepts, untouchability was one, which remained in the background as liberal education and addressing of the social evils within the upper castes were driven to the foreground and manifested as a problem. Most reforms failed to reach the core of the problem of untouchability and the social oppression of the outcastes, under the guise of the religious sanctions of untouchability, continued in the Hindu society.
The concern for the outcastes was more nominal than real (Pimpley, 1990:165-166). He further observes,

The main contribution of the missionaries lies in their indirect contribution in spurring up socio-religious reform, and reforms in the field of education. For them both conversions and spread of education were means to political power and the continuance of untouchability helped them to broaden their base for such a claim. It seems to me that there was a struggle for power between the higher Hindu castes and the British. Socio-religious reform movements and the Christian missionary conversions were means through which they tried to establish their supremacy (Pimpley, 1990:166).

While advocating the importance of education to the scheduled castes in achieving social mobility, Vishwanathan and Reddy (1985) state that “historically speaking, they (scheduled castes) have not monopolized any economically profitable and socially valued skills” and suggests them to utilize education as the means to economic independence, through entry into modern profit-making occupations.

Dalits and Social Stratification in India

The various disadvantages faced by the Dalits in the caste system and the various social mobility options that were available to them have led to the generation of many ideologies against inequality in the caste system and identity processes of Dalits. The process of social mobility has been an opportunity for the Dalits in reinterpreting their past as well as visualizing a future with self-respect and dignity as the main components. The various attempts at understanding the past had democratic and egalitarian goals as the axis. Nagaraj opines, “The caste system in India is not only a structure of cultural values, but also a certain pattern of inequitable distribution of power and wealth of different kinds along the lines of caste hierarchy” (Nagaraj, 1993:6). Similarly, Pimpley argues, the inequalities within the caste system are not merely religiously ordained but are a consequence of the unequal distribution of power and privileges in the society. Accordingly, high castes have a monopoly over scarce goods or have relatively greater access to power and privileges (Pimpley, 1990:167).
Raj (1998: xv) argues that the opposition to globalization is manifold, asserting peoples’ right over economic and political systems, safeguarding of local cultural identity, self assertion of indigenous and marginalized people and various environmental, Dalit, Women and Peasant movements, etc. He observes that, the Dalit community, despite having 'subjugated' for 3000 years continues to be distinct and vibrant to pose challenges to the forces of globalization and 'objugation' (objectivity and subjugation).

In the context of Dalit identity formation, Raj (1998) also lists out the following identities to be found in an individual in multiple degrees at different points of time:


Khare (1984: x) proposes that the 'Untouchable' possesses a distinct ideology, identity and pragmatism from the 'Hindu'. He states the 'Untouchable' discovers a ground from which to consolidate his positive self-definition. A positive cultural ideology and identity are always very precious gains for the socially deprived. The more pronounced the deprivation, the more socially sensitive, coveted, and contested are these gains generally. Above all, for identifying the Untouchable’s ideological categories, it is crucial that a distinction be maintained between ‘the Hindu’ and the earlier ‘pre-Hindu’ roots of civilization. In a situation in which, widening social gaps and rising conflict between the caste-Hindus and the ‘Untouchables’ are making the ‘Untouchable’s’ present initiatives difficult to understand. Throughout the history of the caste system, the various attempts made by the ‘untouchables’ to regain a respectable social position for themselves in the society, through submission and opposition, have made them more rebellious and the caste Hindus more aggressive towards the ‘untouchables’.

The urban Chamar reformers, leaders and ordinary persons as studied by Khare (1984) articulate their distinctive cultural perspective, as well as a serious awareness of their changing role in Indian society. The received knowledge from ancestors and

\[21\] Ibid, p. xi.
their own day-to-day experiences guide them to formulate their opinions about the society. The Untouchable is expressing himself through a distinctive culture, which negates the Hindu order in order to claim spiritual as well as material equality.

Khare (1984: 143-144) sums up the following four strands taking place in Dalit asceticism:

1. **Ideologically explicate**, rests on a transcendent, ultimate order of Indic equality and justice, aiming at absolute spiritual equality and gathers support from spiritual ascetics and heroes to reform the social. This is to demonstrate the superiority of spiritual over worldly morality.

2. The prospect of social reform, often slow and sporadically inspired. It is marked by the ascetic’s and the hero’s efforts to reform.

3. Shaped by the changing politico-economic character of Indian society during this century, organized political protests and their culmination in a pragmatic pursuit of legal and economic claims (and its contests). Ambedkar is obviously the fountainhead.

4. In the context of a decline in cultural innovation and a rise in the free play of pragmatic evaluations and accountabilities. The claims for moral, legal, and economic equality start a pervasive politics for equal social rights. The fourth strand represents a step toward the routinization of politics for social equality.

Khare, visualizing these four strands as woven together, ‘in different patterns and under different regional lights’, asserts that there emerges ‘a thumbnail sketch of what engages the Untouchable’s mind’. For Khare, the ‘untouchable ascetic’ is ‘partly resigned, partly protesting, partly rhetorical, but largely politicized’. Further, ‘the Untouchable, as a true civilizational member, continuously totalizes the ideal and the practical to conform to a non-dichotomous view of knowledge and reality’ (1984:143).

KN Sharma (1986:172) observes that the system of ‘protective discrimination’ has granted free education facilities and reservation of a certain percentage of jobs in various government organizations and public undertakings to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. It appears that the assumption behind this policy is that,
through free education and job-reservation, their social mobility in the class system may be enhanced. Thus, either caste status would become irrelevant for their life chances and social intercourse, or through an improvement in their class status, a change in caste status would also be achieved. By and large, the members of the Scheduled Castes are rejecting birth as the criterion of social status in general and caste status in particular. A process of destructuration has begun. Referring to Ram’s study he observes that, 82.9% of respondents acquired middle class status, while 7.5% of respondents reached upper class status on the basis of objective criteria. In addition, their perception is more or less on same lines, i.e., 77% and 5.5% respectively. Sharma further observes,

In terms of the evaluation of their caste status, he accepted the interactional approach, because “the status of a person based on his birth is possible only at the ‘theoretical’ level. But in reality (empirical situation) change in the status of a person is possible in the caste system though such a change may not completely alter his status based on his birth in a particular caste. And “… Although a vast majority of Indians and probably many Scheduled Castes insist on birth as the sole criterion of caste status, and the attributional theory also asserts it, the growing number of educated castes do not seem to accept this theory. They have acquired education and better jobs, as a result of which they have improved their class status as well as interaction with higher castes. They, therefore, perceive a change in the caste status at the individual level without bothering about the corporate rank of their caste. As has been stated earlier, this is a process which is the reverse of the process which led to a replacement of the varna system based dharma, karma and guna by the jati system based on birth.

For, it is through an improvement in class status that the Scheduled Castes are succeeding in acquiring the desired social status. Moreover, the reverse is occurring in three stages: (1) Birth as the sole criterion, (2) A section of SCs reject birth as criterion for social status and insists on education, employment, interaction as criteria for caste status. In this stage there is a divergence between the theory and practice, and (3) Rejection of birth totally, where divergence is removed (Sharma KN, 1986: 108).

Social mobility is mainly intergenerational occupational mobility, which involves movement of individuals or groups in the society in a particular direction. In any given society, persons and groups are never stable in the same position forever but engage in some or the other sort of movement or undergo mobility in their economic and social status.\textsuperscript{24}

Roy and Singh (1987) observe that, in a society like ours where inequitable distribution of resources follows more or less the hierarchical order of the caste system, even acquired attributes (elite position) are monopolized by a section of society which is already placed high on ascribed statuses. “Social mobility”, Prasad (1970: i) describes:

... is usually taken for flow of people, events, and ideas. It, therefore, refers to two important social phenomena: movement and change. ‘Movement’ is the transition between lower and higher positions (‘vertical mobility’) and one group to another group at same level (‘horizontal mobility’). Change is the extent of invention and innovation, which takes place in the institutions, ideas and cultural forms of a society. Mobility in the caste system was possible through individual movement (mostly downward mobility) and mobility through entire caste changing its status (into equal plane due to essential/necessary circumstances).

The mobility of individuals and castes in Indian society is not a new phenomenon. The mobility of intermediary castes, per se, from one occupation to another occupation and taking on the name of another caste was permitted in the past. M.N. Srinivas named this process as ‘Sanskritization’.\textsuperscript{25} Upward mobility of the lowest castes or ‘outcastes’ was tabooed in the traditional caste order, with several restrictions imposed to curtail changes in their occupations and lifestyles. There were no changes in the positions of the two polars - the top most and the bottom one in the caste hierarchy. The Dalits located at the bottom of the hierarchy could not raise their social status until the caste system was attacked from outside by the British and modern social reformers. Under the British rule, Dalits were employed in secular jobs, and for the first time, were brought into continuous contact with caste-Hindus.

\textsuperscript{24} Sorokin defines social mobility as “... any transmission of an individual or social object or value, anything that has been created or modified by human activity from one social position to another” (Joseph, 1986:5).

\textsuperscript{25} MN Srinivas (1966: 1-45) provides an elaboration on the concept of Sanskritization, as tool for status mobility among the ‘lower castes’.
The social reformers mainly tried to educate the Dalits and instill ‘awareness’ among them, in addition to attacking the caste hierarchy.

The process and fruits of modernization was initially not accessible to all castes. Even among caste-Hindus, the degree of mobility, to a great extent, depended on their location in the caste hierarchy. Those who enjoyed a better social and economic status traditionally, by virtue of their caste, moved up more easily than those who were placed ‘below’ them in the caste hierarchy. In all, the process of modernization largely reflected the traditional status system rather than any other criteria. In a way, the modern social order is superimposed on the traditional social order. Caste plays a significant role in one’s access to education particularly with regard to one’s attitudes, consciousness and participation in social relations.

Roy and Singh (1987: 125) observe that the impact of modernization created spaces for the Scheduled Castes to become elites. The world-view acquired from the British period transformed their ‘status from passive subjects to active citizens’, and it set up a new goal to be achieved i.e., ‘equality democratically’. Raj (1998: xiv) suggests that the awareness and assertion among the Dalits and their consequent transformative struggle continues to make a fundamental difference to the caste based, hierarchically divided society of India. He further adds that the awareness ‘converts itself’ into the act of community and then on to rebellion to shake the very foundations of the system.

**Dalit Identity and Social Mobility**

The conscious, collective attempts of the Dalits to acquire social mobility started in the 19th century, during the British rule. In pre-British period, the social mobility attempts made by Dalits were not significant, for they were often lacking in ‘consciousness’ and often not fruitful, though in the medieval period, the Bhakti movement created some saints (Bhaktas) even from among the ‘untouchables’ like Ravidas, Chokkamela, etc. This kind of mobility had several limitations. It was
largely confined to upward mobility of very few individuals, who were not accepted by caste-Hindus, and thereby their influence on the society was limited only to spiritualism. Though these individuals broke caste restrictions imposed upon the Dalit communities to become Bhaktas, they could only preach human equality and criticize caste practices. However, their impact on caste-Hindu society is very limited with regard to the confidence they nurtured among the Dalits. Given their limitations, these saints from the Dalit communities referred to Moksha as the salvation for the Dalits’ socio-economic and political subordination. However, the Bhakti mode was not sufficient for the emancipation of the Dalits’ socio-economic problems as it searched for emancipation more on a spiritual plane. Its important contribution was in recognizing these problems and thereby instilling hope among the Dalits. The concerns raised by the Bhakti movement were addressed by the socio-religious movements in the Colonial period to some extent. Thus, social change and transformation in the 19th century brought about an overall change in the social structure and created new social groups.

Dalits have used various means of mobility to enhance their social and economic status since the 19th century. Reddy, (1984: 68-71) identified these as -
(1) Social reformation, (2) Religious conversions, (3) Sanskritization, (4) Protective discrimination and Constitutional guarantees, and (5) Political action.

The ideology of social reformation, for which the leadership was external- (the reformists)-mainly addressed the ritual degradation and cultural repression. A thrust on education and economic betterment motivated this mobility. Cleanliness and purification were preached among the 'untouchables' to bring them into the Hindu fold. However, this model could only make a partial progress in gaining caste Hindus' acceptance of Dalits. To some extent, a new identification as a clean caste with new status was made possible within this mobility, but overall this mobility was not successful because of the prejudices of the upper castes.

The religious conversions, 'another mode of mobility for Dalits', had change of religion as its ideology. In this model, external as well as internal reformists, priests

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26 Dube, (1988, viii) observes these as 'rare exceptions' which had not facilitated 'entire untouchable groups' to achieve 'upward mobility' mainly due to 'ritual hierarchy of Hinduism'
and holy men offered leadership. The ritual degradation and access to resources like education and economic betterment in the society motivated conversions among the Dalits. Conversions into religions like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity were attempted and encouraged. With conversions, often, a new religion and a new culture were achieved but discrimination based on caste continued. This model was mainly followed by only the lowest among the Dalits and was partly successful.

The third model Sanskritization has Sanskritic and Brahmanization ideology. Internal (caste) reformists, attempting cultural change, and high and new social positions mainly led to this mobility. It involved imitation of the higher castes and/or the Brahmin life style. Mostly individuals or groups belonging to the elite sections among Dalits adopted this model and were separated from the Dalit masses in the process. However, this mode was also not successful due to the upper castes' attitudes; they closed all channels for Dalits in this mobility process.

Social security, equality and justice as ideology orient protective discrimination and constitutional guarantees. Political leadership, administrative and judiciary carried out this task. The thrust for social equality, numerical strength and politicization motivated this mobility. The Anti-Untouchability Act, seats in legislatures, employment and education along with other welfare measures are the issues involved in this mobility. The beneficiaries of such programmes, who became elite, came to be alienated from Dalit masses. This mobility was also partly successful, because it was not a collective mobility but a person centered one, while the lackadaisical attitudes of administrative and judicial systems are the limits in this kind of mobility.

Finally, political action - militant and mass political participation and action was the ideology behind this mobility. The politicians and social activists, both external as well as internal to the caste, led this mobility. The motivations for this mobility are destruction of the traditional order, perception of relative deprivation and quest for power. This mobility proceeded through organizing protests, dharnas, mobilizing people on sectarian lines. It involved radicalization of caste, it responded to new ideologies and political actions, while ignoring caste solidarity. This mobility was relatively successful. Conflicts, however, increased due to a high degree of resentment by the upper castes.
These five modes of mobility explained by Reddy (1984: 68-71) can be classified into three different phases, and these are different approaches to social mobility in so far as the Dalits are concerned. They are: (1) Social reformations and religious conversions as reformatory which aimed at improvement in the Dalits' social status, (2) Sanskritization, protective discrimination and constitutional guarantees as improvement and development, oriented at Dalits' economic as well as social status, and (3) Political action as alternative identity, aimed at Dalits' political identity as a solution to their subordination. Thus, it can be stated that the attempts of Dalits towards social, economical and political mobility employed diverse means and strategies.

All castes follow the caste system irrespective of their ritual rank; 'untouchables' also practice caste system as practiced by caste-Hindus. This does not mean that caste ranks are, as a whole, accepted and practiced without questioning. There have been individual attempts to change one's social status ascribed by birth, as well as some attempts questioning the validity of the caste system (like Buddhism which propagated equality from the beginning).

Whenever Hindu culture came into contact with a foreign/distinct culture, it underwent some changes. Each time it encountered a different culture and, faced with a situation of needing to account for its unequal structure, Hinduism made some cosmetic changes within itself without altering the larger normative framework. In the medieval period, the contact with Muslim culture had given rise to the Bhakti movement and in the 18th century, the contact with British culture gave rise to the socio-religious reform movement by high caste Hindus. These movements implemented some reforms, which were not wholehearted, yet prevented threat to Hindu religion. The Bhakti movement did not question the existing varna order adequately; instead, it tried to resolve the lower castes' (socio-economic and political) problems offering Bhakti or salvation. The Bhakti movement at first gave signs of a burgeoning new social order based on brotherhood. The adherents of Bhakti did not abandon the Varna model of society. Within that model, they were prepared to grant some semblance of equality to the lower classes (Augustine, 1991: 198). Similarly,

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27 Pimpley (1990:162) proclaims that 'the struggle against inequality within the caste system goes back to Buddha'.

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socio-religious movements in the 19th and 20th centuries mainly aimed at the prevention of conversions of the lower castes to Christianity; they did not try to resolve untouchability in its entirety, except through the preaching of equality.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, under the British rule, Indian society, especially the Hindu caste system, experienced attacks from outside in the form of state-initiated social reforms (abolition of sati, child marriages and encouragement of widow remarriage etc.) though these were not aiming for a change in it. The British, in order to legitimize their rule in India and further strengthen it, introduced a new land revenue system, which gave rise to tax collectors, who in turn, exploited the peasants, grabbed their lands and formed a new landed class. In addition, the group of middlemen, the mediators between the British and the people, the interpreters, small businessmen etc., formed a middle class.28

Singh (1979:89) observes that “the result of educational changes was two fold; first, the interjection of the western values and ideologies among the members of the new educated class, and secondly, the rise of social and cultural reformation movements.” Pimpley (1990:166) opines that the Christian missionaries’ conversions of the lower and ‘untouchable’ castes also indirectly contributed to the ‘socio-religious reform and reforms in the field of education’. According to him, the missionaries’ main aim was to spread the western culture and spread of Christianity. Thus, the ‘conversions and the spread of education helped the missionaries in their attempts’.

The attempts of the Christian missionaries to convert the lower castes and ‘untouchables’ were facilitated by two factors, namely: 1) continuance of untouchability, and, 2) essence of liberal education. There were some significant changes, which took place in traditional occupations under the British rule. They were:

1) The introduction of liberal education, which attracted mostly upper caste Hindus to government jobs, leaving their traditional occupations,

28 The features of this class can be noted as:
(a) Its social composition differed from region to region, (b) The members of this class served as middlemen for the European traders, (c) They generally had a lower class origin and (d) They varied from petty clerks, interpreters, cashiers, to petty contractors (Singh, 1979: 88).
2) New technology, which caused alterations in caste occupations and which enabled the artisan castes to enter industries and migrate to urban areas.

3) The expansion of western culture and Christianity, the conversions to Christianity mostly from the lower castes and 'untouchables' whose low ritual status made them turn to Christianity, while materially benefiting from education and modern occupations.

These primary changes resulted in many social movements, which can be broadly classified into, (1) Socio-religious reform movements, (2) Anti-Brahmin or Non-Brahmin movements and, (3) Untouchables' movements.

Regarding socio-religious movements, Pimpley (1990:162) suggests that as a result of the changes that took place in British period,

The Hindu elite to retain its position at the apex was forced to widen its base and recreate a myth on equal footing. The socio-religious reform movements of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century were probably a consequence of this struggle for power between the British and the Hindu elite.

Most of the social reformers received liberal education and were high caste Hindus. Desai (1989:253-4) feels that the social reformers who attacked the caste system stood for equality and national progress. However, Pimpley (1990:165-166) observes that they could not attack the caste system wholeheartedly since they were enjoying positions of power in the caste system. They only addressed the issue of 'liberal education and social evils within the upper castes' and did not heed the problem of untouchability, he complains.

The socio-religious reformers and movements that took up issues of social reform (reform in caste system) and reform in Hindu religion (the mode of worship, the belief systems, etc.,) strived for equality in the social as well as in the religious system. Samajs like, the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj carried out this movement. Matto (1991:31) classifies these Samajs based on their programs and priorities- Brahmo Samaj stands for middle path (secular education with Hindu religion); Prarthana Samaj for eradicating social evils; Arya Samaj for upsurge of Nationalism; and Ramakrishna mission for Neo-Hinduism.
To some extent, these liberal ideologues from upper castes did facilitate a ground for the lower castes and 'untouchables' to raise their voice against the caste system in the future. The material help provided by these socio-religious reformers and movements created some space for educational and occupational development of the 'untouchables'. Their various activities and spread of new values of equality and humanitarianism in long run helped the 'untouchables'. Pimpley (1990) observes,

... the efforts of these movements were merely adjustivc to the changes being introduced in the society in keeping with the new values of equality and egalitarianism. They were humanitarian in nature, which was in keeping with the Hindu philosophy of Karma, as well as in maintaining the status quo as far as the power structure of the society was concerned. Such an approach leads to conceptions like Brahminization and Sanskritization. But this does lead to upgrading of the entire stratification scale. It does not lead to structural changes in terms of power relations of the different elements of the social structure. As promised, the low status of the Scheduled Castes is a result of deprivation of power and privilege and not in their low ritual status, so the efforts of the socio-religious reform movements which maintained the status quo of the society were bound to fail (Pimpley, 1990:167).

He concludes,

Yet one cannot totally negate the efforts of the socio-religious reform movements. In all fairness, they did manage to stir the traditional social system. Although the inhuman caste injustices were substantially mellowed down but when it came to larger issues like removal of untouchability, they inadvertently helped to preserve the existing structure of the society (Pimpley, 1990:165).

Heimsath (1964:5) compares social reform in India and in the West as:

In India, social reform did not ordinarily mean a reorganization of the structure of society, as it did in the West, for the benefit of underprivileged social, economic classes. Instead it meant the infusion into the existing social structure of new ways of life and thought: the society would be preserved, while its members would be transformed.

When it is necessary, the members of different castes mingled with other castes but broadly, they remained loyal to their own castes.

The emergence of the non-Brahmin movement is understood best in the context of the attempts of the British government to create a clerical class to serve their needs, the liberal education and modern outlook provided by this attempt and the social equality
brought forth by the socio-religious reform movement, urbanization, etc., which facilitated the middle castes to become economically dominant. Their urge for better economic positions and for a social status equal to that of Brahmins and the twice born castes resulted in the non-Brahmin movement. Though it is considered a South Indian phenomenon, in reality it occurred in other parts of the country as well, even when not taking the proportions of a movement, as it did in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. The Yadav upsurge in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are examples to prove its pan-Indian nature.

Some of the factors that contributed to the emergence of such movements were: (1) The politics of colonial intervention (2) The British policy of elite recruitment (3) The desire for upward mobility among the lower castes and (4) The urge to fight the hegemony of Brahmins in government jobs and to secure proportionate jobs for every caste (Nagaraj, 1993: 5).

The non-Brahmin movement is described by Nagaraj (1993:5) as:

... a deliberate, organized and conscious effort on the part of the lower castes and social groups. They chose to fight the hegemony of superior castes through gradualist and constitutionalist methods that they had learnt from their white masters.

While it primarily involved the middle castes and lower castes fighting the Brahmin hegemony in education and jobs, it also took anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindi and anti-Sanskrit issues in Tamil Nadu.

On the other hand, the 'untouchables' movements' before Ambedkar, in which the 'untouchables' fought the caste system since its inception, were not organized at a striking level, nor were they ideologically driven. The medieval period’s individual untouchable saints like Ravidas, Chokkamela, etc., broke their traditional occupations and sought 'Moksha' as a solution to end the troubles of 'untouchables'. Though breaking up of the traditional occupational structure and the pace to become an ascetic might have been radical developments in so far as that period is concerned, but their urge/call for equality was mostly spiritual than material. However, it is largely understood in a context that, the advent of Muslim rule, the threat of Muslim culture and religious conversions facilitated the Bhakti movement in the medieval period and
similarly, the British rule and expansion of Christianity gave rise to socio-religious reform movements of the 18th and 19th century.

With the weakening of caste rigidities in the 19th and 20th centuries and social change in favour of modernization of the society, a few ‘untouchable’ castes tried to elevate their caste status wherever they improved their economic condition, for example, the Nadars and Ezhavas of Kerala, the Shanars of Tamil Nadu, the Jatavs of (Agra) Uttar Pradesh, and the Mahars of Maharashtra. While identifying themselves as being on an equal footing with high caste Hindus, these castes spread Sanskritic norms among their castes to raise their caste status in the social hierarchy. Another model that was followed was through identification with alternative religions and culture ("Ad dharm" - the indigenous or native religion) through which, the Dalits tried to improve their social status through distancing themselves from the dominant Hindu order. In addition, conversions to other religions also played a crucial role (conversions to Islam and Christianity) in their attempts at social mobility. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's Satyashodak Samaj too brought some ‘untouchables’ within its fold even though, it primarily attracted the land owning non-Brahmin castes to fight the Brahmin ideology. Satyashodak Samaj falls under the anti-untouchability or anti-caste movements.

The movements in which the Dalits took part in colonial India, prior to the leadership of Ambedkar, adopted methods and ideologies that by and large failed to better their socio-economic status in the caste hierarchy. Until the Dalits came under the leadership of Ambedkar, all the attempts they made lacked a particular ideology of their own that could be called 'Dalit ideology', which rejected the model of 'self-purification' and adhered to a model of 'self-respect'.

Social Mobility : Dynamics and Processes

Under the British rule, though the Dalits were to some extent encouraged in the fields of education and employment, their socio-economic development was systematized only after Independence. Reservations were provided to Dalits according to their proportion in population (15%) in education and employment under Articles 15 and

\[29\] All these instances are extensively studied under Sanskritization model that facilitated mobility process.
16 of the Indian constitution. They were also provided with reservation of seats in state and central legislatures under Articles 332 and 334 of the Constitution of India. Further, Article 17 abolished untouchability in any form and declared its practice an offence. The policy of 'protective discrimination' thus chosen by the Indian government provides developmental measures for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. They can be broadly classified as: (1) Protective measures such as prohibition of discrimination, of forced labour, and of untouchability, (2) Welfare measures, guaranteeing representation in various categories of public services, in state assemblies and in parliament, and (3) Developmental measures providing grants in-aid and other facilities for social and economic development.30

Various development and social justice policies initiated by the British, and continued by the independent Indian government, helped Dalits to become upwardly mobile/move up in economic and political status but, at the same time, led to increased instances of atrocities upon them. Consequent to their economic development and social mobility, Dalits had to face many threats, atrocities, and massacres. Wherever Dalits asserted their rights and fought for equality, they faced social boycott, forestalling of social interaction, denial of work, etc. These kinds of repressive activities, singling out the Dalits, are in response to the increasing socio-political organization of Dalits in cities as well as in rural areas. Caste Hindu response to Dalit socio-economic development and mobility is very aggressive and violent most of the time. Often, it demonstrates weakness and fear of caste Hindus at losing their privileges, especially when along with economic development; Dalits try to gain social respect and equality on an equal footing with others. Consequently, the 'upper' castes not only lose free labourers but also feel hurt and 'reduced' vis-à-vis Dalits. Often caste-Hindus who grew anxious that these hitherto inarticulate and politically subordinated sections were posing a threat to them economically and politically; resorted to atrocities and massacres on Dalits (Chunduru, Karamchedu, Vempanta, etc., are examples from Andhra Pradesh). Incidents like these have been occurring all over the country, though the oppressors change from middle castes (land owning) to upper castes. This variation rather depends on geographical area and the castes affected by the Dalits' economic and social mobility.

30 Ram, 1988:8.
However, though the rising aspirations of Dalits sometimes result in social conflict and atrocities committed upon them, without such aspirations, Dalits cannot climb the socio-economic ladder. They have always remained backward in all walks of life for no fault of theirs. Inspite of the many protective and development measures in their favour, all the spheres of modern life are under caste-Hindu control; nevertheless, the Dalits have to take part in all these spheres for the smooth functioning of the nation.

Now Dalits have entered new occupations to which they did not have access earlier, occupations and new arenas like entrepreneurship, sales, business, contracts, medicine, law, engineering, government jobs etc. However, such mobility has not been without its problems. They have had to face obstacles in the form of social conflict, resistance from the upper castes, non-implementation of reservation in employment, in promotions, continued caste discrimination at their work place, residential area and so on. In the face of these socio-economic disabilities, their numerical strength, better economic opportunities, urban contact, better communication, better exposure to mass media, assistance from external leadership, stronger participation in political process have helped them in the process of development by way of greater resources to engage in political action.\(^{31}\)

Accordingly, the trajectory of Dalit consciousness suggests that Dalits have come a long way in inventing, rediscovering, defining, redefining, shaping and sustaining an ideology that is emancipatory in nature. The process that has shaped this ideology would now be examined.

\(^{31}\) Tripathy, 1994.
As we have noted earlier, the questioning of caste and its hierarchical system from the very bottom and fighting against its various inequalities and injustices existed in the pre-Independence period too but these attempts were within religious contexts and the value framework of the Great tradition of Hinduism. None of them had any meaningful impact on the political system. Hence, those attempts did not bring about any structural changes (Singh, 1973:193). Yogendra Singh observes,

The rapidity in the emergence of new social aspirations of people is such that it could not wait for development of appropriate institutional-mechanisms as it did in the West. In India, traditional institutions like caste, ethnic and linguistic groups, therefore, offer natural arenas for articulations of new values and aspirations and spheres of activities (Singh, 1986:169).

In contemporary times, the situation of caste has undergone few external changes. Caste as a socio-religious system, concerning mainly with caste endogamy and clan exogamy, combining hypergamy and hierarchy has become visibly weak. Caste has now turned into a politico-economic formation. Caste thus acquired those dimensions that were traditionally considered outside its scope. Ritual power is substituted with economic and political power, organic and segmentary relations, the closed and open nature of the caste system and its cultural and structural aspects not only imply one-sidedness of these devices, but they also undervalue caste as a dynamic and resilient formation (Singh, 1986: 171-173). This transition or development has been due to the various forces and factors discussed below.

The Constitutional provisions of equal rights and concessions and reservations to the unprivileged sections of society give them heightened confidence in articulating, estimating and questioning the injustices meted out to them. While, at the same time, a reverse trend began to manifest itself. Rao (1967:132) observes that there is a keen competition among castes for backward status in order to gain protective discrimination. The articulations opposing the notion of Sanskritization are Backwardisation and Dalitisation. The process of Backwardisation can be seen among traditional middle castes or present ‘dominant’ castes, which are economically

\[\text{\ref{32}}\] Sheth (1999) observes, ‘Both rituality and sanskritisation have virtually lost their relevance in the formation of the 'new' middle class.’

\[\text{\ref{31}}\] Shyam lal 1995: 87-88, reports of a process of downward mobility of ‘upper castes’ to acquire Dalit identity, precisely Bhangi identity, calling it ‘Bhangiisation’ and ‘asprashyeekaran’ in Rajasthan. He opines it is not confined only to Rajasthan and an all India phenomenon.
well off, land owning and politically dominant. Their political domination helps them in getting into the backward classes, ex:- Okkaliga and Lingayat of Karnataka, Kamma and Kapu of Andhra Pradesh.

Similarly, the process of ‘Dalitisation’ as opined by Raj (1998: xv) challenges the status attached to caste. Being at the bottom of caste system, Dalits negate both hierarchy and the process of ‘sanskritisation’ by not being Sanskritised and thus not being assimilated into the Hindu society, opting instead for alternative cultures, along with the exhibition of an interest in their cultural past. Dalitisation thus involves taking pride in and upholding their own traditional cultural past and highlighting it as an alternative to the dominant Hindu lifestyle and culture. Sachidananda (1974:282) observes that, “nowadays the Scheduled Castes are turning more and more to the alternative symbols of prestige and values which the modern secular order provides rather than to Sanskritization”. To this extent, Dalit ideology and identity differs from Sanskritization, in that they are anti-Sanskritized and secular in nature. Both the processes of Dalitisation and Backwardisation are political in origin and aim at economic benefits.

Social change in India facilitated social and economic mobility among large sections of society including the Dalits. The emergence of and access to new ‘secular’ occupations and policies of protective discrimination helped some Dalits gain in social and economic status. This development also reflects a general shift from the caste based social stratification to the one based on class in Indian society. The emerging social structure, in a sense, is independent of the caste system. The new occupational structure stresses more on values of achievement and much less on those of ascription.

The Dalit Middle Class

Existence of the Dalit middle class is mainly attributed to the ‘reservation policy’, which aimed at uplifting individual Dalits to raise from the disadvantaged positions of their earlier generations to be a part of an egalitarian society, built on principles of equality. In post-independent India, the Dalit individuals who witnessed mobility as

34 See Kulke, 1976: 249 for a similar conclusion.
compared to their parents' social and economic class are forming ‘a new Dalit middle class’. This Dalit middle class is markedly distinct from the general middle class. Middle class Dalits largely remain a closely-knit community with a certain political temperament, in the absence of a full-fledged assimilation and integration process. They arrange their lives around each other, heavily confining their social relations especially at family level to other fellow Dalits.

The social change and transformation processes being experienced by the Indian society have led to the emergence of new social categories, with new aspirations and sense of identity. In India, the very emergence of middle class has its foundations in ‘a new modern India’. Prior to reservation policy, equality of opportunity was available to all but Dalits, for they were considered outcastes or ‘untouchables’. It is only during the last 100 years that, the Dalits have gained entry into the sphere of ‘modernization’ principally due to ‘protective discrimination’ or reservation policy. In this context, Ram (1988: 7-11) identifies the areas where the Scheduled Castes have progressed due to constitutional measures, namely, access to religious and other public places and lessening of ritual and social distances; growing integration of different caste groups including Scheduled Castes, in schools, colleges, and universities; growing share in political power and occupational mobility.

Regarding upwardly mobile Dalits, Kulke (1976: 253) argues that, the middle class Dalits’ social environment is different from their community of origin and they have not as yet been fully integrated into the “mainstream” middle class culture that is largely dominated by upper castes. Also, the specific problems faced by the middle class Dalits are due to their newly acquired economic status.

In the case of Dalits, social mobility is not parallel to mobility in economic status. Ram (1995: 207-8) observes, “Those who are socially and economically mobilized are not fully accepted and assimilated into the social and cultural realms of others, especially caste Hindus.” Richardson (1977), analyzing mobility in England, holds that many of those upwardly mobile had been unable to shake off an attachment to the working class and that “rather than becoming ‘core’ members of the middle class,

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their upward mobility is mediated by a peripheral status group.” He further observes that ‘translating economic mobility into social mobility’ is more difficult. In analyzing social mobility, he feels, the following questions need to be addressed:

Whether social mobility leads to change in the nature of social relationships? Are the socially mobile able to adopt the standards and outlook typical to their ‘new’ social class?

Dalits traditionally do not belong to the middle class category; they are newly recruited into the middle class and considered a ‘new middle class’ (Ram, 1995:190). Occupationally, bulk of the Indian middle classes are mainly from “the educated professions, such as government servants, lawyers, college teachers and doctors” (Misra, 1961:12). The Dalits have also mainly opted for the above middle class occupations. In the case of Dalits, reservations helped them enter new spheres of national life and occupations hitherto controlled by caste-Hindus. A small fraction of the Dalit population is represented in almost all modern occupations. Adhering to the trend in the Indian middle class, Dalit entrants into the middle class have also shown more inclination towards white-collar jobs or ‘middle class occupations’. At the same time, there is also a growing aspiration among them to become entrepreneurs, businessmen and independent professionals.

Further, upwardly mobile Dalits are faced with the question of identity at both self and collective levels. Their reference points regarding mobility (individual as well as family aspirations) intersect with their perceptions of Dalit ideology and identity (the agenda of Dalit empowerment) and hence make them identify with both. Historically, Dalits’ identity pattern was influenced by the social reality in relation to their level of resistance to withstand the restrictions imposed on them in the caste system over generations.
Ilaiah opines that in spite of exclusion and marginalization, the Dalitwadas (Dalit localities) possess 'creativity, productivity and humanness' called "Dalitism" (Raj, 1998: xvi). Further, Raj\(^{37}\) observes,

If a Dalit as an individual comes to know about his/her rights, the act of knowing does not remain confined to an individual. It slowly converts itself into an act of community because the relationship between the individual and the community is very strongly tied up through the twofold structure of caste and ethnicity. Secondly, such an act of knowing- becoming conscious-unlike many other acts of Dalits is a 'revolutionary transformative act'.


Dalitism is a historical phenomenon. Dalits as a class can be seen only in terms of human relationships, and not as a category, a thing or as a fixed ‘structure’ at a given point of time. Dalitism implies ideological and political militancy of the Dalits. They could be referred as ‘consciousness community’. Acquisition and control of knowledge and power is treated as the most potent resource by the Dalits. Thus, Ambedkarian discourse on Dalits and untouchability is said to be an alternative perspective to the Gandhian view about Harijans ....... Dalitism sets a new agenda for an equalitarian social order, new distributive just processes. ‘Equality of outcome/result’ is the most concrete and measurable yardstick of the envisaged new social order ....... Finally, ‘caste’ is the central phenomenon in the discourse on ‘dalitism’, but ‘class’ is also inherently presenting it. Caste is used as an idiom for waging a ‘class war’ against the established and entrenched hierarchies of power and domination. However, Dalits are not just a constellation of untouchable castes, they are seen also as actual exploited workers, peasants and agricultural labourers in all parts of India. Emphasis is laid on their emancipation from economic bondage by bringing about ‘economic radicalism’ (socialism).

In other words, Dalit middle class is both a vehicle and stabilizer of Dalit ideology and identity. Middle class Dalits play a major role in modernization among Dalits, as catalysts they inspire and assist Dalits in emerging as self-asserting individuals with community consciousness.\(^{38}\)

The formation of attitudes, process of identity and perceptions of empowerment among the educationally and economically upwardly mobile Dalits, who joined the ranks of middle class in life-style and outlook, are central to Dalit ideology and identity. The articulation of Dalit consciousness and the process of Dalit

\(^{37}\) Ibid, xv.

\(^{38}\) Sachidananda (1974) feels that Dalit elites are ‘torch bearers’ of social change, for they are most active and powerful agents of social transformation among Dalits. According to him, they are catalysts of change.
empowerment are centered on the Dalit middle class, which plays a crucial, catalyst role in development of Dalits. The Dalit middle class produces ideas and sets the agenda for the social and political activities of the Dalit movement. Their access to power and resources accords them due importance both with respect to the state as well as the Dalit masses in issues pertaining to Dalit development. They, as socially and politically conscious Dalits, represent Dalit interests. The members of the Dalit middle class mediate between the state policies and the Dalit masses’ economic needs when they assume the role of a catalyst.

Omvedt (2004) summarizes this development, as follows:

Dalits are fighting back. In the villages, increasing efforts to claim simple human rights – to walk the same roads and drink from the same teacups that upper-caste Hindus use – have often led to violent rioting. The efforts of young people to break away from caste-defined marriages have resulted in brutal murders. Dalits have formed political parties, fighting elections with notable success in some cases but also coming up against refusals to allow them to vote. They have fought for land, tried small income-generating projects, joined – and where possible, set up – their own NGOs. And finally, the new, small and still insecure dalit middle class that the system of ‘reservation’ – or positive discrimination – in education and public sector employment has helped to foster, is attempting to move beyond its limitations.

Thus, Dalits need no longer be viewed as a marginalized category of ‘underprivileged’ people. Owing to various social movements against untouchability and the state policy of positive discrimination, at least a section of Dalits has come to experience the privileges of modern life. Thus, a uniform ‘developmentalist’ or a ‘welfarist’ perspective cannot provide a comprehensive sociological picture of the social and cultural status of all Dalits. It is in this context, the study of social and economic mobility and formation of new social classes among the Dalits assumes importance.

Unlike in the past, today, the formulation and implementation of socio-economic and political strategies for development of Dalits require the consent of Dalits. In order to understand the status of Dalits today, we need to understand the very authors of Dalit ideology and identity who influence, inspire and motivate the Dalit masses today.

Thus, the study of Dalits, especially the educated and economically upwardly mobile Dalits or “middle class Dalits”, calls for an enquiry into the processes of adaptation, assimilation and acculturation in reference to their newly acquired middle class status, where improving their social status is a major concern. Their mobility in economic status ‘reinstalled’ their struggle for social and political rights in a new plane. Dalits have come a long way to reclaim their lost status, of social, economic and political equality.

**Significance of the Present Study**

Historically, the upper castes dominated all spheres of social, economic and political fields due to the ‘higher’ status accorded to them by their ‘ritual purity’ in the traditional social structure. In modern India too, they rendered their positions secure by monopolizing education, and thereby extended their hold in the upper and middle classes. In both the cases, the majority of the society remained dispossessed as ‘lower castes’ in the caste structure and as wage labouring ‘lower classes’ in the class structure.

In the post-independence period, the Dalits have gradually made an entry into the modern occupations and professions, with the help of socio-political changes enabling social and economic mobility in general and the state-provided reservations in education and employment in particular. Reservations have supported the Dalits, like other disadvantaged sections of the society, to enhance their social and economic status to reach middle class positions, which were hitherto the monopoly of the upper castes.

The long periods of ‘social reform’ (pre-independence period) and ‘social justice’ (post-independence period) enabled at least few Dalits to take to education and thereby enter a class structure that is amenable to their social and economic aspirations. In the post-independence period, the last 57 years, Dalits have been able to enter into the middle class. Now they are represented in all modern occupations, but such presence over a period is not proportionate to their population and they are unequally distributed across various occupations and the positions that exist within
According to estimates, only 5 percent of Dalits became middle and upper classes in the process.\textsuperscript{40}

Amidst many contradictory claims and analyses surrounding their representation in modern occupations, social and economic mobility, and as having made it into the middle class strata by ‘forfeiting’ their roots etc., the Dalit middle class requires to be put through a thorough enquiry to assess their presence in these fields, vis-à-vis their priorities and politics. The very nature and extent of their shifting of grounds and whether their entry itself is an achievement or trouncing of social and economic mobility needs to be examined.

Many Dalits who are represented in these modern occupations are the first generation in their respective families and their level of achievement is significant in terms of ‘grandeur’ and ‘noteworthiness’. In such a context, the Dalit middle class is largely constituted of persons who achieved social and economic mobility.

The Dalit middle class is also caught between non-recognition of their achievement by the society on the one hand, and the ‘jealousy’ and ‘expectations’ from the other Dalits on the other hand. The middle class Dalits are in a sense ‘untouchable’ to the society and ‘outcastes’ for other Dalits.\textsuperscript{41}

It is in this context that the Dalits who are engaged in such occupations and professions are classified as middle class. Middle Class Dalits, as an object of the present study, engages with their life experiences and priorities, and the prime focus is on the ideology and identity of the Dalit members employed in these modern occupations. With engagement in such occupations, Dalit professionals are latently initiated, socialized and stabilized in the course of arriving at and staying in the middle class way of life, within that broader spectrum of social and economic mobility. In the process of becoming middle class, the Dalits have carved out a distinctive identity for themselves. Notwithstanding the fact that technically all the modern occupations and professions are open to Dalits, in practical terms, few occupations and professions are easily accessible to Dalits compared to other caste

\textsuperscript{40} Guru, 2002: 141.
\textsuperscript{41} Ram, 1988:120.
groups. Thus, the majority of the mobile Dalits are congregated in few occupations and professions.

The formation of attitudes, process of identity and perceptions of Dalit empowerment among the educationally and economically mobile Dalits, who joined the ranks of middle class in life-style and outlook, are central to Dalit ideology and identity. For they lead Dalit movement and only they formulate and implement strategies to empower Dalits economically, socially and politically. Studying the ideologues of Dalit ideology is essential to understand the status of Dalits today. The study of Dalits, especially of the educated and economically mobile Dalits or “middle class Dalits”, calls for an enquiry into the processes of adaptation, assimilation and acculturation with reference to their newly acquired middle class, where improving their social status is a major concern. Their mobility in economic status ‘reinstalled’ their struggle for social and political rights. Dalits have come a long way to reclaim their lost status of equality, socially, economically and politically.

**Objectives of the Present Study**

The central objective of the present study is to map the emerging Dalit middle class in Hyderabad and examine its special identity patterns as well as its ideological position and articulations. The study attempts to understand to what extent this emerging Dalit middle class in Hyderabad as a group, and individually, manifest in practice, the Dalit identity and ideology that could be considered as an example for emulation by the larger Dalit milieu elsewhere.
The above question assumes importance also because many previous studies\(^{42}\) on this matter have established clear correlations between Dalit upward social mobility and its identity-ideology orientation that has been considered as successful instances in promoting Dalit emancipation. Here, reference is solicited to studies conducted by Kulke and Ram, which established the following:

1. Middle class Dalits’ social environment was different from the community of their origin and they were not fully integrated into ‘main stream’ middle class culture that is largely dominated by upper castes.
2. Middle class Dalits generally lived in Dalit neighborhoods. Caste continued to be an important factor in assessing their social status.
3. However, with upward economic mobility, they could avail services from others and neither did they feel the need of *sanskritizing* their ritual life.
4. In contrast to the most of the illiterate Dalits who identified themselves with Gandhian ideology, the middle class Dalits identified more with Ambedkar.
5. The identification of mobile Scheduled Castes varies with their education level and social status.
6. Their employment in white-collar jobs meant upward mobility in the class structure.
7. While they were forging new patterns of social relationships with people in their work place and elsewhere, irrespective of caste and community considerations, the degree and direction of their mobility was not clear.
8. The middle class among scheduled castes is different from the old middle class.
9. Since the economic mobility of Scheduled Castes does not necessitate an equal social mobility, there is an incongruity between their social and economic mobility.

At the same time, the previous studies also note certain existential dilemmas among the Dalit middle class with which the members of this class live.\(^{43}\) So, how do members of this class understand these dilemmas and attempt to resolve them in practice?

\(^{42}\) Kulke, 1976; Ram, 1988.
\(^{43}\) All these aspects have been dealt within detail in appropriate chapters of the present text.
The present study essentially is in the tracks of the previous endeavours, attempting to study similar concerns of the previous studies in a specific urban context—Hyderabad. The present study would attempt to find out how far its conclusions correspond to earlier studies, its divergence and reasons for the same. Here in lies, the essential significance of the present study. The latter ought to be considered as yet empirical contribution to the studies on Dalit upward social mobility, identity and ideology.

As such, the present study is exploratory in nature and character. Consequently the need for a hypothesis does not arise. The present study is an attempt to empirically understand the issue at hand by adopting sociological methods and techniques of enquiry.

**Research methodology**

In earlier studies, dealing with socially and economically mobile Dalits, such as Sachidananda (1974:12) used ‘web technique’ in which the respondents were selected largely by informal contacts of respondents interviewed to further locate and interview new respondents. Such studies, ranging from 29 to 300 respondents, largely comprised of interviews of educated persons, terming them elite (for example, Issacs interviewed 50 persons, Saberval 58, Sachidanand 200, Deshpande 29, Roy and Singh 55 elites), and middle class (Ram 240 SCs and Kulke 300 SCs and non SCs). On the lines of earlier studies, focusing on the various middle class occupations the Dalits have entered into, the present study studies the Dalit middle class’ ideology and identity in Hyderabad, with the aid of a structured interview schedule. It tries to profile the Dalit middle class in Hyderabad, focusing on 105 middle class Dalits and through construction of 8 detailed case histories from among them. In furtherance to the purview and objectives of the earlier studies, the present study attempts to traverse beyond and tries to capture their ideology and identity juxtaposed against their socio-economic status.

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46 These studies include the present researcher’s M.Phil study earlier (1994-96) which dealt with “Intersecting Identities : A Study of the Dalit Middle Class.”
The research tools used for the study are:

- Administering interview schedule to a stratified sample
- Representative case studies of individuals from the sample
- Recourse to secondary sources to bring out a historical profile of Dalit middle class

The study undertakes to explore the below mentioned questions in the context of absence of any latest empirical evidences to show the current status of Dalit middle class and varied contradictory assumptions about the middle class Dalits. The broad questions dealt within the study are related to:

- The phenomenon of Dalit middle class, its origin and context
- Characteristics of Dalit middle class, differences between Dalit Middle Class and non-Dalit middle class
- Economic and social status of Dalit middle class
- Religious trends among the Dalit middle class
- Experiences of untouchability and other forms of caste discrimination
- Membership in Dalit, political and voluntary organizations
- Dalit middle class members’ views on women’s liberation
- Their perceptions on various issues like caste politics, communalism, casteism, etc.
- World view (understanding of larger society) of the Dalit Middle Class
- Dalit middle class’ perceptions of social change
- Dalit middle class’ perceptions on the question of Dalit liberation, and
- Identity patterns among the members of the Dalit middle class

Focus of the Study and Research Question

The study is an attempt to identify the changes brought about by the social and economic mobility among the Scheduled Castes individuals with specific focus on those who have joined ‘white collar’ jobs and other independent professions such as law, medicine, journalism, etc. The research questions dealt with in the present study are related to the process of the changing social identities of these individuals. The study uses the category 'Dalit middle class' for them and attempts to look at how caste and class contexts intersect in articulations of their self-definition and politics.
The specific questions addressed in the study are with regarding to the following issues:

- Social background of the middle class Dalits, educational level, occupation, economic status and rural/urban background of the family of their origin.
- Their understanding of the problem of their community; their opinion on the ways and means to solve them.
- Their preferences for self-identification as Dalits and/or middle class.
- Their new attitudes towards education and occupation.
- Their life style, consumption patterns, assets, and debts etc.
- Their interaction patterns with the members of their own community and other caste groups. Their perceptions on reservations as a means of Dalit upliftment.

The Universe

The study divides the middle class Dalits into two categories 'government employees' and 'independent professionals'. The fieldwork was carried out in Hyderabad, the state capital of Andhra Pradesh, where it is possible to find a good number of middle class Dalits employed in government offices and independent professions.

Tools and Techniques of Research

The nature of questions raised being qualitative in nature, a structured interview schedule was used for collection of data, which was filled in by the researcher in person. Web technique was used to identify the respondents. While most of the interviews were conducted at their work places during working hours, a few interviews were conducted in their residence. However, the family involvement in the interview process was limited only to introductions. Except a handful of respondents from among those identified for the purpose of interviews, the rest readily assented to be interviewed. Those who refused to be interviewed ranged from officer cadre in government service to a government pleader, as they felt that only those among the Dalits who put in hard work had come up in life, their individual mobility had nothing to do with being a Dalit, and they saw no reason for Dalit consciousness either.
The sample

The spectrum of middle class occupations and professions are ever proliferating, whereas information regarding this ever-expanding universe and occupations are unavailable. Given this limitation, the question one had to confront was- 'How to locate the Middle Class Dalits in a city like Hyderabad? At the same time, there were problems like non-availability of official and reliable records regarding the population of the middle class, occupations and professions they inhabit, the number of Dalits employed in these occupations and professions and how to locate the middle class Dalits particularly in Hyderabad city. In this context, it became difficult to ascertain the total universe to employ any regular sampling methods and thus, *web technique* was employed to locate the respondents.

Therefore, an attempt was made to include equal number of respondents into the sample from all the major occupations and professions that the Dalits have entered. However, it was realized during the pilot study that the greater numbers of middle class Dalits who are employed in modern occupations are largely in government service.

In order to have intra-occupational comparability and to diverge from the bias of according more importance to any particular occupation, care was taken to include equal number of respondents from each category in the sample, except in the case of two occupations, namely doctors and journalists, as it was difficult to find more numbers of Dalits in these professions. It was realized in due course that in the case of the remaining categories, they were largely employed in Government service and less number of Dalits have entered into the categories of doctors and journalists. These two factors made it impossible to find respondents in these categories. It is in this context that more numbers of employed persons had to be included in the sample compared to independent professionals. Accordingly, 105 respondents were interviewed for the study with the help of a structured interview schedule and eight representative case studies from among the sample were carried out.
The next chapter is devoted to a detailed discussion on the questions of Dalit identity, the Middle Class, Ideology and Identity and allied concerns drawing on the available literature on these issues. Chapter 3 profiles the respondents as belonging to Dalit middle class. Chapter 4, in Section-I, analyses their ideology and identity patterns, based on their perceptions regarding their personal life trajectory, their community and the society in general, and Section-II provides few representative case studies. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the questions dealt with and outlines the findings of the study.