The Dalits are traditionally not part of the middle class. For centuries together, they remained in subjugation, serving the caste-Hindus. Various streams of socio-religious and political mobilizations in the 20th century paved the way for Dalits to take to education and employment in non-traditional occupations. In the post-independence period, the Indian State has adopted 'social justice' as its goal. As part of which, it has been supporting the Dalits’ socio-economic mobility through the policy of ‘protective discrimination’ or the policy of reservations. Thus, the emergence of the Dalit middle class is largely attributed to the reservations system.

There is an upward mobility in occupational structure among the middle class Dalits in comparison to their previous generations. This 'mobility' is primarily facilitated by the reservations system that aimed at 'development of the community through individual mobility'. However, it burdens such 'mobile' individuals, on the one hand, with the economic responsibility of members of their ancestral family, and hence reduces the extent of their economic mobility. On the other hand, they are still struggling to achieve social mobility. By now, studies have proved that their economic mobility is not leading them towards social mobility as well. In terms of mobility, whatever Dalits achieved so far was not without resistance from the "upper" castes. Dalits have had to struggle a lot to make a little improvement in their socio-economic position wherever their mobility was directly involved with upper castes' interests. They faced insults and humiliation all through their history due to untouchability. In a changing state of affairs, they continue to face the same situation, because they are looked down upon as a reserved category.

However, Oommen (1977: 189), striking a critical note on positive discrimination observes that - “although the developmental benefits are extended to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as social categories, the beneficiaries are specific persons and families. This means, the unit of mobility is an individual and not a group in the context of developmental benefits.” Now, after 50 years of independence
and reservation policy, the number of Dalits who benefited from this policy are growing in numbers, however, the number of Dalits who have climbed the social and economic status ladder is small, in comparison to the overall Dalit population. Over the years, the reservation policy encouraged education among Dalits; likewise reservations in employment allowed the possibility of their reaching highest positions in various occupations, resulting nominally in Dalit representation in various kinds of occupations that can be described as middle class. However, at the same time, it is evident that this policy alone cannot elevate the status of all Dalits. It elevated only a small section that is considered as middle class or elites among the Dalits. However, for the overall development of Dalits, the crucial assertion and commitment should come from Dalits themselves. More decisively, their political realization alone decides their future.

Though the reservations were made available to Dalits, in various categories of government sector, on proportional basis to their population, they were not implemented properly. Only in low cadre jobs are reservations implemented adequately. Posts in the Group-I and II categories are not filled even though eligible candidates are available. In technical fields, engineering, science etc. there are very limited number of aspirants. This has been principally due to their economic backwardness in the past but now there is increased aspiration for entry into these fields too.

The enormous volume of literature on Dalits largely engaged with the socio-economic development of the Dalits. However, studies that deviated from such a traditional trend have focused on Dalit movement, ideology and the identity of the upwardly mobile Dalits i.e., those availing the benefits of the government policies of protective discrimination. These studies tend to show how the process of upward mobility among the ex-untouchables is giving rise to new questions of identity and ideology. However, the literature on the Dalit middle class is still very meagre. In this chapter, an attempt is made to provide a theoretical framework for the study covering the following concepts: middle class, Dalit middle class and Dalit elite. Literature on the above themes is reviewed thematically under each of the concepts.
The ‘Middle class’ : The global experience

When we examine middle class in general, the relevant issues here are: who are the middle class, what do they consist of and how are they different from others in the Indian situation where caste is the primary stratification criteria. It is very difficult to trace the origins of the concept ‘middle class”, which is differently perceived by different scholars. It is generally believed that Lederer and Marschak (1926) are the first to analyze the middle class.\(^\text{47}\) And later on, many others developed the concept by offering different interpretations of ‘middle class’.

The middle class is referred to differently by various scholars, Whyte (1956) called a middle class individual as a ‘man of the organizations’, Mills (1946) as ‘man of corporation’, Lockwood (1969) as ‘black-coated worker’, and Dahrendorf (1967) preferred to call the middle class, the ‘service class’; later on they also came to be known as ‘salaried class’, ‘white-collared worker’ etc.

While Marxism uses the terms strata, fractions and categories to designate particular ensembles, it remains true that these strata, fractions and categories always belong to a class (Singh, 1985: 6). Mayer (1972: 62-69) views middle class as Marx’s classless society of the modern industrial economy. Marx himself predicted the possibility of ‘middle class’ and its expansion in his theories of surplus value, in which, referring to Ricardo, he emphasizes, “...the constant increase of the middle classes, who stand in the middle between workers on one side and the capitalist and landed proprietors on the other side, who are for the most part supported directly by Revenue, who rest as a burden on the labouring foundation and who increased the social security and the power of the upper 10,000 (Bottomore, 1963:198).

Holger Stub (1972: 104) hypothesizes that “the variation in life-style characterized by various groups in consumption patterns, social values, and political ideologies, will increasingly promote the retention and formation of a wide variety of status communities in the middle levels of modern societies.” As Knowles (1966:15) observes “Another reason behind the origin of the middle class professions is that it took place with and when only more number of workers had freed themselves from

\(^{47}\) Singh G, 1885: 2.
land work and became class free labourers, at liberty to barter their services to the best bidder.”

Locating the Middle Class

Daniel Bell (1974) argues that, “Now within the enterprise, in the position between employers and workers was a new stratum”. Lederer (1926) called it a ‘new-middle class’, less for its function than for its social evolution, which was based on their own self-esteem and the esteem of others”. “The middle class is placed between labour and capital... this class consists of the petty bourgeoisie and the white-collar workers. The former are either self employed or involved in the distribution of commodities and the latter are non-manual office workers, supervisors and professionals. Thus, in terms of occupations shopkeepers, salesmen, brokers, government and non-government office workers, writers, teachers and self-employed professionals such as engineers, pleaders, doctors etc. constitute the middle class.” Shah (1990:161) observes, “most of these occupations required at least some degree of formal education.” According to Dahrendorf (1967:106-107), “middle class is located somewhere between at least two other classes, one above it and one below it.”

Cole’s classification of the middle class as summed up by Prasad (1968: 9-10) is, “salaried persons, including administrators, managers, social workers, shop assistants, clerks, etc. persons engaged in independent vocations as medical practitioners, lawyers, consultants, persons engaged in entrepreneurial or business activity; and retired persons.”

As the complexity in various fields grew, the need for a ‘middle class’ increased as supervisors, managers and administrators, both scientific and technical. Negating the theories of class, both Marxist and Warner’s scheme of six classes- middle classes grew in number and have stabilized themselves as a category. Both the conceptualization of economic class and social class could not predict the emergence and growth of the middle classes. Whyte (1956) gave the ‘organization man’ thesis and argued that the replacement of the small enterprise by large-scale organizations has led to the rise of the ‘salaried’ employee leaving back the ‘self-employed’ man. This growth of large-scale organizations increased white-collar workers and laid
down a distinct life style and attitudes for that group. Even, it is believed that the origin of the middle class has a context, i.e. the Industrial Revolution. Earlier, it was mostly the working class who constituted the ‘middle’ class. In Europe, ‘historically, the bourgeoisie has been called the ‘middle class’ because it stood between the land-owning class and the working class’ (Singh, 1985: 18). After the decline of the gentry, the grand bourgeoisie became the ruling class, then ‘petty bourgeoisie’ became the ‘middle class’- i.e., the small traders, independent small business men, the self employed professional and the independent artisan. “The white-collar people have clean-bowled Warner’s scheme (Warner, 1957) of six classes. Leaving the upper-upper and the lower-lower class, they penetrated inhibitantly and walked in freely in the other four” (Singh, 1985: 3).

As many scholars expected, the middle class has not disappeared, but in fact, has expanded and, with increasing modernization, has multiplied numerically along with industrial growth. The ‘middle mass’, which is not a ruling class, at the same time, neither a pure working class, played its role in the growth and development of the industrial economy.

Joseph (1986:71) quoting Goldthorpe observes that, even when manual workers earned very high wages, they did not take up middle class attitudes. They saw their work as a means of getting money rather than as a career. They did not mix with middle class people. “Occupation...has been accepted as the most important single criterion and most useful index of social status” (Krausz, 1969:167).

“Vertical mobility is often inferred from occupational mobility and the inference is generally justified because the position of the individual in the total pattern of inequality largely depends on the occupation” (Broom and Selznick, 1970:178). “In Great Britain occupation is probably the most important single criterion of status” (Glass, 1967:178).

“In the process of growing, middle class has become a different type of social formation. More and more the bulk of white-collar positions open upto competition through achievement and ability. New stratum of the white-collar employee, clerical, technical, administrative and professional emerged” (Singh, 1985: 1-2).
The next interesting argument about the ‘middle class’ is, as the nature of the class and the members of the class varied from time to time, the feature of the ‘middle class’ consequently changed, and hence one can distinguish between the old middle class and the new middle class. The old-middle class is the one that includes peasants, petty bourgeoisie, traders, artisans, etc., which is located externally to capitalist relationship of production, in a sense that, capitalist production relations dominated them without being integrated into the capitalist class structure. “However the so called New-middle class are structurally ambiguous class situations- draw their ambiguous class character directly from the structure of capitalist relations of production” (Rosemary and Jon, 1977) that is to point towards the white-collar employees, clerical, technical, administrative and professionals.

The emergence of the new middle class is a striking development of this century. The new middle class now stands for no particular criteria compared to earlier definitions. Now, the new middle class has lost its middle class character “as painted by Lewis and Mande i.e., to practice a particular type of occupation white-collar; to enjoy a particular level of income-above average; to have received a particular level of education-at school or university; and to live in a good comfortable house in a good responsible area, has faded” (Singh, 1985: 1).

When everybody else is being drawn under the (rather broad) category of middle class, the imminent question that arises is, ‘and then who is not a middle class’? For which, Bendix and Lipset, (1966:22) offer that “those men whose fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market, ex:- slaves, are not, however, a ‘class’ in the technical sense of the term. They are, rather, a ‘status group’.”

‘Old’ and ‘New’ middle classes
Braverman (1979: 402) writes, ‘The old-middle class’ occupied that position by virtue of its place outside the polar class structure, it possessed the attributes of neither capitalist nor worker, it played no part in the capital accumulation process whether on one side or the other. This ‘new-middle class’ by contrast occupies its intermediate
position not because it is outside the process of increasing capital, but because as a part of this process it takes its characteristics from both sides.\textsuperscript{48}

There are two theories arguing about the nature of the ‘new-middle class’ - (1) an extension of the old, capitalist or ruling class (Croner, Bendix and Renner are with this opinion), and (2) an extension of the proletariat or the one closer to working class. Moreover, Dahrendorf (1959)\textsuperscript{49} opines differently “the ruling class theory applies without exception to the social position of Bureaucrats, and the working class theory equally generally to the social position of white-collar workers.” Further, in England, Cole (1955) points out that, two characteristic developments brought out New Middle Class emergence. The public schools increased in numbers and over the same period the spread of the joint stock system, which greatly fostered large-scale enterprise, brought into existence a new large class of salaried managers and administrators, not only in mining and manufacture but also in banking, insurance and commerce.\textsuperscript{50}

Prasad (1968:6) quoting Lewis and Maude regarding the criteria to determine the characteristics of middle class, ‘to which class an individual belongs to’, avers that it depends upon a series of factors, “including income, occupation, accent, spending habits, residence, culture, leisure pursuits, clothes, education, moral attitudes and relationships with other individuals.”

The new middle class in India is generally defined as:

... group of white collar-workers as we call it new middle class is constituted by various types of clerks, assistants, civil servants, executives, managers, professionals (such as doctors and engineers, and lawyers), working as salaried employees in organizations, supervisors, teachers and other educationists, employees working in various departments of Government, Banks and commercial firms, and salaried employees other than manual workers, in tertiary industries, viz. hotels, cinema, restaurants, advertising firms, traveling agencies, and insurance companies etc. They all constitute the new middle class. All enjoy a salaried status, job security, old age benefits, medical facilities, and other perks. The underlying assumption of vital significance is that they work in organizations, big or small, doing non-manual work (Singh, 1985:72).

Providing a similar picture of Black middle class in the United States of America, Pinkney (1984) opines that, though racism in the United States is less pronounced and

\textsuperscript{48} Singh, G, 1985: 27.
\textsuperscript{49} Dahrendorf, 1959:53.
\textsuperscript{50} Singh, G, 1985: 26
racists are less vocal, race continues to be an ever-present part of the American way of life. He argues that the progress of Blacks in America remains a myth. Further, there is a trend by social scientists of either exaggerating the progress of the Afro-Americans or blaming them for their lack of progress, instead of blaming the forces in the society that serve to maintain their oppression.

Generally, education, income and occupation are considered as the three variables by which one’s social class may be measured. The three variables are interrelated although it is possible to use any one as an indicator of social class. Pinkney (1984: 100) maintains that, in the case of middle class Blacks, style of life is as important as income. Whenever middle class needs to be defined, the policy makers consider only the economic class but not the social class. This has resulted in many Blacks being counted as middle class in America by policy makers though they do not possess the required characteristics of a middle class. It is often alleged that, if the Blacks did not rise up to the middle class, the middle class was lowered to include more Blacks in order to show them as middle class.

However, of late many Blacks are taking to education, thereby entering occupations that placed them in a more comfortable social and economic position in comparison with the other Black masses. Here, they face the identity dilemma of either emulating middle class Whites’ behaviour or associating with other middle class Blacks as a fallout of rejection by the middle class Whites. Another significant aspect is that, the middle class Blacks provide assistance to those remaining in the slums, if not to a large number, then at least to their immediate and extended families. Middle class Blacks sponsor fund raising events for Black education, civil rights, and community organizations.

Middle class in India: Sociological perspectives

The origin and expansion of middle classes in India has been widely studied. Such studies attempted to locate, analyze and interpret those classes in various social, economic and political contexts. The first and foremost important study till date being, BB Misra’s Indian Middle Classes, that is a singular attempt in terms of its
magnitude and nature. Later, studies by Bhagwan Prasad, Y.P. Chibbar, and Gurchain Singh also focused on analyzing the characteristics of the Indian middle classes.

During the British period, the British introduced a new land revenue system, which gave rise to tax collectors who in turn exploited the peasants and grabbed the lands, forming a new landed class. The mediators between the British and the people, the interpreters, small businessmen, etc., formed a middle class (Matto, 1991).

Given the circumstances, the middle class has accurate opportunities to address and to lead us to a better understanding of the Dalits, their disabilities, sufferings and their day-to-day struggles through the ages to overcome poverty, untouchability and participate in the rapidly changing Indian socio-economic and political scenario. Their ambition and their plans for the future are effectively communicated through the middle class. The rich class mainly identifies with the community’s past, dream for a better future for the entire community, unless it is trapped by, and confined to its self-interest.

The self-perception of belonging to the middle class is another crucial aspect that needs to be looked into in a study of the middle class. “Some sociologists are inclined to say that an individual must feel that he belongs to a certain group. It is doubtful whether this criterion will help us. Persons having an air of superiority may very well claim to belong to an upper class whereas persons having a humbler outlook may derive pleasure in associating themselves with a lower group. It is, therefore, not enough that a man has a feeling of belonging to a certain class. This concept will have the problem of over-estimation as it is a class in which many prefer to remain even when they do not belong to this group.” And, “many persons earning four digitied salaries and enjoying most of the conveniences of life prefer to call themselves as middle class people”, observes Prasad (1968: 7).

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51 Bhagwan Prasad (1968), Socio-Economic study of Urban Middle Classes. The study was carried out during (1958-60) covering 500 middle class families of five big towns of Uttar Pradesh (namely, Kanpur, Agra, Varanasi, Allahabad and Lucknow with 100 families from each town).
52 YP Chibbar (1968), From Caste to Class: A Study of Indian Middle Class.
53 Gurchain Singh (1985), The New Middle Class in India: A Sociological Analysis.
Quoting a national level survey conducted in 1994-96 by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Sheth (1999: 2510) observes the new criteria evolved for identifying the middle class is as follows:

The survey conceived the category middle class in terms of subjective and objective variables. The subjective variable pertained to respondent's own identification as 'middle class' and an explicit rejection of 'working class' identity for himself/herself. Using self-identity as a precondition, certain objective criteria were applied for inclusion of a respondent in the 'middle class' category. Thus, from among those with middle class self-identification, respondents possessing two of the following four characteristics were included in the middle class category: (i) 10 years or more of schooling, (ii) ownership of at least three assets out of four, i.e., motor vehicle, TV, electric pumping-set and non-agricultural land, (iii) residence in a pucca house – built of brick and cement, (iv) white-collar job. Accordingly, 20 per cent of the sample population was identified as belonging to the middle class.

Further studies carried out in India have revealed that the middle class has certain 'White-collar' attitudes, namely, (1) a 'Babu' mentality, (2) preference for non-manual and non-agricultural work, and (3) a largely urban concentration. And, “there is considerable truth in the belief that the middle class is engaged in non-manual, non-agricultural operations. Prior to independence, it included people belonging mostly to the clerical cadre. After independence there are decidedly more avenues open to this group and we can include people engaged in more varied occupations. A middle earning member includes persons of medium income like teachers, medical practitioners, traders, junior executives, public servants, small entrepreneurs, lawyers, planners, architects, engineers and so on” (Prasad, 1968:8).

The life style, (basically expenditure), of the middle class differs from the strata above them, (rich or aristocratic class), who spend on luxurious items like parties, entertainments, maintaining a car, going to clubs and, at the same time, the strata below them (the working class). Middle class families too have to go ‘upward’ or ‘downward’ according to the individuals’ profession and income (Prasad, 1968: 8-9).

Class and social mobility among the three classes shows that, the higher the class, the greater the probability of upward mobility. “...there is a considerable drop in the proportion of upward mobility immediately after the middle classes. The differential between proportions of the middle and lower classes is 33.9% as against a differential of 27.1% in the case of upper and middle classes. The upper class is almost three times more upwardly mobile than the lower class. This rather clearly stresses the deterministic role of class. The circulation of positions is confined to upper and middle classes and the lower classes have only limited access” (Philips, 1990:68).
Indicating a change in such a situation in the context of formation of a new middle class in India, Sheth (1999: 2510), provides a broad profile of the ‘new middle class in India’ based on the findings of a latest empirical study on the middle class in India by Centre for Developing Societies (CSDS),

The survey analysis revealed that even today, the upper and the rich farmer castes together dominate the Indian ‘middle class’. While members of the two upper categories, the dwija upper castes and the non-dwija dominant castes, account for about a quarter of the sample population, they constitute nearly half of the new middle class. But this also means the representation of upper castes has reduced in today’s middle class, for the old middle class was almost entirely constituted by them.

Further, Sheth notes a change in the situation as far as inclusion of ‘lower castes’ in the middle class, at least in the recent past, that

About half of the middle class population came from different lower-caste social formations, i.e., the dalits (SCs), the tribals (STs) the backward communities of peasants and artisans (OBCs) and the religious minorities. Considering that members of all these social formations constituted 75 per cent of the sample population, their 50 per cent representation in the middle class is much lower than that of the upper and intermediate castes. But seen in the context of their inherited lower ritual status in the traditional hierarchy, this is a significant development. Even more significant is the fact that when members of the lower castes, including those belonging to castes of ‘ex-untouchables’, acquire modern means of social mobility, such as education, wealth, political power, etc, their low ritual status does not come in the way of their entering the middle class and, more importantly, acquiring the consciousness of being members of the middle class.

Further, there is marked change in the ‘new middle class’ in terms of its nature. The new ‘recruits’ are bringing in their social group values into the middle class.

The Indian middle class today has a significant rural component, thanks to the earlier inclusion in it of the rural based dominant castes and now of the members of the lower castes participating in modern economy and administration. In brief, the middle class in India today is not a simple demographic category comprising of certain ritual-status groups. It is a social-cultural formation in which as individuals from different castes and communities enter, they acquire new economic and political interests, and life styles, in common with the other members of that ‘class’. Within this new middle class, caste identities of its members survive, but operating in conjunction with the new, overarching identity of middle class, they acquire a different political and cultural meaning.
The ‘Dalit middle class’

There are few studies dealing with Dalits who have benefited from the government policies of protective discrimination and other development programmes leading to the emergence of a new social category among them, viz., Dalit elites (Abbasayulu, 1978; Sachidananda, 1974; Roy and Singh, 1987) or a segment of the “middle classes” (Kulke, 1976; Ram, 1988).

The earlier studies on the theme of Dalit middle class and ‘Harijan’ elites looked into the incongruity between the social and economic mobility of Dalits in a context of the general process of social mobility in Indian society. Kulke’s (1976) study of ‘Integration, Alienation and Rejection: The Status of Untouchables’ dealt with 300 SCs and non-SCs from Dhanbad in Bihar. Ram’s study (1988) on ‘Rise of a New Middle Class’ among the scheduled castes has two hundred and forty respondents from various occupational backgrounds varying between sweepers and Class I services. Roy and Singh’s (1987) study, dealing with ‘Harijan’ elites caught up ‘between two worlds’, has fifty five respondents in occupations such as political leaders, caste leaders, bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and businessmen. Both the studies were located in cities in Uttar Pradesh and were carried out during mid-1980s. They deal with social and economic mobility and the identity question of the Dalits in an urban setting with inter-generational educational and occupational upward mobility, their level of assimilation into the middle class lifestyle and problems involved therein.

Such studies suggest the rise of a new section among the Dalits, viz., Dalit middle class or elites who are perceived to be in an extraordinary situation of identity crisis and increased aspirations, who are on the move but have not reached their destination as yet.\(^{54}\)

Kulke (1976) studied the ‘Status of Untouchables’ or the beneficiaries of the reservation policies introduced by the post-independence Indian state to look at the processes of Integration, Alienation and Rejection with reference to ‘Accommodation, Confrontation and Rejection of Scheduled Castes vis-à-vis the Hindu society’. He

\(^{54}\) Kulke, 1976; Ram, 1988; Roy and Singh, 1987; Aggrawal, 1983.
found that the social background of middle class 'untouchables' was predominantly from a few scheduled castes. 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. Middle class Dalits generally lived in Dalit neighborhoods. Caste continued to be an important factor in assessing their social status. However, with upward economic mobility, they could avail services from others and neither did they feel the need of sanskritizing their ritual life. He also observed that in contrast to the most of the illiterate Dalits who identified themselves with Gandhian ideology, the middle class Dalits identified more with Ambedkar.

He predicts, “India will have to face a social conflict of unpredictable proportions if its 75 million untouchables cannot be integrated socially, economically, and politically” (1976: 244). There have been two different approaches to solve the problem of ‘untouchables’. They are Ambedkar’s concept of segregation and confrontation, and Gandhi’s concept of integration. The Indian Government took the latter approach as the official policy and provided concessions and reservations in the name of ‘protective discrimination’ to ‘untouchables’ to achieve the same.

Kulke’s study shows that the state policy had a positive effect on a considerable number of individuals among the Scheduled Castes in terms of moving into higher social positions. However, (1) Most of the Dalit middle class are predominantly from a few Scheduled Castes. (2) Occupation of the Father has a lot to do with the children’s higher positions; it shows that there is no sudden/direct development in switching over from caste occupation to higher social position in one’s life, but father’s occupation (other than caste occupation; preferably a small job) is the first step to achieve a higher social economic position/status in one’s life. (3) The social environment of ‘successful untouchables’ is different from that of their community of origin. As they move on to a higher social and economic status, they have become distanced from their community of origin. Yet, inspite of this process, most of these ‘untouchables’ were not evolving social contacts with the upper strata. (4) They dwelt largely in the neighborhood of untouchables, preferably with their own community, as upper castes were not prepared to mingle with them. Even so, the middle class untouchables tended to prefer their own community people on the one
condition that they were also educated and belonged to their class. (5) Friendship with upper castes in offices or outside is not possible for all ‘untouchables’ but only for untouchables with higher social and economic status. (6) Family friendships are higher between higher social and economic status (SES) ‘untouchables’ and higher SES upper caste people than in the case of lower SES ‘untouchables’ and upper caste. (7) Higher economic status gives more chances of getting served by barbers, washerman, etc, on par with caste Hindus. (8) Higher social status draws middle class ‘untouchables’ away from their community of origin, (9) Higher SES/Middle Class ‘untouchables’ do not give great importance to getting ‘Sanskritised’. (10) Untouchability as a concept works as a psychological barrier. It depends not only on one’s own experiences in the case of middle class ‘untouchables’, but also on other’s experiences of keeping them away from Hindu society. (11) Attachment towards Gandhi or Ambedkar among ‘Untouchables’ shows the middle class attachment to Ambedkar, the minimum educated have an attachment to both and illiterates mostly prefer only Gandhi. Among the youngest generation (the then Graduates) attachment towards Ambedkar is diminishing. (12) Another obstacle to the integration of ‘untouchables’ into the larger society is that they have to identify themselves as ‘untouchables’ in order to get jobs, promotions, etc. (13) Middle class ‘untouchables’ status now lies between partial acceptance and rejection, between integration, frustration and aggression. (14) This dilemma leads middle class ‘untouchables’ to ‘we consciousness’ and they form associations to discuss common interested matters and to celebrate occasions like Ambedkar’s birthday. (15) Caste still is a relevant social dimension of status consciousness among middle class ‘untouchables’ who otherwise attempt to overcome caste barriers (i.e., due to psychological barriers or the failure of the Gandhi approach of integration). (16) The degree of perception of Untouchability increases with a rising educational standard. This does not necessarily depend on any personal experience of untouchability; it is rather a consciousness of the discrimination suffered by their group of origin. ‘Untouchability’ thus remains a psychological barrier against integration also on the part of the ‘untouchables’ themselves (Kulke, 1976:249).

The desire to rise socially and to be accepted in the new middle class milieu leads to certain limitations. In the case of untouchables, the mobility process clearly has a secular character i.e., the possibilities for and the efforts to obtain religious and ritual
recognition are minimal. In general, all untouchables demonstrate a low religious activity, which decreases even further with professional or educational status mobility. This incipient process of change in the case of untouchables thus does not fit into Srinivas’s Sanskritization scheme (Kulke, 1976: 249).

The consciousness of having repeatedly to suffer discrimination and of belonging to a group that is branded ‘untouchable’ manifests itself in the form of latent psychological barriers, which hinders the efforts of socially mobile ‘Scheduled Castes’ members towards social integration. Frequently, this consciousness is not even based on direct personal experience but rather on unconscious group solidarity or the conscious efforts to detach and efface oneself from the group of origin. In any case, the adoption of a detached and neutral attitude towards their caste of origin is very difficult for the socially mobile (Scheduled Castes) members (Kulke, 1976: 247-8).

The identification of mobile Scheduled Castes varies with their education level and social status. Thus, those who favour Gandhi as the leader of SCs also prefer the usage of the term ‘harijans’, while the majority of the moderately mobile ‘untouchables’ preferred the neutral official characterization ‘Scheduled Castes’ and the most educated and most successful social climbers chose self-characterizations such as ‘Indian’, ‘Hindu’ or simply ‘human being’ (Kulke, 1976: 251-2).

Measurement of political radicalization tested with given options yielded figures such as /political system- democratic (46.7%), dictatorial-totalitarian (14.6%) or revolutionary (38.7%) – in terms of which option suits the best to solve the problems of untouchables. With the educational level, the option for revolution increases (Kulke, 1976: 252).

Ram (1988) prefers the category ‘middle class’ for the beneficiaries of reservation policies and observes that there are a small number of scheduled caste individuals who have benefited from the policy of protective discrimination and consequently acquired a better socioeconomic status. Their employment in white-collar jobs meant upward mobility in the class structure. 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.

Quoting Saberwal (1972:114) Ram regards mobile people as those who ".... have either been upwardly mobile earlier or are upwardly mobile now, or are getting equipped for upward mobility in the foreseeable future." Ram argues that the middle class among scheduled castes is different from the old middle class. Since the economic mobility of Scheduled Castes does not necessitate an equal social mobility, there is an incongruity between their social and economic mobility.

Further, Ram (1988) has attempted to measure upward social mobility among the Scheduled Castes. He employs measures such as, Socio-Economic Status (SES) Scale, Caste Status Ranking (CSR) Scale and Social Distance Scale (SDS). In correlation of social status and economic status, Ram argues, however, that the dominant pattern of social stratification in India has been that of caste. The hierarchies of caste and class have not functioned, so far, in parallel direction. It seems the class structure is inclusive of caste structure and vice versa. Consequently, mobility of a person in the class structure has not always led to his mobility in the caste structure. This has happened more in the case of the lower and particularly the lowest castes because the latter had suffered a lot from numerous social and religious disabilities in the past. Complete social mobility neither has occurred in the past, nor is occurring in the present- it is possible only through a rigorous political action involving, 'a civic value oriented social system instead of a family, caste, religion and language oriented one'.

Compared to the early stages of its formation, the Dalit middle class today is more assertive of its identity and more firm on its ideological foundation. Inspite of witnessing mobility in economic status, mobility in social status eluded the middle class Dalits. Since then, the course of social mobility remained a contested ground between the Dalits and others. Amidst resentment and rejection on the one hand and intermittent allurements to suppress their caste identity in exchange of admission into the inner circles of the middle class on the other hand, most of the Dalit middle class

\[55\] See Ahmed and Ahmed, 1964: 244.
individuals had clung to their Dalit identity. This was mainly due to the very initiation process that embedded Dalit consciousness and Dalit ideology in them.

However, the characteristics of the Dalit middle class are not uniform. They have different backgrounds and different locations now. Such diversity in backgrounds and locations necessitates a variation in their identity patterns. In this regard, Omvedt observes that,

Not all of the new Dalit middle class are radicals. Many are simply enjoying the benefits of the new life. They call themselves Hindus and are trying to live as others do. Some are living far from home and are unwilling to reveal their humble backgrounds. Some are living calm lives with relatives, not connected with any causes. Nor are they all second generation; some are first-generation educated while some are living and working so far away from their rural homes that they are able to hide their identity. It is only now that they are beginning to come out (Omvedt, 2001: 27).

Further, Omvedt (2001) differentiates between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Dalit middle class, she observes,

The earlier Dalit middle class fought against casteism, but were often concerned with personal survival to do much. During the 1970s and 1980s Dalit protests were expressed by fighting riots and resisting atrocities physically. The new generation is now coming into their own and discovering a new pride in being Dalit (Omvedt, 2001: 27).

Referring to the ‘new Dalit middle class’ she observes,

This generation is, in part, a product of the policy of reservations. Even if there were no state policies to promote the education and employment of ex-untouchables, a middle class would have evolved because of the new opportunities for mobility in a more open and equalitarian society. But it is certain that it would have happened much more slowly, with deprivation and bitterness involved in the process.... This generation is, in part, a product of the policy of reservations. Even if there were no state policies to promote the education and employment of ex-untouchables, a middle class would have evolved because of the new opportunities for mobility in a more open and equalitarian society. But it is certain that it would have happened much more slowly, with deprivation and bitterness involved in the process (Omvedt, 2001: 27).
The middle class Dalits are in the similar status of discriminated in relation to caste-Hindus, as they too experience discrimination along with other Dalits. Omvedt elaborates:

But these differences, apart from the apparent alienation between the middle-class leaders and the Dalit proletariat, pale before the fact that all sections of Dalits, whether professors, professionals, clerks or agricultural labourers, have experienced the humiliations and exploitations of casteism at crucial points in their life (Omvedt, 2001: 27-28).

The qualitative difference here being in terms of their endurance and the means and capacity to fight caste based exploitation. The middle class Dalits possess the leadership qualities mainly provided by their social and economic mobility from which the Dalit masses could benefit. She further notes that,

Exploitation takes different forms, but people at every level, from labourer to highly educated, have experienced discrimination because they don’t have the same degree of influence, money and family linkages of the upper castes. It is this unpalatable experience of Brahminism which holds together the various Dalit middle class communities and factions. Holding them together is also a simple economic fact: the ‘middle class’ is not a solidary group. Instead, there is a ladder and a sliding scale of privilege and attainment. At all levels, Dalits aspire to a better life, and this may mean a higher pay or a little land for agricultural labourers, a higher position in the bureaucracy and more prestige for the educated. One does not necessarily see the other’s success as cutting off his opportunities. But Dalits clearly distrust their political leadership (Omvedt, 2001: 28).

However, the emergence of the Dalit middle class is not the panacea for all the problems the Dalits face today. She opines,

The rise of Dalit middle class does not mean the end of casteism and oppression; a growing middle class of an oppressed group simply strengthens the overall fight against oppression. The new Dalit millennium will be an interesting one! (Omvedt, 2001: 30)

Indeed, the Dalit middle class is a product of social justice or protective discrimination policy of the Indian state and the enabling environment coupled with their inner urge to rise above their disadvantaged situation that accelerated their recruitment into the middle class in such a large scale within a short span of time. However, the process of social change was inadequate in reaching all the Dalits and, at the same time, the opportunities provided for their social and economic mobility are meager compared to the raising aspirations among them. The incongruity in social and economic mobility of the middle class Dalits is a hurdle that has a bearing on the very process of their social mobility.
The word ‘Elite’ first used in the sixteenth century meant a ‘choice’. In seventeenth century, it was used to describe ‘commodities of particular excellence’; and later on to denote ‘superior social groups’ such as crack military units or the higher ranks of the nobility. According to Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest use of ‘elites’ is in 1823, denoting social groups. Until nineteenth century, the term did not become famous in the social and political writings of Europe or until the 1930s in Britain and America (Bottomore, 1971). The term came into vogue towards the close of the 19th century in the socio-political literature of Europe, Britain and America, and in 1930, through sociological writings, especially those of the Italian sociologist Pareto. The term was used to mean many things and to describe certain fundamental features of organized social life.

Pareto observes, the theory of the Elite suggests that, ‘in every society there are people who possess in a marked degree the qualities of intelligence, character, skill, and capacity of whatever kind’. Mosca divided elite into (1) governing elite (directly in Government positions) and (2) Non-governing elite (intellectuals). According to Laswell, there are as many types of elites as there are institutions. According to Kerr (1960), there are five categories of elite in the industrialization process: 1) a dynamic elite, 2) the middle class, 3) the revolutionary, 4) the colonial

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56 Rajora Suresh Chandra, (1987) traces the history of the concept of Elite, “During the 16th century, the term ‘elite’ was used simply to mean a choice. In the 17th century, it signified commodities of a particular excellence. Later it was used to describe the superior social groups (Bottomore, 1964:25).” According to Manheim ‘elites’ are those minorities, which are set apart from the rest of the society by their pre-eminence in one or more of these various distributions.

57 In Great Britain it was used to denote non-political group i.e., those with assured entry into ‘high society’ were designated as elites. The term was used to indicate the superiority and exclusiveness pertaining to personal relationships (Cole GDH, 1955:102-103).


59 Pareto employed this term to designate a class, which held a high status and commanded influence in the community. He suggests, “Let us assume that in every branch of human activity each individual is given an index which stands as a sign of his capacity, in very much the same way as grades are given in the various subjects in examination in schools...” So let us make a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity and to that class give the name of the elite (As quoted by Bottomore, 1966).

60 Mosca (1933:53) defines the elite as an organized minority, obeying a single impulse, which holds domination over the unorganized majority.

61 For Laswell (1966) the members of the elite are “the holders of high positions in a given society.” Cole refers to the elites as “groups, which emerge to positions of leadership and influence at every social level.” Nadel has defined the elite as a “body of persons enjoying a position of preeminence over all others.” Raymond Aron believes that “the minority which in each of the enumerated professions, has succeeded best and occupied high positions.”

62 Kerr (1960:50).
administrators and 5) the nationalist leaders. Mosca delineates factors, which help a person or group to emerge as elite. He says wealth is the main factor. In some societies, the priestly class will emerge as the elite and in some other, the hereditary castes. Mosca stressed that wealth and military valor are the characteristic feature of the dominant class.

Weber (1953) classified the elite into political as well as intellectual; they are feudal and charismatic in nature. Similarly, Pareto describes, recruitment to elite consists in merit and reorganization. From the lower classes too, an elite could be recruited. The following are the factors in elite recruitment: 1) hereditary (birth in aristocratic families), 2) wealth (richness), 3) religious dominance, 4) education and 5) individual ability.

However, these characteristics are broad in nature and do not help to identify elites in a complex society like India. Lal (1995:148-157) observes that, the problem of identifying elites is not new to social scientists today. Studies conducted in this sphere have mostly been conducted in Western communities following three approaches in the main: (a) positional, (b) reputational, and (c) issue participation approaches to the identification of elites.

Sau (1986: 123-4) notes that there is rapid expansion of white-collar employees in India compared to the industrial workers. And Shah (1990:161) adds that a large majority of the members of the middle class belong to the upper middle castes.

In Indian society, princes, priests, landlords, and top persons in the upper castes may be regarded to form the groups of traditional elites. In the 19th century, education was mainly responsible for the creation of new groups of civil servants, legal and medical practitioners, engineers, university teachers, journalists and creative writers. In the post independence period, with the expansion of administration, education and the

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63 As quoted by Bottomore, 1966.
64 (a) The Positional Approach (which was popular prior to 1953) is one in which, "those holding position of authority actually make key decision while those who do not occupy such positions do not make key decisions" (Those who are occupying objectively defined top positional positions). (b) In Reputational Approach the influential persons in the community play a significant role and can get things done for the community and (c) The Issue Participation Approach (i.e., 'event analysis' or decision making approach) is based on the assumption that those who actually participate in the decision making process are the elites because they have shown the influence in real life situations.
growth of the centers of administration, now, new groups of elites have also emerged. Actually, the area of elite recruitment has widened (Census of India, 1971: 29-30).

Analysing the term elite under all these definitions, we can arrive at the conclusion that, the elements such as superiority, power and organization are important in defining the term elite. Thus, we may think of the elite as those who are regarded as superior, influential and are held in high esteem by the people; they may or may not have formal positions in politics and the Government, but they are in a position to influence the decision-making process, set values and uphold them.

It is here that the imminent question arises, whether all communities have a free access into the elites, more specifically, do the Dalits become elites? Heimsath (1964:5) argues that in India, social reform did not ordinarily mean a reorganization of the structure of society at large, as it did in the west, for the benefit of the underprivileged social economic classes. Instead, it meant the infusion into the existing social structure of new ways of life and thought; that determined that the society would be preserved, while its members would be transformed.

Navlakha (1989) argues that elite formation in India can be understood by studying Industrial managers, civil servants, academicians because these are the areas the elite aspirants are generally attracted to. He mainly focused on the following: 65

(1) Caste background, (2) Urban Vs Rural background, (3) Economic background, (4) Father’s income, (5) Work/employment of fathers, and (6) Fathers’ education.

65 The study revealed the following:

(1) Caste background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste background (Percent of respondents from)</th>
<th>Population percentage</th>
<th>Elites (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper castes</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Castes (cultivating)</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower castes</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Urban Vs Rural background: 86.5 percent of the respondents were of urban origin whereas the total urban population percentage is 18%. (3) Economic background: 84.3% respondents come from high, well to do families, whereas the population percentage of this category is around 5%. (4) Father’s income: 61.6% of respondents’ fathers’ income was more than Rs. 250. 31.6% earned less than that. (5) Work/Employment of Fathers: 87.5% hailed from non-manually engaged families. 54.3% from high occupational stratum and 9.9% came from manual strata. (6) Father’s Education: 89.3% fathers have modern education.
His study shows that, 79% of the respondents are from socially and economically advantageous backgrounds while the rest are from moderately advantageous backgrounds and none from socially, economically disadvantageous backgrounds.

The other studies conducted on similar themes cited by Navlakha are: background of students (Jayaram and BR Sharma), students’ enrollment in IITs (A.D. King), Indian students abroad (Victor Jesudasan), Urban Elite of Jodhpur (SK Lal), Indian Managerial elite (Sagar C Jain), etc. He argues that all these studies show that the aspirants as well as the settled elites hail from somewhat advantageous backgrounds only and lower sections of society are not represented in these even if it is marginal.

Another important observation made from the study is that, ‘as a consequence of Western education, the upper castes like Brahmins, Kayasthas, Baniyas, etc., and some Muslims have emerged as middle class and from these middle classes most of the elite, including political bureaucratic, military and business have emerged’ (Navlakha, 1989:23).

Sharma (1995: ix) observes that there are two main sources of mobility for Scheduled Castes, namely, (1) the welfare measures and (2) certain socio-cultural movements. Patwardhan as cited in Sharma (1995: 186) observes, “The overall perspective is that there is an increasing possibility for upward mobility for all the Harijans.” She states, “there are two processes of mobility: (1) through corporate efforts; and (2) by competing between castes and with in a caste.” Patwardhan also notices that, migration; education and white-collar jobs particularly outside the village have been the main source of social mobility among the SCs.

The challenge to the ideology of Varna and the construction of a counter-ideology is made possible only with the emergence of new Dalit elite, which is separated from and no longer depended on the traditional order and its political economy. In many

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66 Based on the innumerable caste studies, the main feature of the caste system are a common name, common descent, hereditary calling and homogeneity of caste members (op. cit., p.42). While criticizing the class studies in Indian society he opines that, “Class has existed along with caste and as an inseparable phenomenon forming the over all system of social stratification” (op. cit., p.45).

67 Patwardhan, S, 1973, Change among India’s Harijans, Delhi, Orient Longman, p.186
senses, the ideology that is fashioned is the product of these elite and has relevance largely within that social context. Yet the legitimacy of that ideology and of those who are elite is defined in terms of its relationship to the Dalit masses. Hence, the articulation of a new Dalit consciousness rests on a fundamental paradox; it is not a mass consciousness but depends for its validity on posited connection with the masses (Gokhale, 1990: 212-3).

The Dalit Elites

The idea behind the ‘Harijan’ or Scheduled Castes elites had developed from the observation of the ‘widening gap’ between some SCs and the rest of the untouchables for whom the policies such as positive discrimination were meant (Dushkin, 1972: 212). KL Sharma argues, “the realization that unevenness exists among the scheduled Castes has led to the exploration of what is popularly known as ‘Scheduled caste elites’” (Sharma KL, 1986: 56).

The development of very few persons or families from the SCs who, having utilized all the programmes and block others who are more needy in availing of the same programmes, leads to ‘gaps’ within the SCs. Thus, some families form as elites or middle classes and the rest remain poor. Consequently, various constitutional measures have produced and will produce, with the present rate of progress, only a minority of the middle classes among the scheduled castes, and the majority have remained and will remain a relatively poor working class.

There are elites among SCs, but the question is who these elites are? What is their socio-economic background? How they reach elite positions? Do they take up the cause of the advancement of their fellowmen? What are the differences between them and the non-Scheduled Caste elite? In a sense, it refers to those who are included/involved to a greater or smaller extent in the decision-making process, which implies the exercise of the intellect and rational judgment on their part (Abbasayulu, 1978).
The economic mobility of scheduled castes, which had its origins in the British period itself, registered an improvement only after Independence. Again, this improvement was only among those castes, individual families among them, who have acquired land, utilized various government facilities, and those are concentrated mostly in urban areas (Ram, 1995: 41).

Studies on Dalit Elites

There are quite a few studies on Dalit elites ('Harijan' or Scheduled Caste elites as they were called earlier). KL Sharma (1986: 56) lists the following studies:

- Herold's *India's Ex-Untouchables*
- Saberwal's *Scheduled Caste Elites of Punjab*
- Sachchidanand's *The Harijan Elite*
- Deshpande's *Scheduled Caste Elites and Social Change*

Some of the most well-known titles on this theme. Issacs interviewed fifty educated persons from the Scheduled Castes; Saberwal added eight more, that is, he interviewed fifty-eight; Sachchidanand interviewed 200. Deshpande slid down much below Issacs, and interviewed only twenty-nine Harijan elites (Sharma KL, 1986: 56).

He observes that,

Two points of methodological and substantive nature emerge from these studies of Scheduled Caste and their elites: (1) The reliance is on the information which the researchers could gather from their respondents (elites in this case); and (2) it is by and large realised that the 'unevenness' among the Scheduled Castes, inherently prevalent as well as created by the implementation of policies and programmes for their welfare, is mainly responsible for their backwardness (Sharma KL, 1986: 56).

Abbasayulu (1978) studied the elite Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, in which he evolved a criterion to recognize elites. Those who are involved to a greater or smaller extent in the decision-making process, which implies the exercise of intellect and rational judgment on their part, are elites. Thus, (1) those who are elected/nominated to both the legislative assembly and legislative council etc. including ministers, (2) those Scheduled Caste members who have been recruited to the IAS cadre, (3) those who are employed as Lawyers and Judges, (4) those working as Doctors and Engineers and (5) those employed as teachers in the three old universities. He further categorizes those from category (1) & (2) as political elites, (3) as administrative elites and (4) & (5) as intellectual elites.

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69 Abbasayulu (1978) evolves new criterion for defining elites. According to him, "elites are those who have intellect and rational judgment which participating in decision making policy and occupy some position of trust and responsibility."

70 They are Osmania University, Andhra University and Kakatiya University.
He recognizes the role of the elites in the development of Scheduled castes/Dalits in general. He observes that the Scheduled Caste elite or elite Dalit represent the grievances of scheduled castes at the different fora like the legislative assembly and the political parties.

Sachidananda (1974) made a study of *The Harijan Elites* in Bihar. He took educated Harijans into consideration. He also evolved a criterion to recognize elite Dalits. For him, 'any Harijan who is a matriculate and lives in a village is an elite' and a 'Harijan who is a graduate and lives in a town or a city is considered as an elite'. He finds elite Dalits as 'torch bearers' of social change, for they are most active and powerful agents of social transformation. They are the catalysts of change.

Roy and Singh (1987) in their study of ‘Harijan elites’ deal with, the ‘dilemma that the Scheduled Castes face today’ in the context of ‘transformation of the social system on the slippery path of socio-economic status upgradation’ and observe that the Scheduled Castes now remain suspended ‘between the two poles of rebellion and silence (Roy and Singh, 1987: v-iv). The Scheduled Caste elite are concerned with community problems; the issue of reservations; community solidarity and the upliftment of the community.

Roy and Singh (1987: 12-13) observe that the impact of modernization created spaces for scheduled castes to become elites. The journey of scheduled castes ‘to the promised land of economic security, equality and dignity’ continues contrary to the expectation that it would end upon the availing of facilities like reservations in education and in the services. The worldview introduced by the British Raj lit a ray of hope among Untouchables to overcome their 'fateful condition and their status of passive subjects to that of active citizens', and it set up a new goal to be achieved i.e., 'equality democratically'.

Roy and Singh (1987: 20) further posit a view that Harijan Elites are ‘caught between the two worlds of trouble; some past which they can not completely give up and the uncertain future which they must go on trying to share’. ‘The Harijan Elites’, they say, ‘as the most knowledgeable, articulate and advanced sector of the
untouchables, are in a better position to express their community’s concerns and the way to realize them’.

Modern consciousness, which contradicts the caste system and ‘Untouchability’, is gaining importance in India. However, there are several threats posed by the upper strata whose interests lie with the perpetuation of the caste system, who want the traditional values to be continued. The Dalits, realizing that their future will be with the opposition of the caste system, will fight against it. There are two strategies, which they may employ for development. One is collective political action and other is personal or individual salvation. The Dalit elites prefer the path of individual salvation through upward social mobility, better jobs and access to power and positions through different political parties. The Dalit elites who emerged from their depressed positions to acquire elite status are caught between these two worlds. On the one hand, they aspire to be different, while on the other hand they are blamed for maintaining a distance from their own community.

Aggarwal (1983) presented the cases of educated Scheduled Castes who did well in their respective fields; he worked with the categories of Students, Peons, Clerks, Officials, Doctors, Engineers and Politicians in his study *Halfway to Equality* conducted in Delhi in 1983. The study deals with the successful Scheduled Caste men from Delhi, as well as from the other states, drawing upon information pertaining to their personal family background, their mobility ‘up from the bottom’, the government benefits for SC students, the hardships they faced in the process of reaching present positions, their views on untouchability, personal experiences, friendships with upper castes, its consequences, their attachment to their community, etc., all these were recorded in their own words and narrative style. The author presents all the narratives to the reader and asks him/her to decide themselves whether or not these ‘educated, aspired Harijans’ achieved equality on par with other castes. In his opinion, these educated SCs derived some privileges, are hopeful about their future and possess greater tolerance with regard to the present conditions than their counterparts i.e., rest of the SCs who have not benefited similarly.

Aggarwal’s theorization of the status of mobile Dalits, once they move up from their original socio-economic statuses is that ‘they are half way to equality’, with the
examples that (1) individual men and women with education and good jobs are being
accepted by the high castes as equals, (2) they still carry the stigma of their caste, (3)
back in their villages, being untouchables, they are afraid of encountering insults due
to the upper castes' jealousy of their achievements. On the issue of 'identification',
he observes that most of the respondents do not want to hide their identity and further
reports that their experiences reveal that it is futile to hide or pass over their identity,
"most people, however, neither announce their caste voluntarily, nor hide it when
asked. Something analogous to America's 'Black is beautiful' is happening."72

Further, according to Aggarwal, the educated 'Harijan' elites hailing from different
regions and having settled in Delhi, maintain relationships through meetings at
conferences and festivals. Interest in Ambedkar and Buddha bonds them together and
they utilize this occasion for tasks like matchmaking, etc., because there is a scarcity
of educated SCs. One more interesting observation in this regard is that 'most
educated Harijans are from the villages', and that, 'rural Harijans are more upwardly
mobile than their urban cousins'. He further adds that, "a large proportion of urban
Harijans are sweepers whose employment opportunities as well as wages have
improved over the years. Consequently they have failed to strive for better positions
in society".

Deshpande, who has worked on the problem of social change and the role of elites
among scheduled castes, observes that the position of the weaker sections is
precarious in the caste hierarchy. To prove their status they have to scale at least
some heights in the caste hierarchy. The climb up would become possible only when
the elites play a magnificent role for the betterment of scheduled castes. The main
thrust of Deshpande's argument is that, social change among SCs is carried through
elites.

The process of social change in India has resulted in social mobility among the 'lower
castes' especially the Dalits. Such social mobility has been lacking in uniformity and
has some limitations. It has not been able to effect changes all the sectors equally,
viz., social, economic, political and cultural. Similarly, it has not effected change all

72 Ibid.
the communities. However, in the case of the Dalits, it has resulted in the formation of a small section of 'Dalit elites' or Dalit middle class, mainly due to the mobility witnessed by them in education and employment.

In this context, the present study undertakes to inquire into the ideology and identity formation among the Dalit middle class. In this process, the study attempts to profile the Dalit middle class with all its general and specific characteristics in relation to the general middle class in India and then juxtapose the same, with its priorities and politics to enquire into the formation process of ideology and identity. The same is attempted in the next two chapters, which not only profiles the Dalit middle class but also deals with the ideology and identity related issues of the Dalit middle class.

In chapter Three, an attempt has been made to profile the Dalit middle class on the one hand through the analysis of their socio-economic background and life circumstances, mainly to understand the correlation between their socio-economic background with their life circumstances. On the other hand, the ideology and identity patterns of the middle class Dalits, juxtaposed against their socio-economic background and life circumstances, are examined in Chapter four. As part of which, their life situation, identity patterns, ideological perceptions and political participation are also scrutinized. In order to validate and substantiate the above issues, a few representative case histories of the middle class Dalits are also discussed in Chapter four.

The next chapter provides an empirical profile of the Dalit middle class.