CHAPTER – II
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DALITS

The contradictions of socio-economic order in India remain almost the same even after 63 years of independence. Half a century is a considerable period of time for a society, state and nation to realize its mistakes and imbalances. But even at the beginning of the 21st century neither the society nor the state in India has been able to resolve its contradictions. Despite the Constitutional commitment of the post-colonial state towards the goal of equality, liberty and justice, the age old structure of inequality has not been dismantled. Social and economic inequality still occupies the centre-stage of Indian reality. The ideals of social democracy and distributive justice, in their essence, remain elusive. On the contrary, the vast majority of the Indian population is deprived socially, economically, politically and educationally. The social opportunities, offered to the citizens by the state, are confined to the privileged sections of society. The deprived and disadvantage groups are still exposed to the experiences of cumulative inequality. These marginalized groups have yet to experience fully the so-called fruits of modern development. There is a tremendous gap between the population of the upper castes and the Dalits who constitutes more than 16 per cent of the Indian
population. The upwardly mobile other backward castes have, of
course, challenged the hegemonic structure of the upper castes
(Brahminical) order and they have crystallized themselves as a
major economic and political power in independent India. But as
far as the social status of Dalits is concerned, no substantial
changes have taken place during the six decades of development
planning. They are still rated at the underside in the socio-
economic structure.

It is widely acknowledged that traditional Indian society was
based on *varna* and *jati*. This system is very ancient in origin and
through the passage of time it has undergone profound changes,
but caste still a very powerful institution in our socio-economic,
religious and political organization. The most disquietening and
disturbing feature connected with the caste system has been the
concept of untouchability. Those who were engaged in unclean
occupation were considered as polluted persons and had to go with
this stigma in the prevailing reality and had to accept for
themselves the status of untouchables.¹

Over the period of time, the various social and religious
movements strived to make a dent in the social system in favour of
the Dalits. Several saints, social reformers and political leaders
from both the Dalits and non-Dalits had tried their best for the
eradication of untouchability from the social fabric. But the impact of some reform movements was short-lived because the reformers fought within the caste system. However, their attempt was to facilitate certain caste groups simply to move up within the caste hierarchy through sanskritization. In fact, these movements were reform oriented rather than providing protection against the existing inequality in the social system.

In this regard, the efforts by Ambedkar and Gandhi, before and after independence in India, are important. The difference between the two leaders, were on the basis of their approaches in tackling the problem of untouchability and upliftment of the untouchables. Gandhi who described himself as an untouchable by choice attempted to solve the problem within the framework of caste system. But he could neither change the attitude of caste Hindus nor satisfy the untouchables as the practice of untouchability and discrimination continued to operate against the Dalits. On the other hand Ambedkar was totally opposed to Gandhi’s philosophy and programme for the removal of untouchability. He stated "to the untouchables Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors. The sanctity and infallibility of the Vedas, Smiritis, Shastra, the Iron law of caste, the heartless law of Karma and the senseless low status by birth are to the
untouchable's veritable instruments of torture which Hinduism has forged against the untouchables. These very instruments which have multilated, blasted and blighted the life of the untouchables, are to be found intact and unta
urnished in the blossom of Gandhism". Ambedkar felt that the problem of the untouchables was economic, social and political as well as religious that widely prevailed in India even then.

**Caste System and Dalits**

Indian social structure has its unique place in the world, primarily because of its caste system. Several social scientists have made in-depth studies on this Indian social system. Although the social scientists have done much work on the Indian caste system, but they have found it difficult to define it. Some scholars hold that caste is a particular rigid form of class and think its existence to be world wide while others believe it is to be a system peculiar to India and its environs.

The English word caste is probably derived from the Portuguese word *casta* (race). It is especially used by Europeans to denote the different classes into which the Hindus are divided. Varna, colour, jati, race, are Indian names. The word seems to have applied to India by the Portuguese in the middle of 15th century. In English there is a use in the sense of 'race' in 1555 and
the Indian sense is encountered at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the French spelling *Caste* is, scarcely found before 1800.9 The word 'caste' is used in everyday life and we use it to distinguish from one person to another.

The first literary traces of the caste system were found in *Rigveda* and *Pursasukta hymn.*10 In the *Bhagavad Gita* the caste system is sought to be justified on the basis of the idea of Guna Karma (deed) and Dharma (Religion).11 In the age of Simritis and Sutras, the society had been divided into various castes.12 They had framed hard and fast rules regarding occupation, food conduct and marriage. In the same age, these castes became so diversified that they could not meet together in course of time. The feeling of untouchability also grew in this age.13

Untouchability is undoubtedly the most pernicious aspect of the caste system. Its origin is obscure and is a matter of controversy to this day. To Iravati Karve it is a sub-caste of Shudras,14 whereas Ambedkar regarded it as a bye product of the caste system.15 There is however general unanimity of opinion as to non-existence of untouchability during the Vedic period.16

Words such as Varna, Jati, biradri and samaj are used interchangeably with the term caste. All of these terms refer to
ranked groups of various size and breadth. Varna meaning colour, actually refers in large divisions that include various castes; the other terms include caste and sub divisions of castes, sometimes called sub-cates.\textsuperscript{17}

The 'Varna' model provide a framework within which the innumerable variations of caste throughout India are found. The varna scheme is a hierarchy in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual purity and pollution are at the basis of differentiation.\textsuperscript{18} Each caste ranked higher or lower on the basis of the ritual purity. The description of caste model in its extreme form is that one's caste position in a ritually determined status-hierarchy defines one's total life.\textsuperscript{19} There is some correlation between ritual rank in the caste hierarchy and economic prosperity. Member of higher castes tend, on the whole, to be more prosperous than members of lower ranking castes. Most of the castes are traditionally associated with an occupation, such as high ranking- Brahmins, middle ranking - farmers and Artisan groups, and very low ranking- Dalits: leatherworkers, butcher, latrine cleaners. These low ranking jobs are low paid, therefore, many lower caste people live in conditions of poverty and social disadvantage.\textsuperscript{20}
Caste dominate people's lives from birth to death in India. The understanding of the caste system which controls and regulates social, economic, political and religious life in India is absolutely essential while interpreting the Indian reality. It is true that social and racial differences in some form or the other do prevail in other parts of the world, but the kind of system found in India is characterized more by its specific unique features like the complexity, elaboration and rigidity than by such features which share with caste structures elsewhere.²¹

The stratification of Indian population into groups is defined by caste, which is determined by birth. An individual is born into a caste and his status in society depends largely upon the caste to which he/she belongs and not on his/her personal success or failure. The reason of the permanence of caste system in India is the unity of social and religious rules. No rule of social order is distinct from the religious rules.²²

Considering the background of social change, some people believe that the system of caste is on the way out, others believe that inspite of external features, the caste has retained most of its essential functions. Many social reformers, political and social scientists have expressed their concerns about the increasing
influence of caste on politics and many other spheres of social life. M.N. Srinivas, the well known anthropologist, is a major proponent of the view that 'the caste system in India is not declining but growing more powerful. Modern means of communication, the spread of education and an increase in prosperity have contributed to the strengthening of the caste system, especially through the formation of caste associations which cover large area and utilize the means of communication and organization made available through technological progress in order to strengthen their hold upon members of the caste and to mould their activities.'

More and more is being written on the caste system by scholars. Although scholars have done much work on the Indian caste system, they find difficult to define it. They also differ on the meaning of caste.

According to Risley caste is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor; human or divine professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give opinion of forming a single homogenous community. The name generally denotes or is associated with a specific occupation. A caste is almost invariable endogamous in the sense that a
member of the large circle denoted by a common name may not marry outside that circle, but within the circle there are usually a number of smaller circles each of which is endogamous.\textsuperscript{24}

Ketkar defines a caste as 'a social group having two charactericts (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. Each one of such groups has a special name by which it is called several of such small aggregates are grouped together under a common name, while these larger groups are but subdivisions of groups still larger which have independent names.\textsuperscript{25}

According to Beteille caste is a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system.\textsuperscript{26} According to Majumdar "if a number of people constitute a group, not because of physical togetherness but because they have some common interests and common ways of doing things, as a consequence of which stratification of society into higher and lower groups emerges, then these groups may be called status groups. If
a status group is open to entry, that is, if anybody can become its member by fulfilling certain prerequisite conditions, like obtaining a degree, or paying an admission fee, or earning a particular income, the status group may be called a class. The restrictions of the term class to mean an income group has no sociological sanction: such a group is properly called an economic class. If the recruitment is not free, that is, a status group is not open to anybody, but only those are its members who have certain ascribed attributes, which cannot be acquired by others, then it is called a caste."\textsuperscript{27} G.S. Ghurye, has defined caste and enlisted its six outstanding characteristics: Endogamy, Hierarchy, Restrictions on consensual relations between castes, Restriction on choice of occupation, Civil and religious disabilities and Privileges of certain groups, and Untouchability. It follows that membership is fixed for life, because the individual cannot alter his caste by any effort of his own. Further he makes a distinction between caste societies and class societies by arguing that 'the status of a person in a caste society depended not on his wealth as in the classes of modern Europe, but on the traditional importance of the caste in which he had the luck of being born.\textsuperscript{28}
J.H. Hutton points out that caste provides the individual members with a fixed social milieu, a prominent body of association which controls almost all his behaviour and contacts.\textsuperscript{29}

A.R. Desai has described the social structure stratified into the divisions identified as castes. He that writes the castes constituting the series were hierarchically graded and each caste being considered inferior to those above it and superior to those below it. The status of a man born in a particular caste was determined by the rank of that caste in this hierarchy. Once born in that caste his status was predetermined and immutable. His birth decided his status which could not be altered by any talent he might show or wealth he might accumulate.\textsuperscript{30}

However, we need not go into a detailed discussion regarding the origin of caste system and the different theories put forth by the scholars regarding it. The different theories, mentioned above, show that only one or two factors cannot be indicated as probably contributing to the emergence and development of the caste system in India. Caste system is commonly viewed as an hierarchical system. It also evinces some of the properties of a segmentary system i.e. there are several levels of differentiation and these levels are related to each other in specific ways. First, membership in a
caste is by birth; second, a caste is an endogamous unit; third, members of each caste traditionally had an occupation or trade to pursue; fourth, castes are graded in a local hierarchy and fifth, notions of pollution and purity govern the nature and extent of the relationships between castes.\textsuperscript{31} To sum-up, the caste system is a segmental division of society into endogamous, hereditary descent groups. These groups constitute a hierarchy in which the Brahmins occupy the top position and the Dalits the bottom one.

Existence of caste system gives a distinctive identity to Indian society amongst the traditional social systems of the world. At the beginning, the caste system was apparently an arrangement for the peaceful coexistence of several clans, tribes or other social groups. But, with the passage of time, it developed rigidity and caste and communities multiplied themselves on the basis of occupation and other considerations.\textsuperscript{32} The differentiations in status, based on caste, creed or occupation has transformed our society into somewhat closed stratified system.\textsuperscript{33} Another point that caste system is very significant is because it was linked with various aspects of an individual’s life i.e. economic, political, religious, legal and moral etc. In so far as the life of the average people is concerned, religious, rituals and caste obligations still matter very
much. The caste system divided the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups, distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics i.e.

(i) separation in matters of marriage and contact whether direct or indirect;

(ii) division of labour, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession; and

(iii) finally hierarchy, which ranks the group as relatively superior or inferior to one another.

Thus characteristic features of the caste system are its strict hierarchical organization and that each caste is tied to a particular profession.

The social distance between the caste groups varies from state to state, but generally there is well established hierarchy of castes that can be considered under four broad headings, namely-Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras and such a stratification can be traced back to Vedas.

In *Rigveda* period, the earliest work of the first three classes of society are very frequently mentioned, and named Brahma, Kshatra, and Visha. It is only in one of the later hymns, the celebrated *Purushasukta*, that a reference has been made to four
orders of society as emanating from the sacrifice of the primeval being. The names of those four orders are given there as Brahimana, Rajanya, Vaishya, and Shudra.\textsuperscript{37} Further, M.N. Srinivas writes, "In the \textit{Rigvedic} hymn \textit{Purushasukta}, the four varna or order formed the limbs of primeval man (Purusha), who was victim in the divine sacrifice which produced the cosmos. The Brahmin emerged from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from the feet".\textsuperscript{38} The first three castes are twice born or \textit{Davija} since the men from these castes are entitled to use the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of Upanayana, which the Sudras were not allowed to perform.\textsuperscript{39}

It is not only that these four varnas have been mentioned in the sacred texts, but they have also been assigned their duties as well. The Brahmins was directed to the ritual process which was associated with pastoral or agricultural work, the Kshatriya defended the territory and also conduct fire scarifies for the prosperity of his subjects, the Vaishya looked after economic exchange of goods and service and management of livestock and the Shudra toiled in the field and rendered services such as delivering message etc.\textsuperscript{40} It appears that the major stratification in term of caste was originally based on occupational division without a vertical social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{41}
Shudras were considered clearly inferior to the other three castes and were constrained to perform only menial jobs. Those doing menial jobs obviously had low status. A person who had a low status in the caste hierarchy also had low status in other hierarchy of the society such as economic or political.

Since Dalits were assigned the duties of serving the other three Varnas, they were deprived of higher training of mind and were denied social status. Although in the beginning, the caste system was merely based upon division of labour for the purpose of fixing responsibility and duty, yet with the passage of time, it degenerated into pathogenic affairs where occupations changed into castes. The higher castes of the society looked down upon the Shudras. It was a general belief that the Dalits are part of the lowest of low Varnas.

Thus for centuries Dalits have been positioned at the bottom of the rigid Indian caste society. People from other castes, who considered themselves to be higher, believe that Dalits are impure by birth and that their touch or sheer presence could be polluting hence, they are assumed to be untouchable. For centuries, Dalits were excluded from the mainstream society and were only allowed to pursue menial occupations like cleaning dry latrines, sweeping,
tanning or working as landless labour for meager daily wages. Almost in whole of the ancient period, they were the people who cultivated the land, mended the shoes, washed the clothes, made the ropes, cleaned the streets and did all types of menial works.

Dalits were discriminated in every sense. They lived in the Hindu villages hence did not have advantage of geographical isolation like tribes. They were to serve all classes of people around and had to do all the dirty jobs. They were barred to enter in society in every sense, they were prohibited to wear decent dress and ornaments besides being untouchable in every sense.

The first three upper castes were subsequently designated "dvija"- twice born, and were entitled to wear a sacred thread across the chest and over one shoulder as a badge of their nobility. They also enjoyed the exclusive privilege of studying the holy Vedas, the Sudras being permitted neither to open a page of sacred book, nor even to listen to the reading thereof.

Many of the atrocities were committed in the name of religion, like pouring molten lead into the ears of a Dalit, who happened to listen to some mantra. To retain the stronghold on people, education, especially religious education, was the monopoly of the Brahmins.
The two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, describe further deterioration of the Dalits' condition. Indeed, a story from the *Ramayana* shows how even to the Sudras had become degraded in the Rama's time only. The three upper castes were allowed to do Tapasya (Penance and meditation), when one Sudras by the name of Samvuka nevertheless undertook penance in order to attain divinity, a 15 year old Brahmin boy died as a result. When lord Rama came to know about this, he went to meet him. The ascetic replied. "O King ! I am born of Shudra caste. I want to attain divinity by such penance. Because I want to attain divinity, I will not tell lies. I am a Sudra by caste and my name is Samvuka."As soon as the ascetic uttered these words Lord Rama drew his sword and severed Samvuka's head.\

Another story of the *Mahabharata* also illustrates the degraded status of the Dalits. Ekalavya, an indigenous boy, had to have his right thumb cut off because he had learnt archery so well that his skill equaled that of Arjuna." The point is that Dalits in the past had no access to education. The road to knowledge was closed for them. As a consequence, these castes remained socially, economically and educationally backward.
The higher castes of society looked down upon the Dalits. They gave them the title of untouchables because of their total exclusion. They did not allow Dalits to enter the temples and barred them from fetching the water from the common well and from using the common facilities.

Thus, for years, the Dalits suffered from social injustices and exploitations so as to prevent them from rising above the social status fixed for them. The Dalits being on the lowest rung of the social ladder were denied entry into several occupations which were relatively cleaner. They were associated with a variety of specialized traditional occupations such as scavenging, cobbling and disposal of carcasses etc.

While discussing the low position of these groups Blunt says 'At all times, the Brahmin priesthood has endeavoured to keep them segregated, not only from the society, but from the Hindu religion and the Hindu ceremonies; they were not allowed to hear, much less study the Vedas; they must not enter the temples; they must carry on all ceremonies without using the mantras and no Brahmin would carry out any domestic ceremony for them.50

Thus, we can conclude that Dalits suffered oppression at the hands of the upper castes for centuries; their economic condition remained bad, they were educationally backward and they lacked
political skills to hold their own self against the upper caste leadership of the country. In brief, the low rank of the Dalits resulted from cumulative inequalities in economic, political and cultural system.

**Dalit Movements and Organizations in India**

The problem of untouchability and exploitation of Dalits in social, economic and political areas has been a stark reality of Indian society. Various efforts have been made so far by visionaries in this direction by launching movements and forming organizations to highlight and find solution of the problems of the Dalits in India. As a result we can see a constant growth of awareness among the Dalits who have started asserting their identity and demanding their due share in power. Here an attempt has been made to give an account of various Dalits movements and organizations in India.

If we look at the history of Dalit movements organized in different parts of the country, it becomes clear that a number of socio-political organizations, struggles and various types of activities of the Dalits had emerged out of different socio-economic and political conditions in the past to ameliorate their wretched condition. These movements have led to some alleviation in the
plight of the Dalits and resulted in breaking of various social barriers.

A number of leaders raised their voice against the upper caste exploitation of the Dalits. Jyotiba Phule, E.K. Nayar, B.R. Ambedkar, M.K.Gandhi, Mangoo Ram etc. were particularly noticeable for their struggle for the Dalits. Mahatama Jyotiba Phule was the first leader of notice to emerge, who worked to uplift the Dalits and fought for their rights.\textsuperscript{52} After Mahatama Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, well known as Constitution maker and ‘MESSIAH’ of Dalits, represented the Dalits at Round Table Conference in London. It is to be noted that before Ambedkar the personalities who raised their voice against the society did that from the social aspect but Ambedkar did the same from the social as well as political aspect. In 1932, British Government presented the ‘Communal Award’ concerning the depressed classes. In this Award two types of vote system and separate electoral was awarded.\textsuperscript{53} Ambedkar wanted a guarantee for Dalits as a pre-condition of self rule. But M.K. Gandhi was against the separate representation of Dalits and he had to resort to fast unto death. Initially, Ambedkar was against Gandhi’s proposition. But later on they agreed with each other and reached at the connivance which is known as
‘Poona Pact’. This pact was similar to Communal Award, more seats were reserved for the Dalits. But candidates were left to be chosen by joint electorates of both Hindu and Dalits.

In the annals of Indian politics there have been a few independent Dalit movements and parties. Some of the important movements are chronicled below:

**Ad-Dharm Movement**

The beginning of the 20th Century witnessed a series of political developments which interalia led to the formation of movements in different parts of colonial India. The main objective of these movements was to liberate the so called untouchables so that they could lead a life of dignity and equality with the so called twice born. The Ad-Dharm movement which was one of the most important movements of the Dalits started in 1925 under the direction of Mangoo Ram and other depressed class leaders. The first organizational meeting of the Ad-Dharm occurred in Jallandhar in 1925. Speeches were made by Swami Shudranand, Vasant Rai, Thakur Chand and other lower caste leaders. The Ad-Dharm was contemporary to the Mahar Movement in Maharashtra led by B.R. Ambedkar. It was a movement which rejected Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam and made efforts to establish a distinct
identity of Dalit castes. The main objectives of the Ad-Dharm movement were to carve out an independent identity for the untouchables and to blot out the stigma of untouchability. Within a short period, it became popular in the Dalits of Punjab. However, in 1929, the Ad-Dharm split into two factions, one the All India Ad-Dharm Mandal which was headed by Vasant Rai and other Ad-Dharm Mandal which was headed by Mangoo Ram.\textsuperscript{56} Infact, Vasant Rai was lured back by Arya Samaj in 1929, but the Mangoo Ram’s group played an active part in the politics of Punjab for more than two decades. The contribution of Ad-Dharm movement was crucial. It helped the Dalits to seek social recognition through the process of cultural transformation on the one hand and spiritual regeneration on the other hand.\textsuperscript{57} It carved out a new identity and gave them a new name. The Ad-Dharm movement succeeded in raising the consciousness among the down trodden people of the Doaba region in particular and of the entire state in general. But Ad-Dharm movement failed to change the attitude of the upper castes. Dalits continued to face discrimination and oppression.

**Independent Labour Party (ILP)**

B.R. Ambedkar himself tried to wrest space for Dalit emancipation at religious, social, economic and political realms. In
1936, he gave the political movement a specific focus by establishing the ‘Independent Labour Party’.\textsuperscript{58} This was the first political party of Dalits. This was necessary because the existing political parties, dominated primarily by upper castes, were capable neither of representing the interests of the Scheduled Castes nor fighting for their cause.\textsuperscript{59} The absence of any political party which could represent Dalits in first election of 1937 encouraged B.R. Ambedkar to establish Independent Labour party. It was intended to champion the cause of the workers and to advance the welfare of labouring classes and of depressed classes also.

**All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF)**

In 1942, B.R. Ambedkar founded the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, a political organization for the Dalits. He reformulated his political plans. He formed a new political party the AISCF and limited it to the untouchables in the hope of uniting all the untouchables in a new battle for political power.\textsuperscript{60} With the objectives of securing political rights and representation for the Dalit people, he established the AISCF at an All India depressed classes Conference in Nagpur in July 1942.\textsuperscript{61} The AISCF, being a rival organization to the Congress, it used to constantly challenge the Congress claim to represent the Dalit interest. In the initial
period, its main area was Bombay but in a very short period it was spread all over India. The main purpose of AISCF was to unite the Dalits and fight against the untouchability.

**Republican Party of India (RPI)**

The Republican Party of India came into existence out of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation by changing latter's name.\(^6^2\) The RPI was the first political party formed by the post Ambedkar leadership in India on October 03, 1957. The RPI accorded acceptance to the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution such as justice, freedom, equality and brotherhood for the citizens of India. The objective of the party was to organize the oppressed and to fight against the atrocities committed on the Dalits and to get their disabilities removed. It took up many issues that appealed to the Dalits. It lobbyed for installing the portrait of B.R. Ambedkar - the Constitution maker, in the Central Hall of the Parliament. It also argued that idle and wasteland must go to the landless labourers and full justice be done under the untouchability Act to them.\(^6^3\) The RPI initially did some good work and tried to get the problems of Dalits resolved. RPI played an important role in the formation of workers organizations, students’ organizations, women organizations, etc. Unfortunately the tempo
and the revolutionary zeal of the party leaders got lost in mutual conflicts as every leader was posing as a junior Ambedkar. In this competition, they failed to carry forward the momentum of the Dalit movement which led to party’s decline. After some time the party split in many groups. The splits in RPI had no ideological basis but they were due to clash of personalities and personal political ambitions. So, the party failed to recognize and address the root cause of the problems of the Dalits.

**Dalit Panther Movement**

The disintegration of the ‘Republican Party of India’ created discontentment among the Dalits and Dalit youth in particular. The Dalit youth came forward and took up the task of bringing all the Dalits on a single platform and mobilize them for the struggle for their civil rights and justice. This gave rise to the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra, 1970. The most fundamental factor responsible for the rise of Dalit Panther Movement was, the repression and terror under which the oppressed Dalits continued to live in the rural area. The programmes of the Dalit Panther Movement was incorporated into the manifesto published nearly one year after the formation of the Dalit Panther Movement. Their Manifesto stated: "All those who are victims of political, social and
economic suppression are our allies; power, money and prestige are our enemies." The Panther Movement was based on the ideology of B.R. Ambadkar. But in later stages, at least a faction of the Panthers was found inclined to the leftist, especially the Marxist ideology. So, the Dalit Panther Movement split and got divided into two parts. The Panther leaders failed to provide proper leadership to the movement and their slogans and aims remained glued to paper only. Further, no serious efforts were made by either of the two factions to follow the significance of issues mentioned in their manifesto and programmes. After the split in the movement, in 1974, some Panthers again united and continued the Dalit Panther Movement under the leadership of Arun Kamble and Gangadhar Gade, S.L. Virdi etc. They took initiative on the problems of reservation and other concessions granted to the Dalits in various parts of the country. But the whole leadership of Panther Movement has in mobilizing the Dalits at large.

**Backward And Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF)**

In the early 1970s, Kanshi Ram emerged as a dynamic leader after B.R. Ambedkar who gained all India significance by establishing the Dalit organizations. With a handful of educated
employees from Pune and Delhi, he set up the All India Backward and Minority Community Employees Federation (BAMCEF) in 1973 and aspired to give it an all India dimension in the next five years. For some years the BAMCEF was working informally until Kanshi Ram launched it formally on 6 Dec. 1978 in Delhi. Kanshi Ram made the BAMCEF ‘A Pool of Brains, Talents and Funds’. The basic object of this organization, which consisted of educated Dalits who had been able to make use of the fruits of government policies, was to pay back to the more oppressed and exploited section of the society to which they belonged. The BAMCEF, consisting of government employees did not launch rallies but only held seminars. In the political field the main function of the BAMCEF was to supply the funds and dedicated workers to the Bahujan Samaj Party, which was founded in the early eighties.

**Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharash Samiti (DS-4)**

Although BAMCEF was regarded by some as a pool of Brains, talents and funds, it kept a low profile because of service rules restrictions on public employees. For the furtherance of its objective, Kanshi Ram proceeded to set up a new organization known as Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharash Samiti on Dec. 6 1981, as a non political agitational arm of his movement. It’s primary
purpose was to create awareness among the Dalits. The DS-4 consisted mostly of students, unemployed professionals like engineers, lawyers etc. who provided local leadership. The DS-4 was initially conceived as a non-political body, but it soon became a political organization. The DS-4 tested the political water by contesting the election of Haryana Assembly in 1982, Delhi Metropolitan Council and Corporation in 1982 and also of Jammu & Kashmir Assembly election in 1983. None of the DS-4 candidates won in these elections. But it encouraged the Dalits and Dalit leaders to strive for getting their share in political power.

**Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)**

The rise in the political standing of any party can be equated with the rise of the political fortunes of its leaders. Having gained political experience and using the BAMCEF and DS-4 as base organization, Kanshi Ram decided to lay the foundation of political party, the BSP on April 14, 1984 on the birth anniversary of B.R. Ambedkar to fulfill the political aspirations of the Dalit people. The party adopted Ambedkar’s ideology and soon became the political voice of the Dalits in India. BSP gave a new hope to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in creating a strong platform in Indian politics under the leadership of their own community leaders.
In Punjab, the influence of the BSP as a political force was felt during the February 1992 Assembly elections when it managed to capture 9 seats, thus becoming the main opposition party in the Vidhan Sabha. The BSP candidates were runner up in 34 seats. It also won a Lok Sabha seat in February 1992 elections.

With the November 1993 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, Kanshi Ram led BSP emerged as a political force at the national level to be reckoned with. Especially in Uttar Pradesh the BSP-SP alliance who won a majority of the seats to form the government. These elections showed an upward mobility among the downtrodden of India. It raised the prospects of BSP to further strengthen its influence.

The BSP leaders in the beginning believed that any seat sharing arrangement with its rival political parties might weaken its stance on the depressed classes. But in the later years, it has done exactly the opposite. The BSP unhesitatingly indulged in compromises for the sake of maximizing their political gains. The 1993 Uttar Pradesh state elections, the formation of BSP-SP coalition government and its subsequent demise and BSP-BJP combine are vivid examples of such a flexible political strategy.

BSP has been successful in a rather short span of time in arousing a marked socio-political consciousness among the
backward and depressed classes about their degrading status. The BSP commands considerable influence among the Dalits living in urban and rural areas of North India. Dalits were the traditional vote bank of the Congress and now they seem to have shifted the affiliation from the Congress and other upper caste parties.

These were some movements and parties who raised their voice against the upper caste and against the social and political exploitation of the Dalits. But at the same time there have been other numerous small and large organizations of Dalits all over the country such as: Self Respect Movement, the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti in Karnataka, Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala, Dalit Maha Sabha and Dalit Sena in Andhra Pradesh etc. which have been playing significant role to raise the consciousness among the Dalits. However, none of these could make a recognizable impact.

**Constitutional Safeguards for the Dalits**

During the British rule in India, the problem of the Dalit became of focus of law and politics, and soon after Independence, a vigorous campaign was launched to bring an end to the age old problem and ensure the enforcement of equality and justice both in law and fact.\(^{82}\)

The Constituent Assembly, prepared the Indian Constitution with the hope that it would bring about social revolution in the
country. The social revolution hoped to get India out of the medievalism based on birth, religion, custom and community and reconstruct social structure on modern foundations of law, individual merit and secular education.\textsuperscript{83}

The main aim of our Constitution is to provide equality and justice. Although, India is a country of institutionalized inequalities but our Constitution abolished any discrimination to any class. The principle of equality in a democracy indeed, can work only if the nation as a whole is brought on the same level.\textsuperscript{84} Our Constitution therefore, provides certain temporary measures to help the backward sections to come up to the same level with the rest of the nation, as well as certain permanent safeguards for the protection of the cultural, linguistic and similar rights of any section of the community who might be said to constitute minority from the numerical, not communal, point of view.\textsuperscript{85} To accord protection to the needy, the Constitution provides mechanism in the form of reservation. By providing reservation the state can take positive action to uplift the down-trodden and remove unequal treatment arising from social, economic and political conditions of the society.

Our Constitution has provided many securities and protections to the Dalits. It was done with a view to ensure social progress to those sections of people who were kept under
conditions of backwardness and oppression in all spheres of life due to some historic reasons.

Article-14 of Indian Constitution which provides equality before law - The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the law within the territory of India.\(^{86}\)

Further, in Article 15, the state prohibits the discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.\(^{87}\) This Article seems to be the first Article which indicates the reservation for Dalits. It provides that the state can make special provisions for the upliftment of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes some selected people and nothing in the Constitution comes in contradiction to this provision. Thus Article 15 provides the foundation for incorporating Reservation in the Constitutions framework.

We all know how, due to distinct historical happenings, a major group of our society has been left behind in the race for development that the Indian community, in general, has achieved so far. A large section of people of the India have been regarded as untouchables. It is well known fact that Dalits had to suffer
generation after generation, apart from all other factors, the social venum of untouchabilty. The Constitution of India abolished untouchabilty with a stroke of the pen through Article 17.88

According to Article 17 of the Constitution untouchability abolished and the practice of untouchability in any form is forbidden. This Article really provides a big support for the Dalits to proclaim their equality to others.

Articles 29 is no less important, while either provision provide upliftment to the downtrodden. This Article provides them the freedom to conserve their own ways of living. Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.89 This is the Article which gives India its prime cultural feature-the "unity within diversity". Clause (2) of Article 29 says that no citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 46 has been framed with the particular attention paid to the promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the weaker sections. It says: The state shall promote with special care the educational and
economic interests of the weaker section of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.  

Political reservation as a means to emancipate the backward sections of Indian society from the age old bondage was not given recognition during the 19th century. It was only after the Act of 1919 that the depressed classes acquired the status of an important political entity.

After Independence, it was thought that the interests of the Dalits could be secured by their representatives in the State Legislative Assemblies and Parliament–which is the supreme law making body of the country. Article 330 & 332 were incorporated with this view in the mind. These Articles provide for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies. The reservation of seats in the Parliament and State Assemblies are given as per the population of the Dalits. But It is noted that there is no reservation of seats in the indirectly elected upper Houses i.e. Rajya Sabha in the Centre and Vidhan Parisad (wherever they are present) in the States.
However, Article 334 of the Constitution provided that the reservation of seats for Dalits in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assembly of each state shall cease to have any effect on the expiration of a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution. Though the reservation of seats in Parliament and state legislative Assemblies was to come to an end in the year 1960 but the politically motivated decisions of political bosses were successful in getting Articles 330, 332 and 334 amended after every ten years. Each amendment in these Articles extended the period of reservation of seats in the House of People and Legislative Assemblies for a further period of ten years without giving a thought whether the really down trodden have been able to get any representation or not.

To secure their position in the administration, the claims of the Dalits for the service of the posts in the administration have been made acceptable under Article 335. The Constitution makes the people belonging to these classes able to influence each and every part of the governance system so as to make them able to guard their interest.

There shall be special officer for SC, and STs to be appointed by the President. It should be the duty to the officer to investigate
all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the SCs and STs under the Constitution. It has been provided in Article 338 of the Constitution that all matters relating to the safeguards provided to SCs will be reported to this officer, who, in turn, will report the same to the President. Further, Article 340 provides for the appointment of a Commission which will investigate the conditions of backward classes in the country. The President can as he thinks fit, appoint such a Commission which shall exercise the powers and the Jurisdictions as given by the President.

After Independence and proclamation of the Constitution, the list of Scheduled Castes in India was notified by the President, in accordance with the provisions of Articles 366 and 341 of the Constitution. Article 366 of the Constitution gives the meaning of the word 'Scheduled Castes'. Scheduled Castes means such castes, races or tribes or parts of groups within sub-castes races or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of this Constitution.92

Thus, the Constitution of India deals minutely with each and every aspect of the life and problems of the people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or the Dalits. Basically, the Indian Constitution does not recognize any religion or caste. It
aims at creating equality among all Indians. Provisions were made for the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society so that they may be brought at par with other sections of the society and they do not feel handicapped.

Reservation of seats, right from village Panchayat up to the level of the Parliament has integrated the Scheduled Castes into the political mainstream of the nation.

The efforts of social reformers and the adoption of various Constitutional measures, legal and governmental policies and programmes, have helped to bring about a certain amount of development and change among the Dalits. Reservation was primarily introduced to give adequate representation to the Dalits in Legislatures and services for the simple reason that the society had ignored this section for countries.

In other words, this is a protective or positive discrimination to create equality. This was all together a new approach to the problem. True, these efforts positively contributed to the welfare of Dalits community. But if seen in relation to the overall development of our economy, polity and societal progress, they are yet to come on par with the rest of the society. We speak of democracy equality, etc. but even today about 24 per cent of downtrodden people in our country are deprived of real freedom and equality. Members of the
this section are living as untouchables and like second class citizens, and at many places they are worse than animals. At some places, even today, they are prohibited to draw water from the common wells and visit temples or places of worship.

When India attained freedom and a new era began in the history of our nation, it was but natural for all the people, particularly the Dalits, to feel that life would be much better for them in a free India. But no freedom from poverty, discrimination and social castigation came to them. When the Constitution of an independent India was framed; social economic and religious freedom was the right of every citizen. There was to be no discrimination on the basis of caste or religion. All are equal in the eyes of law. Most of the provisions of the Constitution have remained only on paper because their implementation has been faulty, half hearted and inadequate. Inequality, discrimination, exclusion and stigmatization can jointly contribute to the utter marginalization of scavengers in India.93 Thus, Dalits got freedom from the bondage of the British Raj but they are still slaves of tradition.

No doubt, India has a rich and glorious cultural legacy to feel proud of. But there is no doubt, that it is the only county in the world where the social discrimination is perpetuated on the lower
castes by the higher castes on caste and religious grounds. Most members of the lower castes, share the stigma of untouchability they are frequently denied the chance to eat, smoke or even sit with members of the upper castes, and they often must use separate wells from those maintained for the use of others. These injustices are sanctioned more or less by religion, but there are others, more extreme, that go entirely beyond religious approval; *begar*-forced labour for instance, and the sexual abuse to which many lower caste wives and daughters are subjected. Caste based discrimination and atrocities against Dalit communities have increased all over India that lead to the bloody and brutal killing of Dalits many a times.

The Constitutional safeguards and legislation in pursuit of positive discrimination in favour of the Dalits have made some dent into the malpractices in the society but only marginally. The caste based discriminations ranging from untouchability to sexual exploitation of Dalit women are still containing. The Dalit organizations and political parties like the BSP have played a role in organizing Dalits to assert their separate political identity but not all sections of the Dalits have been benefited socially, economically and politically. The next chapter tries to highlight the status of the Dalits in one of the economically better off states of India i.e. Punjab.
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