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THE CONCEPT AND LITERATURE OF SCHEDULED CASTES



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Short Profile

M. Alankara Masillamani is working as an Associate Professor at Palli Charcha Kendra, PSV, Visva-Bharati University in Sriniketan. He has Completed M.A., Ph.D. He has teaching experience of 14 years, industrial experience of 5 years and administrative experience of 6 years.



ABSTRACT:

The origin of Scheduled Caste can be traced from the early Hindu scriptures which divides Indian society in to four *Varnas* on the basis of occupations and the last of which is Scheduled Castes. The Aryans were behind the origin and emergence of castes including the lowest stratum i.e., Scheduled Caste. This Scheduled Caste people are not socially, economically and educationally on par with the rest of the Indian population whose wide disparities with the Scheduled Caste mandate the Government of India to bridge such a wide gap by stringent policy measures. Hence, the Government of India through special constitutional provisions is bound to ensure the security- social, economic and

educational of Scheduled Castes whose name appears in the schedule of Indian Constitution.

KEYWORDS

*Scheduled Caste, society, disparities, schedule, constitutional provisions.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION :

The caste system is unique in India. Since the dawn of history, Indian society has suffered from diverse types of social disabilities. Some of the most unsocial and unscrupulous inequalities and disabilities were centered on the institution of caste. It is implicated the Hinduism that is India's dominant religion. The Hindu scriptures like *Rig Veda*, have described the Caste as *Varna*. India is the only country in the world where such a system came into being and still exists. It is a hereditary or hierarch or social class which still requires discussion in detail.

## 2. THE CONCEPT:

The word caste is derived from a Latin word '*Cast*' meaning pure, and is first used by Portuguese to denote the Indian social stratification as they thought that the system was intended to preserve purity in blood. This concept can be defined in a variety of forms-as noun to denote an abstract principle or to designate a particular kind of social group, and as an adjective to the quality of this principle or the character of this group. Social thinkers and scientists who have studied caste pose basically two views about its definition; one is that the caste needs to be defined in terms of its Hindu attributes and rationale and therefore, it is unique to India or at least to south Asia; and the other, that the caste is to be defined in terms of structural features which are found not only in India but also in a number of other societies as well.

The term caste has been classified on the basis of the Hindu holistic scripture "*Gita*". Simply it divides Indian society into four *Varnas* or groups' viz., the highest Brahmins (priest and teacher), upper caste Kshatriyas (ruler and warrior), lower caste *Vaishyas* (trader) and the lowest caste *Sudras* (servant). The people who are untouchables, in fact, have no place in the *Varna* or caste system and are called '*Chandala's*' or 'outcaste' or '*avarnas*'. Later they came to be known as '*Dalit*' and the constitution of India named them as Scheduled Caste following the British ideas. Robert Jenkins Eimar Barr say "Caste may be seen as the institution that has been structuring and maintaining relations of power among different communities for centuries to legitimize these power relations systematically Indian system dispense mixes of economic and cultural assets/opportunities and deprivations to different communities.

## 3. SCHEDULES CASTE

A Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', found in The Free Encyclopedia from Wikipedia, was the term British used the Scheduled Caste which was derived from a Marathi word '*Dalit*' commonly identified as untouchables. Sometimes it is used for oppressed people in general. It seems to have been originated from Sanskrit (1831 dictionary) meaning 'ground' or 'broken' or 'reduced to pieces generally' (by 19th century reformer Phule). It became synonymous to scheduled castes from the early 1970s (Late 19th Century to 1930s). Untouchables are called differently in different times as:

- '*Adi-Dravida*' in Tamil Nadu, '*Adi-Kannada*' in Karnataka, '*Adi-Andhra*' in Andhra Pradesh (1917).
- The term '*Harijan*' was coined by Gandhiji meaning 'Children of God' – (Hari is another name for the deity Vishnu) may stand for untouchables (1933).
- Scheduled Caste by the British (1936).

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- “Dalits” used by Scheduled Caste to identify themselves (1970).

The Dalit Organization in 2006, in a report on ‘MDG and Dalits’ referred to ‘the word Dalit’ that has its origin in Phalli, a pre-Sanskrit language which means the deprived. This term is used as an act of confident assertion, rejecting nomenclature of Harijan, the ‘children of God’. During a radical movement of Dalit youth in the seventies the term ‘Dalit Panthers’ was used for the first time for those Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, neo-Buddhist, the working-people, the landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who were being exploited politically, socially, economically, and culturally in the name of religion. The term Dalit does not refer to a caste but it symbolizes the unity of all those who suffered at the hands of iniquitous Brahmanism, which is the basis of Hindutva. It is a symbol of change and revolution. Dalits’ belief is in humanism as they reject the existence of god. Rebirth and soul, sacred books teach discrimination, fate and the concepts of hell and heaven, because all these made them slaves. However, the term is usually seen today in a much narrower context of referring only to Untouchables (socially excluded) and the constitution of India defines Scheduled Castes by Article 341 as to who would be Scheduled Castes with respect to any State or Union Territory. The relevant Articles are quoted below:

*Article 341 (1)*: The President may with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory as the case may be.

*Article 341 (2)*: Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1), any caste, race or tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe, but may be saved as aforesaid and a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

#### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature helps to outline the latest researches in the field of study and to pursue the views of various scholars who are authority over the specialized fields of subject. In a way it helped the author to conceptualize the concept of study and to gain adequate knowledge in the field of study towards adopting a sound methodology. It also opened the eyes of the researcher with innovative ideas, new knowledge and understanding of the existing area of research, and given clues for legitimating arrangements and criticism in the subject. Indian society is highly stratified, with many glaring inequalities among different social groups. The worst positioned among them are the Dalits. The caste system segregated the Dalits from the rest of the society to such an extent that they were denied even the basic human rights. The caste system has created and sustained an unequal structure, which is an anathema to the egalitarian principles of a modern democratic society. What is worse, it intensifies and perpetuates the sufferings and servitude of disadvantaged groups by reducing their access to equality.

*Prakash, Nirupama* (1989) in her famous book on “Scheduled Caste Socioeconomic Change” referred to the term scheduled caste that began in the caste order of 1936 covering a total of 47 castes. In the 1931 Census those castes were defined as depressed classes as today confining to the status of untouchables now formally classified as scheduled caste.

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In a significant article on backwardness in Maharashtra Dahiwalé, S.M (2000) has explained that Scheduled Caste was enjoying the lower rank in the social hierarchy of Hindu caste system. The members of scheduled caste were not allowed to enter the temple and high occupations as these downtrodden had been subject to atrocities by high caste Hindus. One of the derogatory tests for the group was pollution by touch or contact (Chatterjee 1996: 1960-69). The Strata Committee 1930 in its recommendation stated that the term depressed classes should be retained to designate the 'untouchable caste' (Bhanagi, 1993:407).

The word 'dalit' has come into universal use in Hindi and English to describe what was once known as 'Untouchable' or 'Harijan'. Ninian, Alex(2008) reviewed the concept in India's Untouchables: The Dalits, Contemporary Review in CBS Interactive inc finds that the word dalit based on the ancient word 'dale' which means 'suppressed' or 'oppressed' and is regarded now a days as more accurate and realistic description of the group and it is obviously less patronizing.

*Thorat, Sukhadev (2002)*, a modern sociologist, in his article "Hindu Social Order and Human Rights of Dalits in the fourth issues of 'Combat Law' brings some important views on the dalits and 'Fundamental Rights' and 'Directive Principles' of the Indian constitution. After more than six decades in free India though situation has changed gradually dalits residential settlements are still 'outside the pale'. The constitution provides in its directive principles that, the state shall promote with special care-educational and economic interest of the scheduled castes and tribes for protecting them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. In accordance with these constitutional provisions a number of protective and developmental measures have been implemented by the government for providing protection enough to untouchables (Scheduled Castes or SCs). In the protective sphere untouchability was legally abolished and its practice in any form forbidden by the protection of civil rights (PCR) (Anti – Untouchability Act 1955). At the root, in contrary the untouchables are treated as 'inhuman beings' and inferior social beings to all other human kinds and therefore, they are not entitled to any individual rights such as civic, religious, political, and economic. It is clear that they are isolated and excluded from the Hindu society. Isolation and exclusion make them anti-social and weak to weaker in their progress.

In his book 'Social Background in India' Desai, A.R. (1959) has attributed that the untouchable is the out caste of the Hindu Society. Historically, speaking that untouchability was the social fruit of the Aryans in India. In the process of social interaction, a portion of the indigenous concurrence was incorporated into the Aryan fold. The most backward and depressed section of this incorporated population bears the hereditary caste of untouchables. Untouchability has been persisting in the Hindu society for centuries. Even extensive and profound humanitarian and religious reform movements by Gouttama Buddha, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, Tukaram, Ramanand, and others hardly affected the inhuman and age old institution of untouchability. The Sacrosanct practice with tradition, sanctified by religion, continues to exist in all its barbarous vigor for centuries.

The failure of the big industries strategy compelled Indian planners to switch over to growth with social justice strategy by Chetty, V.B. Krishnaiah in a study on Scheduled Caste and Development Programmes in India. This strategy requires programmes of reducing absolute poverty. Chetty in this connection has studied Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP) in Andhra Pradesh and found that the majority of the scheduled castes in rural areas are still engaged in traditional low status occupation and very few of them own land. The author came out with the finding that the amount of loan sanctioned to this group was inadequate and some of these beneficiaries found it very difficult to generate surplus income. The inadequacy of follow-ups of programmes and recovery of loan sanctioned was also found in

his highlights.

*Michael, V.B. (1991)* in his edited volume on "Dalits in Modern India" has stated that one of the profound changes in contemporary Indian Society is the emergence of a new sense of identity among the Dalits. The Dalit Movement not only rejects the very idea of pollution, impurity and untouchability but in the process is forging a new vision for Indian society which is different from that espoused by the higher castes. The volume explores the social, economic, political and cultural content of the Dalit articulation and its relevance to the nation.

The edited volume of *Shah, Ghanshyam (2001)* on "Dalit identity and politics: Cultural subordination and the Dalit challenge" highlights the issues of caste system and economic equality, dalit movement, dalit identity, political consciousness and elected mobilization of scheduled castes etc. Bringing together scholars and activists, the volume has examined the many facets of ongoing Dalit struggle to improve their position.

In their study on Socioeconomic Development of scheduled caste in India Singh and Malik (2001) lamented upon the poor status of scheduled castes. They said that the scheduled castes in the country are economically, socially and culturally weaker sections of society due to neglect and negation of benefits that must have accrued to them. In spite of planned development for nearly more than 6 decades and constitutional provisions as well as agreed policy priorities, the development effort for scheduled castes has so far been too small to implement for the development of scheduled castes in Haryana.

A Review" has been carried out by Singh, Darshan on Development of Scheduled Castes in India and reported that the gap between the mainstream and scheduled caste population still persists significantly in our traditional society. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reorient and focus on the strategy in order to support the lesser privileged by providing qualitative education and infusing among them the individualistic and moralistic values of self-denial, temperance, forethought, thrift, sobriety and self-reliance essential to bring these downtrodden into the national mainstream. Besides their circumstances, the major factors responsible for the deprivation and poverty among the scheduled caste people are their improvident habits, wastefulness and mismanagement. Their conditions can be improved through inculcating in them individualistic and moralistic values. These values will help them in proper utilization of the various developmental schemes, which, in turn lead to stability / improvement in their lives.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

It may be concluded that Indian society is stratified with multifarious disparities and conservative sprits which never allow and accept the liberty, equality and fraternity of Scheduled Castes. Though majority of Indians are spiritually bent and simple their superstitious practices and indifferent attitude towards Scheduled caste enhance the latter's vulnerability rather than their liberty. Indians culturally have strong faith in religions but weak in the state of their god fearing and also, do not realize such inhuman treatment imposed upon Scheduled Castes. If every Indian is committed to condemn such inhuman acts and deeds practiced against Scheduled Caste and accept their liberty, India will certainly afar from social maladies and disabilities.



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