

# The Dalits in Indian Society

Unveiling Shadows

Krittibas Datta  
Mukta Goyal  
Savita Mishra



## Contents

Preface	vii
1. The Caste System in India —Pranati Kundu, Subhasish Sen	1
2. The Caste Context in Indian Society —Nishith Ranjan Sarkar	4
3. Present Status of Dalit in Indian Society: A Critical Study from Independence to Till Date —Suparna Dutta	12
4. Challenges and Opportunities for Dalits in India: Overcoming Caste-based Discrimination —Dr. Savita Mishra, Sudip Mandal	22
5. Dalit and B.R. Ambedkar —Lipika Guha	43
6. Development of Dalit Movement in India: An Overview —Abhijeet Ingle	53
7. An Overview of Dalit Movements in India with Special Reference to Bengal —Sudeshna Basu	67
8. The Main Motto of the Dalit Movement —Parnasree Adhikary	79



## Dalit and B.R. Ambedkar

Lipika Guha

### I

In ancient India, the system of four groups of people (Chaturavarnya) based on merit and Karma existed in Hindu Society. According to this system, Hindu Society was divided into four castes, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. The function of the Shudras was to serve the three castes. Later this system turned into a caste system. In keeping with traditional social divisions, Dalits in administrative terms today generally mean those who are regarded as Scheduled Castes. Generally backward and people living in below the poverty line are called Dalits. Exploited poor women, children, elderly, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Tribal, Mahar, Nadar Chamar, Namasudra, and various Communities including Dalits. The term 'Dalit' is a Marathi word and literally means ground or broken to pieces and it was first popularized by the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra by which they meant the Scheduled Caste population. Later on there had been attempts to broaden this definition to any oppressed group. The Dalits constitute around 15 per cent of the Indian population and belong to the lower rungs of Indian society, economically and socially. They are spread throughout the country though they are concentrated more in some states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, and Maharashtra.

The Dalits not only belong to the lower caste category but also belong to the lower class category of Indian society. They are mainly poor peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers in the rural economy.



In the urban economy, they basically form the bulk of the labouring population. The condition of the Dalits in the country as a whole has not changed significantly over the years even though the state in India had pursued pro-poor policies aimed at ameliorating the condition of the poor among whom the Dalits constitute a large chunk. As a result of the policy of protective discrimination against the elite. (mainly middle class) has emerged among Dalits and it is these elite who have been the main beneficiaries of the state policies. The middle class that comprised essentially the upper castes now includes a small section of the lower castes or Dalits. As a result of these changes, the entire Dalit population may now be divided roughly into two sections; a section of Dalits who have remained as they were earlier and a small narrow section who are relatively better off than the majority of the Dalit population. This however may be considered as a positive change since it is this section among the Dalits who are primarily responsible for their mobilization and assertion in contemporary India. Another change may also be noted and that is a blatant form of caste discrimination which was practised for centuries is not practised in India today.

The Dalits demanded the establishment of social justice and rights. They were victims of upper-class exploitation, oppression, deprivation, and discrimination. Dalits were deprived of access to temples, use of ponds or reservoirs, schooling, social interaction etc. So Dalits an end to all these deprivations as well as reservations in various positions. For example, they demand reservation and separate electorate in the legislature and local institutions and in various government posts. They demanded the preservation of education and modern education. They formed political organizations to gain political power. In such a situation Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, who belonged to the Mahar Community emerged as an acceptable leader of the Dalit class. Babasaheb Ambedkar is one of the foremost thinkers of modern India. His thought is centrally concerned with issues of freedom human equality democracy and socio-political emancipation. He is a unique thinker of the world who suffered much humiliation, poverty and social stigma right from his childhood. Yet he rose to great educational and philosophical heights. He was a revolutionary social reformer who demonstrated great faith in democracy and the moral basis of society.

"Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar (April 14, 1891 – December 7, 1956), was one of the great jurists, lawyers, and political leaders of modern India. As a post-graduate student, he had done advanced studies in the field of economics. He was a student at Columbia University in the city of New York one of the London School of Economics. He also studied economics at Bonn. His works on the Indian Rupee as well as on provincial Finance