DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERCEPTION OF CASTE IN INDIA

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Introduction

Human societies are arranged into a number of segments and the theories of social stratification somewhere deals with the social inequalities in various forms like wealth, prestige or power leads to exploitation & oppression of one on another, which ranks them differently on a different stratum of hierarchy. These social inequalities are age-old and omnipresent in societies. In the structural form stratification implies ordering, reordering, distribution, and redistribution of people and resources, respectively. Social inequality refers to the existence of different social classes in various variables such as prestige, income, and status that are ranked one above the other. The specific group or subgroup has a shared interest and common identity and often shares a similar lifestyle that separates them to some degree from members of other social strata. It is widely acknowledged that among the various types of stratification the caste and class are the prominent ones. India is an example where the caste and class both existed in the same society.

The Indian caste system has a very unique nature of division based on '*Varna- Vyavastha'*, which is very different and eccentric from the division of social classes found in other countries of the world. The system of caste is further stratified into class inequality and oppression emanates from the social and cultural construct of the society. The hierarchically ranked hereditary groups get treated as an institutionalized system in the caste system. The economic and cultural concomitants with institutionalized inequality furnished the caste as the unique system of stratification. The social structure which is embedded with structural inequality of caste stratification segregates certain social groups as untouchable castes from the general population. In Indian society untouchables, are kept segregated as much as possible from other members of the social groups of the society.

In the Indian caste system, individuals are stratified into a number of endogamous hierarchical groups based on the concepts of *'Varna'* and *'Jati'*. The caste system is generally associated with Hinduism, but the caste-based differences are also prevalent in different regions and other religions like Islam, Sikhism and Christianity present in the Indian subcontinent.

Varna , Jati and Caste

'Varna' is the fourfold classification of the classes based on *'Guna'* and *'Karma'* of the people. As per the Hindu mythology, the birth of individual in particular '*Varna*' get decided on the foundation *'Guna'* (Instinct) and *'Karma'* (deeds). *'Guna '*further divides into three categories, namely *'Sattva'*, *'Rajas'* and *'Tamas'* which represent the mental temper & different shades of color. The *'Sattva'* denotes by colour white, represent the class or group of people who have the qualities of wisdom, honesty, goodness, and intelligence. *'Rajas'* denotes by colour red, represent the class with the qualities like pride, valor, and passion. *'Tamas'* denotes by colour black, with negative qualities like dullness and lack of creativity. Individuals, who possess any of the dominant qualities in them, end up adopting the appropriate occupations.

The '*Varna' system* mentioned in '*Manusmriti'* and some other ancient '*shastras'*, states the division of society based on'*Chaturvarna' or* functional specialization of the classes namely as *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*. Every social class likely to dedicate itself to perform several duties allotted to them-Brahmin or priests were there for the spiritual & intellectual quest and to impart the knowledge, Kshatriya class duty was to maintain law and order as well provide defense from the aggression and external threats to the state. Vaishya duties were related to agricultural activities, industry, commerce, and so on. The Shudra's considered as the artisan's class and the servants, assigned to serve the prior three classes. It was thought of, that division of labour based on their greater degree of specialization of the acquired skills. During that period though the functions were regarded, as hereditary is an exception, the people were freely allowed to the function of their choice. But with the due course of time, the whole situation has become so inflexible that underscores on birth, not on traits.

Caste consists of relatively closed status groups; in which each group has a commensal unity and possesses a distinct name. These units are locally called '*jatis'*. The *jati* is the most basic unit or social group of the caste system. Each *jati* or sub-caste has endogamous properties and traditional associations with a particular occupation. *Jatis* behavior governs by certain rules and customs related to their ritual status.

The ranking of *Jatis* determined by the traditional occupation or by the activities of purity and pollution in which the individual is involved. The positioning of individuals in the ritual hierarchy has an impact in every sphere of life, especially in commensual relations with other groups both at a personal level and in intermarriages.

There are regional variations among the *jatis* and *sub section of jatis*, which follow the different set of rules in social separation. A section of *jatis* may interdine with eachother but do not intermarry, the rules and customs differ from one *jati* to another *jati* with its regional specificity.

There are many *jatis* in one cultural region, and the members of the *jati* have the particular lifestyle and subject to perform certain duties. *Jatis* are distinct from *Varnas* categorization; *Jatis* have the characteristics of groups whereas *Varnas* are considered as categories. *Jatis* are the sub-section of the *Varnas* but have many complications and ambiguities. A *jati* in one area does not necessarily belong to the same *Varna* or a similar *jati* in another area, the considerable disagreement can be seen in the allocation of *jati* to which particular *Varna* it belongs to.

The theoretical system postulated group classes, *Varna* as ideals and explained the fact of thousands of endogamous *Jatis* truly prevailing within the country as being the results of historical compounding of 'pure varnas'. The *Varna Shankara* (of hybrid Varna) term accustomed denote those communities that don't slot in any of the four Varnas. The tribals, nomads, and foreigners who don't get fit into the norms of Hindu society were get excluded from the society. Another cluster consists of the lower section of '*Shudras'*, untouchables not fit in the four-fold classification of Varna were also considered as *Varna Shankara.*

The term 'Caste' is of 'Spanish' and 'Portuguese' origin, carved from the word 'Castus' in Latin, meaning pure. The word was first to use by the Spanish people, but the Indian application comes from Portuguese origin, applied in the middle of the 15th century. Indian social system is characterized by the hierarchy of the caste system. Mostly the western scholars have mistaken the caste system as the 'Class', but it is more than the 'class'. The individual's caste is defined by the person's birth, ascribed to his or her parents' caste. The caste defines the social status & role of the individual in the community. Some people were put in the advantageous position of society by the caste system based on inequality, where they can enjoy status and rights, and some in the redundant position of hereditary misery, destitution.

Caste is an English word, introduced by the Britishers in India at the time of their colonial rule, to the closed community groups of the social system. 'Caste' scripted by Britishers neglect the diversities of India. Britishers can't accommodate themselves from the complexities of 'Varna' & 'Jati', they club different classes together under the term 'Caste'. India have its own pattern of structural hierarchical power relations which differs one region to another.

The caste is more or less referred to as the *'Jati'* in India.   James Manor analyzed that the word 'caste', refers to the three different things: *Varna, Jati,* and *Jati Cluster*. The caste system is said to be the phenomenon of the Hindu system, but it is the reality of pan-India society. Other

religions such as Islam, Sikhs, and Christians also have castes or caste-like subdivisions among themselves. M.N.Srinivas, described caste as the system which is functionally interrelated in a rigidly stratified society. Caste is refers to the four huge sub-divisions in the traditional Hindu hierarchy. Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra are the four groups, each of the categories consists of a large number of jati within it or 'endogamous caste' groups, which is confined in their group. Now in modern times, multiple jatis pursue similar occupations have often grouped collectively in jati- clusters and recognized as 'Caste'.

Onto-Genesis of the Caste System

The origin, rise, development & establishment of the caste system in India always the issue of debate from the time immemorial. There are several theories related to the caste system which tried to explain the origin of it based on understanding the caste system.

Traditional Theory from Veda

From Purusha-Sukta of Rig Veda, which explains the root of Varna, the traditional theory of caste structure can be traced and later metamorphosised into castes. The three interrelated characteristics of the Varna Vyavastha are the Varna structure, casteism, untouchability, and social segregation.

From the very beginning of the human race, the root of the Varna system seems to have existed. The Varna came from the great sacrificial Purusha, according to the Rig Veda (the Primal man).The distinctive Varna were made from various parts of his body. The Brahman from the head, the Kshatriyas originated from arms, The Vaishya from the thighs, and the Shudras from the feet.The initial three Varnas procured the status of 'Dwija' or 'twice-conceived', the subsequent birth happening at their Upanayana function, though 'Shudra' considered of the lower varna, but at the lower part of the social hierarchy of importance.This cosmic origin of different varnas performed different duties in a different order. The Brahman is the highest varna had to devote to studies, had to do only the work considered purer, they are the priests and the arbitrators in the society. the Kshatriya assigned the work of soldiers and administrators, the Vaishya is the commercial class, placed below the Kshatriya's, they assigned agricultural activities and trade, and the 'Shudra's last in the descending pyramidical structure perform the manual work and to serve these three Varna's.

The Brahminical religious principle of purity & pollution is the core principle of defining the social hierarchy and the social stratification in the society based on the 'Varna-Jati' system.

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'Varna' is the class term, whereas 'Jati' is the (caste) term.By and large 'Jati' is an endogamous community, and their sub-castes (sub jatis) splits into a group based on the same 'Gotras'.

There is also one more traditional version of the caste system theory, which is according to the 'Guna' and 'Karma'. It is to be said that the caste of the individual is determined by the 'Karma' 'Dharma' doctrine. This division is performed in compliance with the 'Guna' (quality) and Karma (the functions, action/ work). The doctrine was also endorsed in Geeta by Lord Krishna. The four-fold structure (Chaturvarna) was developed by me according to the division of qualities and functions (Guna's) (Karma). In the Indian caste system, there are to be said three qualities or Guna's, namelySattva (purity) as Wisdom, intellect, sincerity, goodness, and other positive qualities. Second is Rajas (passion) which include the quality like pride, valor, and passion. the third is Tamas (inertia), dullness. In humans, these three features are discovered in varying proportions, according to these innate attributes individuals follow various forms of occupation. The people who have the preponderance of Sattva are the Brahmins, and they are the thinkers, priests, ministers, or philosophers to the kings or rulering class. The people predominated of Rajas are 'Kshatriyas', the warrior class, their work is to defend the country. The people predominant with Tamas are Vaishya (inertia) engaged in business and agriculture. Sudras are the servants, having no qualities developed in them, they served other three classes.

Speculated Aryan Theory

According to the theory, Aryans and Dravid's both are coming to settle down in India from some other parts of the world. The pre- Dravidian settlers were the natives of India, they were the aboriginals of India, attacked by the Dravidians first. Dravid's were nomadic tribes, settled in India, they defeated natives. Where some natives joined the life of the Dravidians and some fled away in the forests and mountainsides. The Dravidians have no distinction among themselves, they mingled up with the aboriginals and became one united social entity. After the Dravidians, a major attack against India was made by the Aryans, they defeated aboriginals and made them their 'slaves'. These slaves have been taken into the fold of Hinduism by placing them in low status in society & allotting the duties of serving other people. Those, who did not accept slavery were remained aboriginals and have social, cultural & economic distinctions.

The ancient society was divided into four parts: The Aryans, The Anaryas, the aboriginals, and the nomadic tribes. It was the time of the early Vedic era. At the time of the early Vedic era, only two main classes, Aryas and Anaryas, were said to exist. At that time, the class division of rulers and the governed, the masters and the slaves, the haves, and the haves were not found.

After the Aryan's invasion, various institutions evolved out of the requirements of a new set-up, the old structure of society drifted towards new horizons of certainty. The Aryas made the Anaryas 'Dasa', divided the people into classes and the victory of Aryas over the Anaryas gave rise to the caste system. In the Aryan social order, the defeated aboriginals and Dravid's, 'Anaryas' were declared 'Sudra's'. The word 'Sudra' occurs once in the Rig – Veda and seven times in *Atharva-veda*. The Varna –Vyavastha was established in the Vedic period, and *Dasa – Pratha* was at its initial stage in the Rig Vedic times. The symptoms of the caste system were there, but there were some provisions also to change one's Varna.

Though the Varna system was fully established, there was no established form of caste by birth, the symptoms of casteism were visible but its basis was an occupation. The Varna &Jati pursuits were not so much rigid, different pursuits were adopted by different members of one family. In that, the author of four *Suktas* of the 10th Mandal of Rig- Veda was Kavasa Elusa describes that he was the son of a Dasi, his father was physician, and by the virtue of his being a learned ma can also become a priest.

Caste in the Post Vedic period

By the Post Vedic period, in the due course of time, the roots of Varna Vyavastha become rigid & complex. After the end of the Vedic era, the Varna Vyavastha becomes a permanent social institution. And, in due course of time, it grew so rigid that the trench of discrimination was never bridged up. In the post-Vedic era, we find a very complicated form of four Varnas. The differences concerning Karma, occupation, and conduct had become clear and steady. Not only this, several sub-castes had evolved out of the four varnas, having separate distinctive features regarding food & conduct. In the age of Ramayana & Mahabharta, the Varna had acquired the form of *jati vyavastha*. The numbers of castes were getting developed in place of four Varnas (on account of *Anuloma* and *Pratiloma* marriages). Gradually, the jati – vyavastha, grew rigid more and more and the Brahmin's strengthened the roots of Varna Vyavastha, which got permanence in the social structure. The rigidity in the caste system based on birth became the permanent feature in the Buddhist and Sutra age. Brahmin's wrote the Sutra's against the progressive ideas of Jainism & Buddhism, to gain the supremacy and prestige which they lost in the Buddhist age.

In the Dharma Sutra age, due to rigid Varna Vyavstha, the society has been divided into various castes, regarded as higher castes and lower castes, Brahmins were having the highest place in the social order, whereas Sudra's were at the lowest rung of social order. It is said the feeling of untouchability grew in this period. By the feeling of high caste and low caste rigidity completely divided the people and untouchability grew in the minds of people. Society has very rigid rules

of occupation, food, conduct & marriage. The marriages outside the Varna and Caste were considered awful. The offsprings from these marriages were called 'Varnashankra' (means having no caste). The aboriginals who were got defeated in the beginning and those who lived outside the villages were called Asprasya, Antya, Bratya, and Anteyavasin. At the time of Mahabharta, some of them were described as soldiers (Shanti Parv), but in the age of Sutra-Smritis, they were declared as untouchables. After the Buddhist age, under the Muslim rule, the caste system got more and more patronize, the feeling of low & high and untouchables were got nurture in practice, and numerous castes were also get develop in that age.

Occupational Theory of Functional specialization

It is one of the theories that attempt to provide a logical reason for caste origin. According to the theory, caste arose from the division of labor or the functional specialization in the society of different roles. The theory explains the social disabilities of certain classes of people as arising from distortion of a system that was different in its pristine purity. J.C. Nesfield, A division of occupations is the basis of the caste system, and the gradation of castes corresponds to the distinct levels of civilization at which these traditional occupations originated. According to him *"Function & function alone is responsible for the origin of caste system"*. Nesfield provides grading to the occupations; the people who are engaged with primitive occupations were the members of the lowest caste, Kshatriya, as they were protectors, are superior caste, and the Brahmin the priests & spiritual guru's are at the top. The artisan castes were similarly divided according to whether they came before the age of metallurgy, the artisans class, the social positions were divided on the basis of occupation, Nesfield cited the example that the people engaged with the metals ranked higher than those who engaged with the primitive occupations like hunting, fishing, etc.

The hierarchy in the system is based on the superiority & inferiority of the occupations, the social positions in the society depend upon the industry in which person is engaged and to which stage of the culture (the advance and primitive). The technical skills passed to the generation's from generations, they are hereditary, with the time & space and due to practicing the same occupation, the 'occupational guilds emerged which later known as caste.

Nesfield's interpretation was criticized by several scholars, Sachidanand Sinha criticized that caste gradation is not strictly according to Nesfield's scheme everywhere. He placed hunting in the lower strata, but it was also done by Kshatriya as their favourite pastime. All the caste can't be placed in the occupational category, there were several castes like Dusadh, Musahar,etc, who cannot be placed in any particular occupational category. Sinha wrote, that most of the crafts are

much later in origin than agriculture, but agriculture always held higher than all other occupations in India.

Brahmanical Theory of higher social order

Abe Dubois, who wrote Brahmin's in order to have & maintain their higher social order, originated & developed the Caste system in India. The Brahmin's in order to retain their authority imposed several social restrictions on 'Non-Brahmins', particularly on Sudra's. To maintain their purity, they placed limits on dietary habits, social contacts, and endogamy.They gave themselves a higher place in the books and put the other one inferior to them. Dr. Ghurye (1961) also supports the 'Brahminical theory', he describes that the " Caste is the Brahminic child of Indo- Aryans culture cradled in the land of Ganges and hence transferred to other parts of India by Brahminic prospectors". Ghurye in his work analysis that "The Brahmin literature classified as 'Dwijas' and '*ekjati*'(the Sudra). The restrictions on marriage, acceptance of food,etc, contemplated only four classes in the society, came to be the characteristic of every well-marked group".

Racial Theory : The Racial Antagonism

Sir Herbert Risley proposed the racial theory of caste. According to him,there is a distinction on the basis of the twice-born groups and the Sudras, the Indian structure rests on the basis of racial antagonism by the prominence granted to the factor of color (Varna). The racial theory has its idea of ceremonial purity. The Aryans had their superiority and inferiority concerns; they considered themselves superior to the original inhabitants. The 'Aryans' were 'Patrilineal' in nature, and the aboriginals who were conquered by them were matrilineal. The conquerors took the country's women as concubines or wives, but they did not give their daughters to them, the children from that marriage did not get acceptance in society, they were called 'Chandals. 'They were regarded as the half-breed community allocated the lowest role in society, the feeling of racial superiority eventually responsible for the root of the caste system in India. The six caste formation processes were written by Risley as; the shift in traditional occupation, customary shifts, migration, preservation of old customs and practices, enrollment in the Hindu fold, and the position of religious enthusiasts.

Marxism & Theory of Caste

The Marxist theory correlates the relationship between the economic position and the social position. The economic interpretation is too mechanical in nature. R.S.Sharma extends his explanation of the division of classes with relating to Senart's division, wrote "It seems, then,

that in the beginning, the Upanayana was the affair of the whole tribe, but as the tribe disintegrated into classes, it became a prerogative, an honorific distinction to be attained by means of wealth, high social position, which gave the initiated access to, more or less exclusive, often secret societies. Following Senart's view that clan exogamy and tribe endogamy later developed into the feature of the caste system, it may well be argued that the tribal initiation was transformed into the Upanayana of the three higher Varnas, with the result that it helped to bring about the social degradation of the Shudras". R.S.Sharma has not provided any evidence in the support of the theory, he contradicts his statements himself, at one place he wrote Shudras were a conquered tribe, but he also wrote Shudras were a conquered tribe, but he also wrote that the consequent on their becoming poor due to denied Upanayana, because they were poor. Ambedkar also wrote, the degradation of Shudra due to denied of Upanayana by the Brahman. Sachidanand Sinha, wrote that the theory of economic origin is true so all the low caste people being poor, and the caste & class system would get merge and the caste system would get diminished. But the system was divided into some other factors, the change in the economic position of the individual does not lead to change in his caste positioning. The Marxist & functionalist views appear to be valid only within a certain range and in a certain context.

Evolution and Characteristics of Caste System identified by Eminent Scholars

S.V. Ketkar defines the caste as a social community with two characteristics: membership is limited to those who are born of members and comprises all individuals so born; second, members are prohibited from marrying outside the group by inescapable social rule. The author chooses to give characteristics of the caste instead of a simple description since he feels that this will give the caste a clear identity. Besides, the author also stated that *"the word caste and sub-caste are not absolute but comparative in meaning. 'Caste' is the larger group, while 'sub-caste' is the smaller group"*.

Senart provides the explanation of caste in context to the similarities of three systems namely, Indian, Greek & Romans. These three civilizations were the oldest ones, have many similarities in their customs, social practices, and social relations. Senart cites the example of the 'Gotra' custom of the marriage system of India and Rome, the transfer of female 'Gotra' after marriage to that of her husband. The presence of caste panchayats in India is similar to Rome and Greece. Senart concludes, after the assessment and comparisons, that the caste is the natural creation of ancient Aryan institutions.

Nicholas Dirks analyzes that the caste is taken as the expression of traditional India &the core value of the Indian culture. The Indian society before the British rule was fragmented into the

communal grouping, which are the centers for social identity. Dirks wrote that in Colonial times 'caste got framed as we know it', it gets framed and becomes a single term for all the diversified forms of social identity. Caste becomes a colonial representation of Indian 'civil society' that in turn, justified colonial presence.

G.S. Ghurye, provided the core features of the Hindu caste system instead of describing 'caste' as a term: segmental division of society, hierarchy, restriction of social interaction, civil and religious disabilities and privileges, limited choice of occupation, and marriage restriction.

Celestin Bougle: defined the caste in the three characteristics hierarchy, hereditary specialization, and repulsion, he explained it as the "hereditarily specialized and hierarchically arranged groups". According to his analysis different caste has the characteristics of repulsion, they repel with each other rather than attraction. The repulsion through the manifestation of endogamy and commensulity.

Krober defines it as "an endogamous and hereditary sub-division of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with other such divisions". Kroeber's notion is much related to the functional theory of stratification, the caste is much like the special forms of social classes present in every society, have distinct customs & laws which are rigid in nature. In the strict stratification of the Indian society ' Sudras' were kept at the lower strata with bountiful restrictions.

B.R. Ambedkar on the Caste System of India

.B.R.Ambedkar was the first scholar to establish that the untouchables were non-Hindus, through his writing in the book *"Who were shudras".* For that he used the Census Commissioner report of 1910, cited the ten points criteria used by the census commissioner to determine or categories a new set of people who were 'not hundred percent Hindus'. Census reporters from most parts of India found that most of the untouchables fall within the framework of the ten-point criterion from different parts of India. As to get qualify as Hindu, a person must follow a minimum of five tenets which are:

1. Accept the authority of the Vedas.

2. Accept the authority of Hindu Gods and Goddess.

3. Bow before the authority of Hindu temples.

4. Accept the supremacy of Brahmans

5. Revere Cows.

The Indian caste system is complicated in itself, as it is diverse in different regions. In South India, we don't found there any indigenous Kshatriya and Vaisya categories, whereas the Sudra category is extremely bigger there than else. In South India, Sudra's and Brahmin's both were inordinate in size and traditionally dominant castes in southern villages and the various caste which they dominate are from the Sudra category. Being belong to the Sudra category is different in different regions.

Dr. Ambedkar explored that prohibition, absence of endogamy, are the essence of the caste system. He argued that "Caste in India means an artificial chopping off the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy" (only characteristic peculiar to Caste). The text relates the problem of Caste with reference to the surplus woman and surplus man. He was of the view that caste system exists before the Manu. He was an upholder of it, but certainly, he did not and could not ordain the present order to Hindu Society, Manu's work only deals with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of Caste Dharma. He further wrote, the sub–division of a society is quite natural. But the unnatural thing about these sub-divisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self–enclosed units called **Castes**. As conclusion Dr Ambedkar discern four important points:

1. Among the Hindu population there lies a organic unity.

2. That caste is a parceling into bits of a larger cultural unit;

3. That there was one Caste to start with; and

4. That classes have become Castes through imitation and ex-communication.

Further wrote the book provocatively after studying the religious history of India over fifteen years. He wrote that the present-day Shudras are a collection of castes drawn from heterogeneous stocks, are racially different from the original Shudras of the Indo-Aryan Society. In the book, he critically analyzes: the riddle of Shudras, The Brahmanic Theory of the Origin of the Shudras. Ambedkar pointed out that scriptures of Hindus from where the understanding about the caste system emanantes. It is divided into 2 parts.Part 1- has 6 chapters that explains the brahman theory of origin and status of Shudras, shudra versus Aryans, Aryans against Aryans, Shudras, and dasas. Part 2 - Explains hidden story Shudras were, Kshatriya, degradation of Shudras and story of reconciliation. Ambedkar also explained here Aryan& Indo Aryan migration theory.

Especially he stated here that shudras of Hindu society is entirely different from that of Indo-Aryan society.

Conclusion

Caste, not only implies the hierarchy, segmentation but also the difference. The transformation can be seen from the subservience to negotiations in the lower status group. In contemporary times, the former importance of the Varna system is lost, the institution of the jati becomes strong and it continuously exercises its persuasive influence over the behavior of most of the people. Subrata K.Mitra analyzes that before the decline in the power of caste hierarchies had become fully apparent, an increasing preoccupation with jatis and jati-clusters has eroded 'the ideological basis of the Varna scheme'. K.L. Sharma, defines the caste system as a "socio-religious system concerning mainly with the caste endogamy and clan exogamy combining hypergamy and hierarchy has not only become visibly weak, but it has also turned into a politico-economic formulation".

The caste structure is based on the idea of purity & pollution, considered as the main criteria for the determination of a caste or subcaste within the ranked order. The Brahmans claimed to be the purest group and placed at the top of the caste hierarchy. Scheduled Caste also named as untouchables or Dalits, engaged in the polluted occupation placed at the lowest level of caste hierarchy. The Indian caste system is the closed stratified system, where the status, power, prestige, class are ascribed on the basis of birth, inheritance, and family background. In the caste system, the hierarchy also affects the structure of power in society, which regulates social supremacy rather than economic power. The caste system has such strong roots in India that it formed the social and economic framework for the people of India. The system stratified the people into favorable and unfavorable positions, created the hierarchy of unequal and uneven social groups, and the basic rights and duties get assigned on the basis of birth, not on the capabilities, which are not subject to change. Dalits were placed at the lowest rung of the hierarchy, termed as *Ati-Shudras* or *Avarna*, treated as outcaste and *achutts (untouchables)*. In the past, they were suffered from innumerable humiliations, extreme poverty, and social seThe term Dalits is the narrow connotation inclusive of the Scheduled Castes, the erstwhile untouchables, or the depressed classes residing in different parts of the country. The practice of untouchability and the caste system, highlight the question of Dalits, that who are included in the category of Dalits.

In Indian society, the term 'Dalit' implies the oppressed segment of the population placed at the lowest strata inthe caste system. The term 'Dalit' is profoundly used to address the section of

society that faced segregation from the mainstream on the basis of caste, and not on the class. Dalit was not a homogeneous group, have significant differences among them, but also there are several things common among them. The prominent significant verity is the social disgrace they experienced, which is the same for the Chuhra of Punjab, Namashudra of Bengal, or the Pulaya of Kerala. Dalits in a general sense are the categories were considered Pollutants and untouchables in the sense that, the presence of them will pollute the purity of other caste segregation. Dalit are further stratified into several sub-castes and follows the hierarchy and social discrimination among themselves. There are caste hierarchies among the dalits also, the Dalits not have interaction with the castes associated with the occupation of scavenging and handling of carcasses of dead animals. The people engage in these occupations regarded as ritually impure and placed at lower hierarchy in the Dalit class themselves. All this further led to the separation of Dalits from full participation in social life. They were exclusively socially and economically marginalized people.

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