
CHAPTER-5
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The discussion of the preceding chapter establishes the fact that the state of Punjab witnessed the presence of all major religions of the land and there were cases of mass conversion from one set of faith to another, especially when the religion of ruler changes with the change in the regime. Besides, the effect of the colonial rule and socio-cultural reform movement during this phase of colonial rule and socio-cultural reforms movements, during this phase of history has a deep impact on the present socio-cultural settings of present Punjab. Also, the gradual transformation in the means of production especially in the non-agrarian sector led to the emergence of some new occupational caste of which some are dominant and some are less dominant. The general perception that Punjab is a state, where people follow the religion of Sikhism seems to be partially true as this part of the land exemplifies the plural character of the nation. This plurality of religion and their interface with the existing caste and emerging sectism, resultant in multiple layers of hierarchy and fragmentation within a caste group, and this fragmentation and hierarchy vary from one region to another depending on the regional equation of the caste and economic positioning. The notion of ‘Dalit consciousness’ which symbolizes the collective aspiration of the different caste groups has subsided by the internal differences among the communities. Inter-caste division among the Dalits has led to the formation of various caste-based social clefts that pushes them further into the cobweb of various protracted social conflicts resulting in fault lines in Dalit unity in contemporary Punjab.

The present chapter is based on the reflexes and observation gathered through the field study in the select district of the state of Punjab especially during the year 2017 to 2019. Since the population studied is very large and most of the person of a caste group are not able to understand the technical terms like assertion and consciousness, I had restricted my inquiry to the political/caste leaders, who play an important role in interest articulations as well as ‘interest aggregation’. Besides, the non-participant observation was also an important tool of inquiry especially in understanding the role of ‘icons’ and ‘symbols’ and structures in understanding the phenomenon of Dalit assertion in Punjab.

Also, participation in informal gatherings, marriage function, etc. as an observer helps in understanding the 'caste consciousness movements' in Punjab. The semi-structured interview schedule was the main tool used for gathering information from the respondents. Since the study area and population are very vast, I have based my study on the interview of the select political and social leaders in the different realms of the Dalit movements. Also, the selection of the respondent was based on purposive random sampling and the snowball method proves very helpful in this regard.

As discussed in the preceding chapters a total of thirty-seven caste has been placed in the scheduled caste list. However, majority of them can be grouped together into two or three major clusters. The first cluster of Mazhabi Sikhs that of *balmikis/bhangis* constitute a total of 41.9 % (30.75 and 11.15 % respectively) of the total scheduled castes population. Similarly, the second case cluster made up of Ad Dharma (15.74%) and Ravidass/Ramdasia Sikhs (25.85%) together constitutes another 41.59 %. Although there is no official data about the distributive pattern of these castes, the reflections from the field suggest that demographically they are also divided on different geographical reasons of the state. *Chamar* has a thick population in the Doaba region and the *Mazhabi* settled in the Malwa/Majha part of Punjab.

Fieldwork provided me the important insights into the dynamics of caste and society in Punjab. For the fieldwork, I visited the main cities namely Amritsar, Jalandhar, towns, and villages of Majha, Malwa, and Doaba. The field study results have been compiled into several sections according to mapping the Dalit castes their fragmentations & differentiations and different forms, manifestations of Dalit assertion. Some affinities and differentiation have already been pointed out among these different caste groups in the earlier studies. The dominant literature on this aspect of Punjab already established the existence of various caste clusters and the context in which they emerged. During the course of the field study, one of the very starting points of inquiry is that how these different caste clusters came into existence in the society of Punjab and also what kind of relationship this group carries within a larger framework of the Dalit identity. It was an inquiry that how these caste groups perceived each other and how and why they place a certain group below or above to a particular group in a larger social construct.

Religion Identity, Cultural assertion, and Fragmentation

Punjab is the land of a conglomeration of several religions. The search for humanistic aspects in then-existing religions led to the birth of Sikhism, however, the persistent inequality and discrimination result in dissatisfaction in Sikhism and this led to the emergence of the Ad-Dharm movement, and several other sects or such faith groupings like the emergence of Ravidassi Deras and many more which continues up to recent past. And this makes Punjab a state of people having different religious faith & affiliations. In my fieldwork in the different villages of the Districts of Jalandhar, Gurdaspur, Nawashehr, Ludhiana, Ferozpur & Amritsar reflected the different religious faith among the people, especially the community belongs to the scheduled caste. There are several movements with spiritual, social, and cultural activities that led to the awakening of Dalits and identity formation among them. Religious beliefs and customs along with the regional peculiarities result in the establishment of many castes and their proto-types with their specificity. In an interview, a Dalit leader of the Amritsar city pointed out the general feature of caste composition in Punjab. The *Mazhabi* and *Blamikis* together constitute the 'Chura' caste cluster. However, their religious affiliations are different. This caste community worshipped *Balmiki* and follows the religion of Hinduism. However, they hold a low positioning in Hindu society. *Balmiki* temple having some feature of *Guru Granth Sahib* is the center point of their community. However, in the last few years, *Valmiki-Ambedkarite* identity has taken root with many sections of the *Balmiki* community. This gradual evolving identity with a slogan 'educate, agitate and organize' aimed for the spread of education and critical consciousness among *Balmiki*-comparatively a less educated schedule castes in Punjab. *Mazhabi* Sikhs are the single largest Dalit community of the state. Historically, they are *Churas* who embraced Sikhism, they traced their religious affiliation from *Bhai Jaitaji*, who became popular with the name *Baba Jeewan Singh* after baptism by the 10th Sikh Guru Govind Singh. Among the *Mazhabis*, *Baba Jeewan Singh* is popular with the name 'Rangretta guru ka beta' (Rangretta as guru's son). This affiliation with Sikhism makes them keener and more enthusiastic towards their religion and their Gurudwara in the village. *Mazhabis* are concentrated in the Ferozpur, Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Faridkot, Mansa, and Bhatinda districts of Punjab. Despite their highest population number, they are the one most marginalized section among the Dalits with the lowest literacy rate.

The *Chamar* caste cluster consists of *Chamar* and *Adi-Dharmis* and the Ravidassias –who have both affiliations with the Hindus and Sikhs but are more inclined towards Sikhism. There are a few cases of conversion to Christianity and Islam. However, the general inclination of the *Ravidassias* is towards Sikhism and the *bani* (writings) of *Guru Ravidass* have been honoured to be a part of Guru Granth Sahib.¹ However, this does not ensure equality of treatment. Dalit Sikhs do not receive equal treatment in the upper caste gurudwaras as reflected in the number of *gurumats* (resolutions) adopted by the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee from 1926-33 . One section of Chamar follows Hinduism as their religion and claim themselves scion of *Chandravanshis* (for example weaver '*Julaha*').

Boota Mandi was the ideological fulfillment of Ad-dharm movement. Boota Mandi founded by the single caste Chamar, where they are known as Ad-Dharm with Ravidass as the cultural symbol. As the Ad-Dharm movement strengthen it reinforced the other identities to emerge. Boota Mandi is the symbol of proud, self sufficiency, financial well of and social consciousness. The boota mandi means 'Boot Market' or more accurately, 'Leather Market'. The prominent leather trade has contributed immensely to the growth of Boota Mandi. Until around 1930, there was nothing, where Boota Mandi now stands. Boota Mandi was brought on the map of Dalit politics by the Ad-Dharmis of two main sub castes *Kaler* and *Mahey* who were outcaste from their villages. Boota Mandi has emerged as the most important economic and political center of the entrepreneurs of Ad-Dharmis in Punjab. The enterprising Ad-Dharmis finding the avenues modified their skills and ventured into leather and sports goods industries.²

Ad-Dharmis occupies a significant position among the Dalits of Punjab. The consciousness and assertion movement led by Mangoo Ram during the 1920s and 1930s mobilized a substantial chunk of *Chamars* of the Doaba region and played a significant role in transforming their social status and identity. The *Ad-Dharm* movement followed the teachings of *Guru Ravidass* and in 1931 succeeded in registering themselves as a distinct religious community with a demography of 418, 789 members of the community but the movement dissipated soon after its grand success in 1931.

¹ when 5th Sikh guru , Guru Arjun Dev compiled the Adi-Granth he added the bani of Guru Ravidass along with the other gurus and Sufi saint,

² Juergensmeyer, Mark.(1988). *Religion as the Social Vision: The movement against Untouchability in 20th –Century Punjab*. England: University of California Press.

The theology of Ad-Dharm believes that there was a creator god, Adi Purkh (Original being), whose wisdom is based on the ideas of the Saints like Kabir and Ravidass, Gurus, and protestant Bhakats. The backbone of this Movement is the protestant Sant Guru Ravidass, who himself belonged to a Chamar Community. Adi Dharmis use the picture of Saint Ravidass as the mark of Adi Dharmi identity or at their logo. His writings are considered sacred texts. The Ad Dharm followers practice their reverence as the Hindu worships their god and Sikh worships their Guru's. Now, the Ad Dharm transformed into the caste. Ad Dharma is the most prominent caste in the Doaba region of Punjab. The devotee of Ad Dharma worships Guru Ravidass and Ad Dharma was successfully mobilized the Chamar community of the Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur Districts and gave them a kind of confidence. The Ad Dharmis are today among the most well-off, prosperous, educated Caste among the other Dalit communities of the country and far ahead of other communities in Punjab.

Ad Dharma developed the own autonomous religious identity, with the Ravidass as an icon. The Ravidassi refurbish and re-store their community identity with the emergence of Dera Sachkhand Ballan and this Dera further become the Centre of Dalit Activities of Punjab.

In the fieldwork, I came across the fact in some interviews that the Gurudwara's, Dera's, sects are one of the important resembling factors of identity formation or mark themselves different. It also propagates to negate the dominated ideology by establishing their belief system, celebrate their festivals, and have their own icons. Somewhere it also part and parcel of economic prosperity and make the parallel of culture-centric hegemony.

Ad Dharm invented the religious identity as well, their greetings to one another is '*Jai guru dev*' (victory of the divine guru) which has the reciprocity of '*Dhan Guru Dev*' (blessed be the divine guru). The followers adopted the Upanishadic phrase '*Soham*' (I am that) as a mantra, as it implied the basic unity and equality of the world. The followers also appeal to wear red colour either in form of Turbans or as armbands, in part because upper-caste Rajputs in the area near Rajasthan refused to allow lower caste members to wear such a regal color. These methods were meant to differentiate them from the other religions.

However, *Ad-dharma* was the only movement in north western India that has the goal of a respectable place for the SCs through the cultural transformation and political assertion. After a phase of the eclipse, the *Chamars* of the Doaba witnessed a new kind of resurgence under the aegis of *Dera Sachkhand Ballan*. This is a new centre of the emancipation of the *Chamars* of the same Doaba region. Ad-Dharma movement started in Hoshiarpur district and the *Dera* has its head centre in the Jalandhar. The Dera emphasis on the freedom from vices and the campaign against alcohol and narcotics soon culminated in a larger following across the caste community. The Deras became a common point for the followers of different religious practices.

This division among the Chura caste community into various sub-caste groups either due to adaptation of different religious practices or due to change in occupational status or both resultant into increasing layered hierarch among the scheduled caste. Caste endogamy was the way of life for Indian society and it was the first principle of division among the Dalit castes. None of them inter-married and any such instance could invite the wrath of the caste community, particularly the caste of the girl in a patriarchal society. Internal divisions among the untouchables became highly functional for the sustenance of the caste system

The assertive social movement led to the cultural assertion among the various group of Dalit communities in the form of Dera's, which challenge the cultural hegemony of Jat Sikhs. The Dera's are the mode of assertion for the subaltern religiosity and the means of social change. The Dera's are caste-centric, having their religious symbols and religious methods. Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Doaba preached the teaching of Saint Ravidass has the huge following of Chamar Dalits in India and overseas. At the time of the Ad-Dharam movement, the image of Guru Ravidass has projected in a manner that concretizes the newly conceived Dalit cultural space in the state. Ravidass, one of the important names from the Bhakti movement, make attacks or criticizes social oppression and untouchability. Dera Sachkhand in Ballan village near Jalandhar and Dera Chak Hakim near Phagwara was prominent at the time of the Ad Dharam movement, their spiritual spaces provide the path for the manifestation of the social consciousness among the Dalits. Not only in Ravidassi Deras the religious metaphors are also reflected in other Dalit communities with the construction of Balmiki temple at Amritsar by its followers, the building of separate gurudwara by Dalits whether Mazhabi's or else and finding an

alternative in Dera like Sacha Sauda. The modern cultural assertion is also reflected in fusing Ambedkar's identity with Ravidass, the modern teachings with spirituality. The role of Dera is not limited to the subaltern consciousness but they also form the political consent of the different caste groups among their followers.

Dera Sachkhand Ballan is the center of social mobility and social consciousness among the Dalits of Punjab. The Dera Sachkhand Ballan, located in the village Ballan, 12 kilometers from the Jalandhar city. Juergensmeyer writes the Dera dedicated to saint Ravidass "not only provided focus on the spiritual life, but they also functioned as lower caste Centre as well." Dera Ballan comprises the shrine, a communal kitchen (langar hall), dispensary, outbuildings, library, and congregation hall for the capacity of 25,000 devotees with the charitable eye hospital. It publishes a vernacular weekly and distributes Dalit literature free of cost. It also established the school for poor children and providing free education to them.

Dera Sachkhand Ballan is having the same status as Mecca is for Muslims and the Golden temple for the Sikh faith. Dera Sachkhand Ballan has a prominent role in raising the social consciousness, imbibes the feeling of pride among Dalits, and brought cultural transformation among the Dalits of Punjab. It has emerged as the prime 'protector' of Ravidassi identity in recent times. Although Dera has its roots in the 1920s at the Ad Dharm movement Dera was setup by Sant Pipal Dass in early the 20th century. Sant Pipal Dass known as Sant Sarwan Dass lived in the village and taught the poor and the Dera was known as Dera Sant Sarwan Dass. Later a landlord of the village gifted him the land of one Kanal near to his shelter, where the Dera is situated now. Sarwan Dass remained head of the Dera from 11 October 1928 until he died in June 1972. He was succeeded by Sant Hari Dass and Sant Garib Dass. The Dera is presently worked under the headship of Sant Niranjana Dass.

Dera Sachkhand Ballan is a religious institution, preached humanistic values and spirituality and the Ravidassi message for the formation of the casteless society. The Dera is very much active in the local Dalit issues, a focal point in Dalit politics and for Dalit activism. Sant Sarwan Dass was in contact with the Mangoo Ram and at the time of the Ad Dharm movement, Mangoo Ram had visited the Dera Ballan for solidarity among the Dalit masses. The marginalized section of Punjab was oppressed due to the Jajmani system of the caste-based hierarchy and the division of caste among the religions. The

head of Dera Ballan established separate religious centers in Punjab. In 1950 SarwanDass visited Banaras (UP) at the birthplace of Guru Ravi Dass. After witnessed that nothing concrete has existed in the name of Guru Ravi Dass, the Dera Ballan took the task to build the temple at Ravidass's birth city Banaras. With the contribution of Dera Sachkhand Ballan, the mammoth Shri Guru Ravidass Janam Asthan Mandir in the city of Banaras took place. The followers of Dera from India and abroad enormously funded to build the temple which gets completed in 1994. The then president of India K.R.Narayanan inaugurated the temple monument gate, the ceremonial installation of the golden dome atop of the temple was performed by the then BSP head, Kanshi Ram.

Every year at the birth anniversary of the Ravidass, Dera makes special arrangements to the devotees by train from Jalandhar to Banaras to visit the holy shrine of Ravidass. The train is popularly known as Begum Pura express among its followers. The Dera also have strong transnational networks across the globe.

Interestingly most of these caste groups have intra-caste differences over the religious followings and practices, for example, the Chura caste community who were traditionally involved in the practice of scavenging and weaving, in due course fragmented and divided into different religious lines. The Chura Sikhs, called Mazhabi after conversion³, took *Pahul*⁴ abstained from the use of tobacco, wore long hair, and were generally strict in their observance of their orthodox or Kesh Dhari Sikhism. Those who give up their job of scavenging and switched to leatherworking known as 'Rangretta' considered being higher than ordinary mazhabis. The Churas having faith in Islam, called Mussalis and Kutas and were divided into two groups one who renounced the polluting nature of the job (like scavenging) and restricted themselves to pure food and observed Islam and there were those, who had not made such changes. In the frontier towns of the North-western provinces as in Peshawar, the *Musalli* was a sweeper and grave digger. In the southwest part of Punjab, the *Kutas* were Muslim sweepers who had settled on the bank of the lower Indus and has given up scavenging and eating carrion. They had taken to making ropes and working in the grass and heeds and some even cultivate the land.

³ The majhabi became a separate caste in Sikhism, In 1881 census both Chura Sikhs and mazhabi sikh are listed.

⁴ *Pahul* or Amrit Sanskar, is the name given in the Sikh tradition to the Baptism ceremony which is also known as the initiation ceremony into the Khalsa "brotherhood

5.1.1 Emergence of a New Religious Identity with Conflict

It is a very important incident that changed the whole structure of Caste emancipation and triggered the disturbances in Punjab by followers of Dera and the other Dalit groups. On the 24th of May, 2009, Six upper castes men armed with guns entered the Guru Ravidass Gurdwara in Vienna (Austria), and started shooting, targeted the two visiting Saints Niranjn Dass and Saint Ramanand from Punjab, who were giving a sermon at that time. Ramanand has died and serious injuries were reported to Niranjn Dass, the head of Dera Sachkhand Ballan. The assailants were offended by the heterodox religious practices of the Dera and believed to be part of the Sikh fundamentalists group. More than 30 followers of Dera were reported injured. When news of the Vienna Attack and death of Saint Ramanand spread, strong violence erupted in Punjab, a state-level curfew was imposed, and the army was called in to restore order.

After this unfortunate killing and attacks on Dalit leaders, had triggered into the violent clashes in Punjab and the followers wants establish a new religion as '*Ravidassi*' different from Sikhism altogether. At that time Akali Dal and SGPC did their best to please Dera Sachkhand Ballan, Jalandhar, so that Dalits don't leave Sikhism but at the same time Government of Akali Dal arrested several Ravidassia leaders during the campaign for the new religion. The Dera Sachkhand Ballan compiled its holy book the Amritbani based on the teachings of Guru Ravidass. The announcement of the new religion was made by the present head of the Dera Niranjn Dass in January 2010 from the birthplace of Gurudwara Ravidass in Banaras. Their new holy book was installed in the Jalandhar temple on the Birth Anniversary of Guru Ravidass on February 1, 2012.

Despite the Dera Ballan other Dera are also very prominent in Punjab. According to the famous newspaper Desh Sewak, Chandigarh, there are more than 9000 Sikh as well non-Sikh Deras in the 12000 villages of Punjab. In Sikh Deras code of conduct (Sikh rahit) is observed whereas non –Sikh Deras like Radha Soamis, Sacha Sauda, Nirankaris, Namdharis, Divya Jyoti Sansthan, Bhaniarwala, and Ravidassi among, they follow the different practices according to their faith.

In the fieldwork, I came across the reality of the presence of more than one worship place and Gurudwara in a single village along with several local Dera's and sects. In the villages, Jatts have one Gurudwara, but the other castes also had constructed their own

place of worship or Gurudwara, which are plural in numbers, for example, Mazhabi has a different one, Ravidassi has a different one. Dera's are also prominently seen there.

The Daulatpur village (a village on the way towards the city Jalandhar), has five worship places, the village has three Gurudwaras, two Muslim Dargah, three cremation grounds. One Gurudwara was constructed by the Jatts, the other two Gurudwaras belongs to the Ravidassi community, the village also has two Dera's, one of Radha Soami Dera and the second are Nirankari Dera. Dera's were considered separate from the religious belief system. The cremation grounds belong to mainly two major communities the Jatts and Ravidassi, meanwhile, the third cremation ground was under construction belongs to the Chuhra community.

The Gurudwara built by Ravidassi followers has the statue of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar in the courtyard of Gurudwara. 'Ravidassi Bani' placed in the Gurudwara same as the 'Guru Granth Saheb' get placed & worship in the Sikh Gurudwara's. followers do '*Shabd*' '*Kirtan*' of Ravidass Maharaj. They have a slogan also "*bolo Soh Nirbhau, Shri Guru Ravidass Maharaj ki Jai*" which is similar to Sikh's '*Jo Bole SonihalSatSriakal*'. The priest and followers having the conception that 'RavidassJi' was much elder to Nanak Ji and Nanak preached the teaching of RavidassJi Maharaj. The village population mostly consists of elderly people.

In Ludhiana, the Tarkhan's (OBC) have separate Gurudwara & prefer to go to their own constructed Gurudwara. In an interview the respondent not comfortable calling himself 'Balmiki' as the 'Balmiki' related to Hinduism and the rituals, he insists to call himself 'Bhangi'.

The religion is blended in Punjab, some of the Mazhabi, Balmiki& Chamar community people celebrate the festivals celebrated by the Muslim community and Hindu community. When a respondent (a lawyer & Dalit activist), when asked about the religious affiliation, he belongs to Bhangi community, did not want him to call himself Dalit, he said Mazhabi & Balmiki community does not have any clear take on religion because they follow Sikhism, Hinduism & Islam all. They used to went together for the pilgrimage tour of Anantpur Saheb followed by Naina Devi and Balaknaath and the Pir dargah.

When an educated Mazhabi Sikh respondent (Dalit political activist) asked about religion, he said, ‘professing any religion, the community does not get anything, he said the elder people are more inclined towards the religious faith, whereas the new generation is much religious, they were more practical and aware. He shares the experience one of known in the Gurudwara of Sikhism, “A person from Mazhabi Sikh community got the job as the contractual peon, later he developed religious faith in Sikhism, became the true follower through the religious ceremony of ‘Amrit chakna’, the person used to come to Gurudwara at 4am and did the cleaning work there. Till his lifetime he worked as the cleaner at the Gurudwara never became the priest ‘the Granthi’. While talking to the respondent, I infer he wants to say that they do not follow Sikhism because it has the characteristics of fundamentalism and dominancy somewhere.

The trend of so multiple Gurudwara’s in a single village is the reflection of the struggle of caste in the religious spaces in past and present as well as the hegemony and the reason for the separate place of worship.

One of the respondent ‘Chamar’ by the community, said ‘Sikhism’ has the concept of Langar & Pangat, but it also has discrimination, shared one of the incidents of his village that ‘one of the chamar community girls of his village wants to help in making the langar, but the ‘Jatt’ females not allowed her to make it’. He supported the Dera’s, especially the Dera of Sachkhand Ballan, who said it is proud that somewhere scheduled caste are leading the community and head of the institution.

In the interview with the Dalit activist of Punjab, who belongs to Chura community, said the ‘Sikhism’ initially followed by all the people without any difference, but with time its got dominated by the ‘Jatt’ community, who are Shudra’s in Varna but practice Brahmanism in practice in social & religious aspects. People embrace Sikhism but also follow their dominant culture, practices & discrimination. Most of the Gurudwara’s have the managing body of the Jatts community, they have a financial hold over the Gurudwara’s working, which makes them dominant in religious affairs. There is no space for the SC community in the managing committee, no financial hold in management, no say and power over there. The discriminatory practices of the dominant caste in religious aspects compels the other caste to have their own religious space for worship, no matter it is big or small.

In the Doaba region, there were so many Ravidassi temples in the region, these temples also have Ambedkar's statues or photos, they call Ambedkar '*tiewala baba*', they said '*Ravidass ko ser jhukana hai, Ambedkar kibaat manni hai*'.

At 'Rahpur Khurd' village near Amritsar, one of the respondents told us that 'there are two cremation grounds, one of the Jatts and other of Dalis, due to some consequences once the Dalit get cremated into the cremation ground belongs to Jatts, but later they don't allow to collect the ashes (*Phool nhi chugne dete*)'.

5.1.2 Cultural Assertion of Dera with Social & Cultural factors

The emergence of the Dera can be seen as the emergence of alternate sectism due to incongruence in the basic ideals of Sikhism and persistent inequality in the society. On the issues of Dera, it was found during the study that people were hesitant to admit their faith towards Dera. In the rural areas, especially the marginalized poor Dalit individuals were found a sense of identity which is more respectful and alternative to the dominant interpretation. A respondent, when asked, said Dera's are a matter of moral concern not offers the people anything more than spirituality, not beneficial in financial terms and political terms.

One of the respondents, who is also the student leader of SFI, has the view that 'Dera have exacerbated the phenomenon of castism & discrimination in the society. Their significance is that the followers uplifted themselves from the caste and ritual bondages of the primordial societies'.

The interview with one of the noted scholars and activist K.C.Sulekh provided a deep insight into the trajectory of the Dalit socio-political and cultural construct of Punjab. He shares his view that on 'Dera', according to him the lack of education, superstition among the people led them to follow the Deras. It is the very much 'Brahmanvadi' ideology led the people to become the follower of Deras. The emergence of Dera's is the 'bad fortune of Punjab' it's a setback to the rationality and broad-minded culture of Punjab. Dera's make the people mental slaves.

When asked about Darshan Kumar, layman people don't know him, only the people read and write about Punjab Dalit heard about him having the view, that he is a confused person, he worships Ambedkar, who himself refutes the Dharmashastra and rituals. He

worships 'Ravana' puts the surname 'Asur' as a suffix in his name. It is also an act to focus on or highlight the identity. Darshan Kumar is completely against the teaching of Dr. Ambedkar in manifestation.

One of the respondents, a Dalit leader of Amritsar on the issue of religion & Dera said that the presence of numerous Dera's are there to divide their community into fractions. The unity of the community is broken down; make them divided into every sphere. The SC community is in this trap of the dominant caste, 'he said they divided the SC community as they want to dominate. They know if Dalits were getting united they will agitate, make demands for their rights. Dera's work as that kind of division.

5.1.3 Symbols & Identity

Saint Ravidass is an icon for Dalit, the compilation of his teachings considered as '*Bhagvat Gita*' for Hindu's and '*Quran*' and '*Bible*' for Muslims and Christians respectively. Dalit people have their own religious spaces, different Dera's have their own symbols and flags. Dera Ballan has 'SOH, and 'HARI' like Sikhs have 'EK OMKAR', the Dera have its own '*Amritbani*', '*Ravidassibani*'. The Ravidassi followers at the nameplates of their homes have the inscription of 'SOH' on it, pictures of Ravidass can be seen at the main gates. The graffiti of the Ravidassi village or colonies have the inscription of the teaching of Ravidass. One of the slogans is "*Aisa raj mein kisbhi ko mile Ann, Chote bade sab sam base, rahe Ravidass ke sang*".

The fragmentation among the scheduled caste can be seen, the superiority complex among the scheduled castes, Mazhabi, Ramdassi, Ad-dharmi, Balmiki & Chamar communities have a kind of superiority complex due to their history. The 'Rai Sikh' (lower caste) does not relate with other SC castes. Chamar & Chuhra are distant from each other, there are no commensal relations between the two communities. The assertion cannot only be seen through political participation and mobilization but also through the use of religious and cultural practices and symbols.

Political Mobilization, Representation & Leadership

The political dimension is an important aspect in analyzing the position of Dalits in Punjab. The various factors like religion, caste, kinship, region, language, and leadership are the important determinants in Dalit politics. As the state Punjab consists highest no. of

Dalit population, it consists of the highest share of votes in the electoral politics of Punjab. There are 57 villages in Punjab which have 100% of the scheduled caste population and 2361 number of villages have more than 50% of the scheduled caste. The introduction of a democratic setup and the introduction of constitutional rule in India provided the right to vote to all its citizens without any discrimination. The provision makes every class and section recognize their votes. Dalit becomes an important ally for everyone in factional politics.⁵

In Punjab, the party politics mainly concentrated between the national party the Congress I, and the regional party Shiromani Akali Dal with the CPI, CPI (M), and BSP also mark their presence here. The Akali Dal has been dominated by the upper caste Sikhs (the Jatts). The Akali gain popularity in 1953, by the demand of Punjabi Suba. Akalis claims to have to represent all the Sikhs, but they're always sharp differences in the Sikh community. In the internal classification of the Sikh community caste is the important factor. Punjab being having the highest population of Dalits but did not have that reflection in their political presence. Akali Dal has the domination of Sikh upper castes, the Khatri, and the Jatts. The Dalits who constitute around 25-30% of the Sikh population, remained to the margins of "community affairs". Whereas the Congress party, has good alliance with the non-dominant Sikh caste groups, urban traders, and the other backward & Dalit groups. In 1972-77, Giani Zail Singh was the last non-jaat Chief Minister. The mostly CM were from the dominant community 'JATTS'. Dalits were not ever converted as a political asset in Punjab. Dalits in Punjab the heterogeneous community, having multiple religious practices and they are divided not just in their beliefs but in socially & politically also. In the initial years, Mazbhabi Sikhs have the more inclination towards Sikh religion and Akali politics, whereas Balmiki community with a substantial presence in urban areas, "Hindu" politics of the Jan Sangh in a communally changed politics.

Ad Dharm was the first movement by the scheduled caste of Punjab which has the political edge also. Later it was got supported and get merged with the Ambedkar Scheduled Caste Front. The All India Scheduled Caste Federation was the first party that belongs to the Dalit to contest the elections in Punjab. After the SCF, the Republican Party of India (RPI) came forward in the elections but failed to emerge as a strong Dalit

⁵ Verma, P.S. (1999). Akali-BJP debacle in Punjab: Wages of non-performance and fragmentation, *Economic and Political Weekly* 35,50: 3519-3531.

party. But RPI makes its effort to mobilize the Dalits, make them conscious about Buddhism and propagate the message of Ambedkar.

Till the 1980's Congress party was considered as the secular & neutral party and created the social base among the Muslim minority, landless people, Dalit, and in the middle-class community by its 20 point program for 'total rural regeneration'. In 1975, under the Chief Ministership of Giani Zail Singh, the Congress government in Punjab has introduced a twofold classification of its scheduled caste population. The 25% jobs reserved for the Scheduled caste, of which 50% (12.5% of the total) were offered to Majhabi Sikhs and Balmikis on a priority basis. The scheduled caste community, especially the Balmikis and Mazhabis supported the Congress.

Dalit politics in Punjab entered into a new phase when the Bahujan Samaj Party came into existence. Kanshi Ram a Ramdasia Sikh belongs to the chamar community from Ropar, a leader who shaped the Bahujan Samaj movement into the full-fledged political party on April 14, 1984, on the birth anniversary of B.R. Ambedkar to fulfill the political aspirations of the Dalits of India. BSP adopted the B.R. Ambedkar's ideology and soon turn out to be the political voice of Dalits. It provides new hopes, an alternative, and a strong platform for the Dalit leadership. With the BSP Dalit politics in Punjab entered into a new phase. BSP's ideological plank was there to fight against the issues of purity & pollution and the Brahmanical social order. BSP had marked its presence in the state politics of Punjab in the first election it fought in 1985, especially in the Doaba region of the state when the Ad-dharmis the supporter of the congress switched their loyalties for the Bahujan Samaj Party. BSP used the caste as the medium of political propaganda and succeeded in making the Dalit community politically aware. With the emergence of BSP, Dalits get the alternative choice and also the new point of view.⁶In the initial years of BSP, it was able to attract the Dalit voters, who were the traditional voters of the other political parties. In 1992 BSP contested 105 seats in Punjab and won 9 seats and get 16.19 percent votes out of the total votes polled all over Punjab. In the 1997 assembly elections BSP got only one seat out of 67 which were contested by it. Its vote percentage also declined. Only 7.49 percent of votes were polled. The decline seems to be the resultant of the deep splits and power-sharing decisions with the alliances. Due to that alliance, Dalits feel a detachment from the BSP. The declining trend of BSP continued in 2002 and 2007

⁶ Ram Ronki.(2004). The Dalit Sikhs. *Dalit International Newsletter* (Waterford, CT), 9(3), October, 5–7.

Assembly Elections its performance was also bad as it got only 5.69 and 4.10 percent votes only. The Party gets its lowest phase in the 2012 and 2017 elections, in the last two terms BSP gets zero seats and its Voting percentage is 4.28 and 1.5 respectively. After the 1997 assembly elections, the BSP could not win a single seat in the assembly nor the Parliamentary elections in Punjab. Even its vote share reduced from 16.32% in 1992 to 1.5% in the 2017 Legislature elections as it failed to inspire voters. With the time BSP lost its grip in Punjab, it is not as dominant as it was in the other states, like Uttar Pradesh.

According to Neeru Sharma, BSP failed to get understand the regional, cultural, social, and cultural specificities of Punjab.⁷The notion of purity and pollution, Brahmanism are the main ideological planks of BSP found misfits into the social and cultural domain of Punjab.BSP, which claims to be the party of the oppressed section of the society, had a shocking result in assembly elections of Punjab, even it creates existential crises for the BSP. Even the Scholar raising the question of the idea of assertion which is also connect with the presence of BSP. As per Nirmal Singh, It proves that people are no longer interested in just caste or religion-based politics. The prospect of real development is more important and attractive than dry words like “ethnic identity” and “assertion of caste identity or Dalit identity”.⁸

The Political awareness of Dalits and assertion has been studied by their understanding of Political mobilization, their political participation, and political sociology. Here I discuss the view of those respondents who are actively participated and engaged in the activities of Dalit Politics.

Table: 5.1

Scheduled Caste representation in Panchayats of Punjab 2011-2012

S.no	District	Panchayat	No. of Panchayat in which SC sarpanch elected	Total no. of members elected	
				total	Scheduled Caste
1.	Gurdaspur	1260	194	2617	1117
2.	Pathankot	399	96	1797	594
3.	Amritsar	817	258	5139	1645
4.	Tarn Taran	534	112	736	171

⁷ Sharma, Neeru . (2012) .Caste in Punjab: Political Marginalisation and Cultural Assertion of Scheduled Castes in Punjab. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 19(1): 27-47.

⁸ Singh,Nirmal. (2014).BSP in Punjab Analyzing, *Economic & Political Weekly* http://www.epw.in/sites/default/files/cache/epw_masthead-new.p, Vol. 49, Issue No. 48, 29 Nov, 2014

5.	Kapurthala	549	176	3193	730
6.	Jalandhar	901	474	5545	2621
7.	S.B.S.Nagar	458	122	637	182
8.	Hoshiarpur	1362	485	7821	2821
9.	Rupnagar	590	105	3350	603
10.	S.A.S. Nagar	357	64	1895	489
11.	Ludhiana	908	216	5953	1422
12.	Ferozpur	752	157	4141	802
13.	Fazilka	-	-	-	-
14.	Faridkot	190	39	1364	335
15.	Shri Muktsar Sahib	263	72	2017	665
16.	Moga	337	111	862	773
17.	Bhathinda	314	68	2469	547
18.	Mansa	244	76	1839	592
19.	Sangrur	585	177	4161	1276
20.	Barnala	156	40	1201	274
21.	Patiala	979	294	5909	1646
22.	Fatehagarh Saheb	431	109	2476	757
	Total	12386	3445	65121	20055

Source: <http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/PDF/SCSP/Archives/SCSP-2012-13END.pdf>

The table shows the representation of Scheduled Caste community people in the villages of Punjab in 2011-2012. Punjab the agrarian land, majority of the population living in villages has very less representation of the Scheduled caste community in the Panchayat affairs.

During the course of field study, it has been observed that Dalits contest and win the elections of the Panchayats by having the support of dominant caste members. At the reserved seats, the dominant castes often had a say in deciding who amongst the Dalits should contest the polls. In some cases, even when a Dalit became Sarpanch, the real power remained with the landowning Jatt whose faction had supported the candidate.

As per the discussion with one of the respondents, who branded himself as an Ambedkarite political activist about the political participation of Dalits- “There is rural – Urban and community wise differences as well in the Scheduled caste political participation and in voting behaviour. BSP has only 1-2% stakes in Punjab. Power comes through money. BSP is not there in Punjab as the ruling one, it is incapable to fulfil the interest of the people, as there is no money with the candidates or the followers of the BSP. The leaders didn’t do work at the ground level.”

Respondents have affiliation from any political party have their response according to that, the respondent, who is a retired army officer and the husband of Dalit sarpanch and an Akali supporter said, “Almost all political parties are here, but Akali Dal tries to development of the Dalits. The welfare schemes of Akali dal attract the community. On a similar question, the response of BJP candidate, who is also a two-time counselor of Municipal Corporation Amritsar said, “Dalits still vote for Congress, they feel Congress is good, but Congress looted them for 60-70 Years.”

Another respondent, who is the social and political leader of Dalit said, “Dalit people are the innocent ones, most of them are unaware of their rights, people or the leaders of another party use their weakness for their gains”. Similar views were expressed by the Head of BSP Amritsar who said, our peoples (Dalits) and voters are daily wagers, most of them are poor, illiterate, and unaware, these upper-class parties used them according to its needs, and at the end, they divided our community into different sub-castes.

On the same line, another respondent talked about the Buta Singh, Ex. - Cabinet Minister of Congress belongs to the Dalit community, he said, “He was a home minister of India, a powerful position in the Indian context and can exercise many powers as the Home Minister. But he never helps the people of their community. Another respondent who belongs to Mazhabi Sikh Community feels the same kind of alienation by the Dalit leaders based on the internal classification of Caste.

One of the respondent, the MLA belongs to Balmikis Community feels hopeless when he asked about the future Dalit leadership, being himself as a Dalit Leader he is not so confident about the changing nature of Dalit politics, the respondent said, “We don’t have a capable leader, if any leader is selected then he worked for the party he is affiliated. Another senior leader of the Dalit community, who has 35 years of service in Ambedkar’s mission seems disappointed by the present Dalit leadership, as respondent said “present Dalit leadership is meaningless, they are failed to come together in last 70 years. There is also no hope for future unity that’s why people should stand for ourselves.”

Some of the respondents praise the quota system no matter got benefited from it or not, one respondent who belongs to the Balmikis community, who is not directly benefited by the reservation of 1975 supported the Congress, respondent said, “in our area, only two parties are working Congress and Akali Dal-BJP, BSP is not present there, out of these

two parties, he said that Congress party is better, because it gives them reservation quota. He further criticized the BJP said it has the anti Balmikis policies and said, “We are against BJP because it didn’t support us.”

One of the respondents, an active Dalit political leader at the age of 70 years, respondent said, from last 30-40 years, we are without any capable leader, if we have our leader, people were not supported that leader, we don’t have unity even the Dalits are divided, all opposed each other, we had a Leader, but people were not supported towards him.

The Dalits are facing a crisis of leadership, they feel they don’t have any leader and a political party, as per respondent, “ We don’t have any leader, No one support us, If we have some or create anyone, He becomes corrupt, other parties give some money and then he loses its identity”. Another Respondent added his views in the conversation and said, “If some Dalits register themselves for the elections as the contestant, then others were may kill that person or give some money for the withdrawal of name from the election.

In another interview, the respondent, a Daily wager and active member of Chura Community, said, “In the elections all leaders of the political parties doing fake promises. They only interact with the people at the time of elections to make fake promises, after that they didn’t give any attention to our community. They didn’t give any grant to us, a few thousand rupees of the grant is given to us at the time of Congress which is used for building a roof of 50 sq. yard of the Local religious space.”

In Punjab the local organizations prevail, the voting to any of the political party doesn’t matter, because local level organizations are very much strong and work at the ground level. In earlier times, people buy votes from money, now the organizations have the vote bank, they influence the political parties with it.

When I asked, why the BSP is not so strong in the region, a sarpanch replied “ BSP is not working at the ground level, not work for the education of Dalits, not raised the strong voice against the atrocities over the Dalits. BSP is only making a community urge to them at the time of elections, for vote-seeking purposes”. There are a lot of people nowadays who read & write on Ambedkar. The salutation and greetings of ' JAI BHEEM, JAI AMBEDKAR' are there. Lots of programs, seminars organized on the name Ambedkar, but not get transformed into the votes.

According to K.C. Sulekh 'There are identity crises in leadership after Kanshi Ram among the Dalits, the leaders now don't have to sacrifice will not have care for the community. Only profit and interest-seeking leaders with the aim to get the power to govern by politics.

There should be 3C in leader- **Commitment:** have principles, dedication to the cause

- **Consistency:** not changing the view
- **Contribution:** in concrete terms like B.R.Ambedkar his children die, but not deviate to the cause.

One of the respondent said "*Kanshi Ram have sacrificing nature, he also connected with the people at ground level, but "Maya mein phans gaye"*(engrossed in the affairs of Mayawati). Dalits need a social & Cultural Revolution is a must before the political revolution. Dalit leaders in Punjab not financially strong & lacking a political base.

According to the L.R.Balley (RPI- National Secretary for 6 yrs, RPI also gets 2 seats when he was National Secretary when get asked about the Dalit leadership in Punjab, replied 'RPI was there, but congress makes it vanishes or destroyed it. Being the vice-chairman of All India Action Committee he puts 14 points demands and agitates. Baba Saheb Gaikwad (chairman of the All India Action committee) proposes to have a compromise with Congress. Books written by Baba Saheb Ambedkar are just like GITA but no one truly follows them. There are so many 'Jati's and as much as 'Jati's same no. of Political parties are there, so the fractions are much. The really downtrodden people, the people who work on roads, don't have '*Chetna*', ('Consciousness'), they do not awaken people. For the leadership, we need –Honesty, Dedication, and Devotion. And have to win the confidence of the people. Now, the people are lacking all the things.

He claims himself as the unsung hero of Dalit causes. Did so much for his community, went to jail so many times for that, 35 cases were registered against him. Now no one has that much courage to fight for that cause.

When asked about BSP presence in Punjab, the Sarpanch of a village, who himself a Dalit, responded 'BSP is nowhere in Punjab. BSP candidates and the BSP followers have

no money with themselves, so how could they work to help others. So, why do people go for BSP?

When questioned about the current Dalit leadership situation from A respondent who is a Mazhabi Sikh (worked as an ex .Town Planner in Punjab government) said ‘There is one for Dalits, there were so many political parties on the name of Dalits but did nothing for them, for their upliftment. There is no Dalit representation of Dalits in Punjab. The scenario and situation of Dalits are different from one district to another. One district people didn’t support people of another district people.’ The most deprived section is the laborer one, daily wager, these are not educated, engaged in to meet their daily needs, so how can they came to know about Ambedkar and his teachings. **“baah fadn wala chahida hai”** (need a leader to back them up at every point to time) said they need strong leaders who can fight for their community, resolve their plights, and lead their community.

On the question of Dalit leadership and BSP, the Ambedkarite political activist replied ‘there is no big leadership among the Dalits, all who claims to be Dalit leaders are self-centered people, and YES men of the big political parties seeks for their advantages. BSP in Punjab is just like **“Nalayak baccha jo school nahijate, 11.5 months Padhta nhi, te last 15 din wich syllabus khatam krna chahida h, ta pass hona”**. It is just like a school kid who never went to school but wants to geta pass and promoted to the next class without hardwork. .” BSP didn’t look 5 years in our condition, it comes at the time of elections for the votes only. There is no strong BSP leader in Punjab. If ever the BSP leader won, they only concern for themselves, not for the people. He further said Avtar Singh Karimpuri is a member of Rajya Sabha for 6 years but he didn’t look in our area, he works for his area only”. Presently BSP is just like a shop or business party. Mayawati (Head of Bahujan SamajParty) collected crores of rupees, but she didn’t spend a single rupee for Punjab. After the death of Kanshiram, Mayawati becomes ignorant towards Punjab. Another respondent response to the same question, “In our area, the condition of BSP is very bad and miserable. They work in U.P only. The leaders of BSP are not working for Punjab. If BSP invests in the cause of Dalits in Punjab, then only Dalits will think about it. Another respondent replied that ‘There is no name or popularity of BSP supremo Mayawati is there in Punjab, as she doesn’t visit there not concern over their

plights. After Kanshi Ram's death, no Dalit wave by any political party has been seen in Punjab to unite them. Even Kejriwal did visits, and raised the Alcoholism & Drugs issue'.

The respondent who was earlier part of BSP feel disappointed with the role and performance of BSP in Punjab, The ex-member of BSP said, "On 6 Dec 1956, The topic of Dalit was wrecked after the death of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. In 1964, Kanshiram revives the discourse, raised the hopes of a new beginning for Dalits but after the death of Kashi Ram on 9 Oct 2006, again the efforts stopped up. Now BSP is in an awful condition not in Punjab, but in the whole of India, the party is in a miserable condition. BSP is in urgent need of a leader like Kanshiram. Now there is no hope of the restoration of BSP in upcoming years."

One of the respondents and president of BSP Amritsar said, the electoral democracy of our country is in threat; people only listen to the louder voices, which make their base by the utilization of money, power, and media. Other political parties have economical resources, muscle power, and good contact in the administration. He added, "What we the Dalits have, our peoples are unaware, uneducated, poor and unemployed." We are in day-to-day struggle, but media avoid us, they don't want to recognize and raise our voices."

Mazhabi Sikhs of Punjab also want political mobilization and their active role in political participation. One of the respondents belongs to Baba Jiwan Singh Sanstha, Amritsar respondsto the question of BSP said, "Bahujan Samaj Party is the party for Dalits, but due to fractions among the Dalits, the united stand has not been seen yet, people vote mostly to the personality of the leader, not the party. If all the sections of Dalits get united party will definitely grow.

One respondent of Balmikis Community and the head of Balmikis Yuwa Sabha Amritsar Said, "from Childhood we are seeing only two parties, one in Congress and another is Akali, BSP is an Uttar Pradesh based party, here we even don't know about the party's Candidate.

When asked about the question of Dalit leadership in Punjab, most of the respondents replied that Dalits are not allowed to come forward for active leadership. Mostly the big parties bribe the local contestant or they make low profiling of him by having the propaganda. Even some of the respondents do not consider BSP as the political party of Dalits, they said it is for the 'Bahujans', not for Dalits, it includes all castes which only

exploit Dalits, they want to maintain the hierarchy of upper castes on lower caste communities.

BSP is only best at the time of Kanshiram but not after that. Even the BSP is a poor party in Punjab that has no funds for its candidates. The other political parties focused on fetching votes, not focused on the real problems of Dalits. Group discussions with Dalits and some personal interviews with Dalit representatives reinforced that caste continues to be an important player in political power relations. The majority of people feel that they don't have any political representation; they know the importance of their numerical majority in electoral politics but feel marginalized. They are suffered from leadership crises. In the conversation with different leaders, one thing is observed that the leaders do not seem to be economically mobilized.

Education among the Dalits

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar believes that deprivation from education remains one of the important reasons for the marginalized position of Dalits in Indian society and he laid down a strong foundation for the importance of education among the Dalits. The element of rationality will increase with the horizontal and vertical expansion of education and this helps in breaking various shackles which the Dalit society owns in various part of the land. The importance of education has been seen in the slogan 'Educate, Agitate and Organize' given by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar. Before the Constitutional rights in India, all the people were not able to attain equal rights of education. From the very beginning of the Varna social order, Dalits& women were not allowed for learning Vedas, and also are excluded from formal education. Dalits always struggle for education and remained deprived socially, economically, and educationally backward. JyotibaPhule and B.R.Ambedkar encouraged the Dalits for the education and put effort into their upliftment. Savitri bai Phule, wife of the Jyotiba Phule works in the direction of the education of the women, which she considered as indispensable for empowerment. During the phase of colonial rule, the opportunity to avail the education was very limited, and only upper castes/classes have the opportunity to avail themselves of it. Generally, the section of scheduled castes and tribes remained aloof of it with some exceptions. But the introduction of western education has also opened new horizons and various forms of mobility to those people who get access to education. Very few people from the scheduled caste were successful in

able to gain an education. The unevenness in the literacy rate among the categories of unreserved, SC & ST reflects the discrepancies.

Table: 5.2

Literacy Rate among the Scheduled Castes in Punjab

S. No	Caste	Population			Literacy Rate (%)		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
1.	Chanal	97	49	48	86.2	95.5	76.7
2.	Sarera	14,419	7,433	6,986	84.8	89.5	80
3.	Ad Dharmi	1,017,192	519,947	497,245	81.5	87.2	75.5
4.	Kabirpanthi, Julaha	84,711	44,323	40,388	79.8	84.1	84.1
5.	Darain	865	460	405	79.2	85.7	71.9
6.	Bhanjra	3,659	1,850	1,809	76.9	81.7	71.9
7.	Dumna, Mahasha, Doom	202,710	106,370	96,340	73.4	79.3	67
8.	Batwal, Barwala	19,979	10,473	9,506	73.1	79.3	66.2
9.	Chamar, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi, Ravidasi, Ramdasia, Ramdasia Sikh, Ravidasia, Ravidasia Sikh	2,078,132	1,097,815	980,317	72.8	78.6	66.2
10.	Dagi	322	181	141	72.6	78.3	65.3
11.	Khatik	14,482	7,651	6,831	71.6	79.1	63.1
12.	Megh	141,023	74,331	66,692	69.8	76	62.9
13.	Barar, Burar, Berar	8,451	4,417	4,034	69.1	75.4	62.2

14.	Balmiki, Chuhra, Bhangi	866,953	449,929	417,024	65.9	71.5	59.9
15.	Perna	68	38	30	63.9	65.7	61.5
16.	Sansoi	456	246	210	63.3	74.4	50.6
17.	Kori, Koli	24,921	13,513	11,408	63.2	70.5	54.4
18.	Sirkiband	57,555	30,246	27,309	60.6	66.5	54
19.	Sanhal	1,538	831	707	60	69.5	49.2
20.	Marija, Marecha	260	158	102	59.6	60.1	58.6
21.	Pasi	39,111	21,456	17,655	57.4	64.9	48.1
22.	Bazigar	241,125	124,033	117,092	57	67.1	46.4
23.	Mahatam, Rai Sikh	516,695	265,553	251,142	55.9	65.5	45.9
24.	Dhanak	89,406	47,157	42,249	55	61.7	47.4
25.	Mazhabi, Mazhabi Sikh	2,633,921	1,391,552	1,242,369	54.5	59.3	49.1
26.	Sansi, Bhedkut, Manesh	122,201	62,889	59,312	50.3	57.8	42.5
27.	Mochi	8,763	4,585	4,178	50.3	57.4	42.4
28.	Dhogri, Dhangri, Siggi	391	207	184	49.1	55.8	41.9
29.	Pherera	80	47	33	48.6	68.2	15.4
30.	Od	32,061	16,725	15,336	47.2	55.9	37.7
31.	Sanhai	359	191	168	45.6	58.1	31.1
32.	Gandhila, Gandil Gondola	3,513	1,825	1,688	45.1	55.1	34.4
33.	Bauria, Bawaria	125,259	65,107	60,152	43.3	51.2	34.8
34.	Bangali	4,690	2,436	2,254	35.6	39.7	31
35.	Sikligar	11,807	6,219	5,588	34.8	39	30.2
36.	Gagra	799	421	378	34.3	43.2	24.3
37.	Deha, Dhaya, Dhea	10,560	5,325	5,235	19.6	23.2	15.8
38.	Nat	3,902	2,032	1,870	18.6	22.5	14.4
39.	Sapela	5,872	2,997	2,875	15.5	18.5	12.3

Source: Ministry Of Social Justice & Empowerment, Pp-120-122

In Punjab AD-Dharmis and Chamars are the most educated community among the scheduled castes. Most of the government offices are dominated by the Ad-Dharmis& Chamars but they did not mobilize the other scheduled castes such as Mazhabis. Chamar has the kind of dominating situation among the Scheduled Castes in Punjab, Mazhabis&Balmikis are the most deprived section and also felt threatened by the situation.

Education is a very important aspect to measure the growth of the community. An educated person has status in society, can also do productive for his community. Mazhabi's, Balmikis, Sansi communities are the poorest among the Scheduled Castes; the literacy level is also very low among them. Dalits are uneducated and even the majority of people are not able to write or read basic words. They know the value of education and want their kids and the next generation to be educated. There are several reasons responsible for the lack of education among Dalits. During fieldwork, I observed a few of them through the respondent's views on questions related to education.

On the question of why the Balmikiis not much educated and what being the situation of education in their community. A Balmiki respondent replied: 'we don't have any 'role model/ideal types in our community in this regard he absence o which results in a near absence of urge and awareness among the fellow community members. We are not stopped from school or getting educated. But the problem is that one needs to set an example. In old times "if one get educated and get the job, the person was 'ideal' for that community. But now the mentality is changing, people are getting graduate and postgraduate is normal. Now it is easy to get the work and meet the needs of daily life.

Mazhabi Sikhs, Ambedkarite respondent, when asked about the awareness and importance of education opined that-' Education has a significant role in awareness and to get jobs. Baba saheb aware about its importance and we are following that, now we are enrolling ourselves in college education to gain the knowledge and to come in the stream of life. To get more people of our community aware of the importance of the education system, we do a screening of Baba Saheb movie screening in our village, so the people get to understand the value of education.'

One of the respondents on replied on the question of education said, No quality education for the Dalit students. As most of the Dalits are poor, not able to send their children to private schools so they mostly went to government schools. Private Schools have some quota for economically weaker sections, but now Brahmin's, Jatt's have their quota in economical backwardness, Dalits left behind here also. Only general category children able to get 80-90% marks, they have the facility of tuitions, private education, and English medium education. Dalit children study in govt. schools, with no facility, the teacher education ratio is also miserable. So, how can they compete with other children? There are very less SC children who get around 80% marks.

SC is relatively less educated than the other communities, so how can they relate it with education. Those who got educated, don't care about their community for upliftment. They are not united, separate castes in SC's, superiority and inferiority complex among them. No job leads Dalit youth towards alcoholism, they mostly earned easy money by 'just delivering the drugs(pudiya)'. As the work of laborers now done with the people coming from UP,Bihar, Jharkhand, called them 'Bhaiya'.There is a Public and private school divide needs education for emancipation.Need or demands for equal education & employment. ***"We won't need Aata –Dal scheme."*** Education should be there so society will progress.

One respondent from the Balmiki, working as the sweeper in Municipal Corporation Amritsar, when get asked about the need for education that, "we know the importance of education and we are trying it hard. We know this thing that if we are S.C and our marks are less then also we get a job. But the situation is not so simple, we don't have food to eat, our family conditions are not survivable, if our children are not supported us, then we are not able to feed ourselves.

A similar response comes from another respondent who is Mazhabi Sikh and the ex-army personal said that, what do you think, we are happy with this condition, no we are not, we are just helpless, my son was got good marks, but in 12th standard, he was failed twice, then he leaves the school, I had a dream that my son becomes a high-rank officer in the army', further he added that 'the Education is for rich peoples only, we don't have tuitions, we don't have money for private schools that's why we are not achieving our goals'.

Even the Akali government also cheats Dalit students in the name of free education for those who get 80 percent marks in class, how we get 80 percent marks without sufficient resources, general students have proper classes and tuitions as well. Dalit students are going to government schools where the everyday teacher is absent, only less than half of staff members are present. 80 percent marks only get by the general students. The government propagated that they made meritorious schools for us, but there is no student of Dalit studying there.

Respondent and head of youth Sabha related with Balmiki community said educated people are well behaved, Educated person consider everyone equally. But an Illiterate person thinks that he knows everything and considers others as an idiot. The illiterate person never takes work seriously.

A shopkeeper and social activist of Balmiki community on the question of less proportion of students in schools and universities said, “We are poor, we have only two options first to feed ourselves or second to teach ourselves, some are educated in the field of humanities but they still jobless, if they are engaged in some work then there is less chance to move in the wrong way. The contemporary education is also double standard, one of our known have two degrees in the master of arts, he was trying a lot to get a job but failed, now he is binding the books, another has a degree of B.com and after study for years, he is run a meat shop.

Another respondent of nearly sixty years age and who is Mazhabi Sikh responded to the question of awareness said, “People more aware when they get an education, educated person create more awareness. If someone has money he is also going to the wrong side, if someone has no money but has an education then he can stop thousands of those who are going to the wrong side”.

A respondent who is the senior leader of Dalit community and the famous Ambedkarite, have deep faith on their knowledge and skills said, we are the disciple of Balmiki, you may be noticed in every sculpture or image Balmiki has a Pen in its hand and he writes a “Ramayana” a most important epic of India, Our community indulges in sweeping, they forget that they have to choose pen not to broom. It is observed in Doaba also those who are related with their hierarchal occupations they are marginalized.

One respondent and the head of Balmiki mandir said, we are not dumb or weak, we are backward due to our limited resources, you see, Dr. Ambedkar is also from our community, he wrote the constitution of India, no one is more educated than him.

“People think we need their feeding, they thought we need their help, No we don’t. We need our rights only, which is taken by us through planning. We are the natives of this land, this land is our, they (Brahmins) come for shelter only, we provide them, they use our innocence and slowly and gradually became the master of us. They occupy our resources, ideas, and even land, we are forced to live outside the villages. But it was past. Now we speedily get an education, we are enlightened, we have knowledge of our history, our heroes and our Movements. Now the " Dalit - Raj is coming soon.” reply of the respondent on the question on Education.

Migration: A building of Status or Prestige

The state of Punjab witnessed a high rate of migration, mostly to foreign countries. The migration from Punjab has a historical context that starts from the British times, after the annexation of Punjab as the colonial territory. Britishers recruited the Mazhabi Sikhs in the British army and developed the canal colonies in Punjab. In many of the official texts and narratives, they were branded as a martial class.

In Punjab, the Doaba region has a very high rate of migration, even some villages are having a population of elder people, in local language these village known as ‘Jatheriya de Gaon’, villages of old people. Dalits who got settled abroad have also invested back in Punjab by different means and re-affirming their asserting identity. There are so many Dalit gurudwara’s and Dera’s that have been built by the support and contribution of the Dalit diaspora. The Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Jalandhar and Ravidass temple in Banaras has been built with the support of Dalit NRI’s. “*The ceremonial installation of the golden dome atop the temple and the temple’s monumental gate, built with the financial support of the Dalit diaspora, on July 16, 1998*”.⁹

The financial mobility changes the nature of the rural structure of Jatt hegemony in Punjab. However it is also true that all the Dalits are not get benefitted and they are still

⁹ Jodhka, S. S. (2004). Sikhism and the caste question: Dalits and their politics in contemporary Punjab, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 38, 165–92.

facing marginalization, the migration is very different for them, engaged in the blue-collar job in Arab countries. The Poor and Dalits send their children to Arab Countries, Dubai and Iraq are the first preference. The majority of Dalits going to Singapore, Malaysia, and the Gulf Countries However, as Judge and Bal (2005) have argued, the migration of the Punjabi Dalits neither followed any such perception that their conditions would undergo change nor was there any increase in migration rate.

One of the respondents belongs to the Chuhra community from Amritsar, on the question of Dalit migration responded that ‘every parent desire to saw their children as the settled one, having a good source of income and rich. In the Punjab dynamics due to the migration trend and the social prestige attached to it, most of us also want our children to get settled abroad, live alive and happy life. But due to limited resources, our children were going to Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Dubai. The survival in these Arab countries is also very tough, most of the people from our community engage as the workers there due to low education level. Even for some people, it is difficult to know whether their children are alive or not.

The migration of Dalits is not in western countries, who are rich and get well educated can only afford the lacs of rupees for the Visas of England and America. Dalit are the poor ones, to send our children in Arab countries we have to collect loan from society, Only some can survive there and get success but the majority have come back to the native places.

The respondent from Mazhabi Sikhs from Amritsar on the migration issue said ‘In the area of Jalandhar-Hoshiarpur-Nawanshahr from every single house they have someone settled outside India because of prosperity in their houses. In Amritsar, migration is not an observed phenomenon. We have limited outskirts approach.

The respondent, who is a senior Dalit leader from the Majha area said, ‘lots of people from Majha area lived in foreign countries but support to their community is less observed, which is the much-observed phenomenon in the Doaba area. The respondent said we have to learn something from the Doaba. They are united, they fight for each other not from each other’.

Similar views are given by the Mazhabi Sikh respondent from Amritsar, retired army personnel said, the major problem with our Mazhabi community is that they don’t learn

from the experiences from other communities of Punjab. The Chamars of Doaba have a good status and have migrated to western countries. The Chamar community migrated to Canada now have Canadian citizenship because they are united in every problem and supported each other. But the people of our region and community are divided. There is no single leader from our area, no consensus on one name, they don't want to unite. The prevailing social-economical backwardness is somehow is the result of all this.

Another Mazhabi Sikh respondent, on the question of the impact of foreign migration, said, the Ram Tirath of Rishi Balmiki also the outcome of NRI's funding. In Amritsar the Balmikis have full of resources, they have foreign migration, setup their business, and also have government jobs. They occupy all the structures of politics.

Dalit Consciousness & Hierarchy

As there are 39 scheduled caste communities in Punjab residing in a different part of Punjab, economically some are more equipped in comparison to others. This section of the study is an attempt to discern the caste-differentiation and analyzed their relationship with other communities.

One of the respondents, a social worker, working for the post-matric scholarship of Dalits, said there is a superiority complex in some of the SC caste community from the other caste communities of the SC. Politicians make advantages of the reservation & division of 50% for the SCs in Punjab. The congress has divided in whole India as well as Punjab's Scheduled caste. If there are a total of 10 seats, they are divided into 6:4. Dalits are fighting why they got 6 and why we get 4. We (Dalits) have to fight collectively for the one-fourth share in total.

One of the respondents, a Dalit political activist said, 'Some Privileged Scheduled caste has a superiority complex. Mazhabi, Ramdassi, Ad-Dharmi, Balmiki, Chamar have superiority complex due to their history. There are Rai Sikhs (lower caste) who do not relate with other SC caste. Rai Sikh is placed in the SC list in Punjab, considered as OBC in UP, and ST in Himachal Pradesh. Kanshi Ram wants to unite all the Scheduled Castes. There is the misconception assumed by the other castes of the SC, that BAMCEF and RPI are the parties or the group of the Chamar's not for Valmiki's and other SC. This misconception is spread by Brahmin's & Baniya's. Balmikis the workers attached with

cleaning occupation worked in the households who mostly belong to the upper caste and mislead the Balmiki about the RPI and BAMSEF’.

As per Sulekh 91 years old, renowned Dalit writer and activist on the question of fragmentation among Dalits said, “This is the tragedy that no status, no representative till now is much strong among the Dalits, ‘who will unite all the Dalits’ this is the question in the present scenario and for future also. Only Baba saheb Ambedkar fights to take a stand for the unity of Dalits, now Dalits are fragmented and separate communities claim them. Dalits are not conscious and united due to fragmentation among them now the Dalit movements are jati-focused (Caste-Centric) (Sulekh) said and write that Dalits have to transform ‘Bhim shraddha’ into ‘Bhim Shakti’. Baba Saheb has the power to unite the people, created the revolutionary consciousness among Dalits. Power is called only the power of unity, nowadays we have several Dalit associations, different in different cities which is the worst scenario. Various rallies take place in Ambedkar’s name by various political parties, Dalit organizations but it would not come into ideology, it’s the worst tragedy’.BAMCEF came with the ray of social consciousness, but divided into many more parties”.

The respondent, who is a political activist who belongs to the Chamar community, on the question of Dalit consciousness responded “People are very less aware of the collectivity, he gave the example of the reaction of Dalits on the SC/ST act judgment of atrocities act, he said when you asked the Dalit community about the act nobody will be able to provide the correct answer. Most of the people had the misconception that it is related to the reservation in jobs and scholarship. This misconception is due to a lack of education, awareness, and consciousness. There are leaders, Professors. and many educated persons but they don’t correct the agitators. Even from the agitators, no one tells them about the true interpretation of the act. There were very few people who know about the ‘Shamlat’ land. If they know about it, there were no struggles for it. Not aware of Dalit rights and Dalit lands.

Another respondent, who is a social worker and also works as a facilitator for availing post-matric scholarship for the Dalits. There is no collective consciousness in Dalits of the Malwa region due to Communism. Communists brainwashed and mislead the people. They don’t lead the people to work for their community and its unity. Respondent gave the example of Punjab University Dalit student organizations have the picture of Bhagat

Singh, who himself detach from the 'caste', it detaches the Dalits from their roots and struggle, engage them into something else. The Communist organizations in Punjab have much influence on the life of the people. They formed various unions like Kisan Union, Mazdoor Union but the leaders are JATT (dominant caste) and the bonded labor is still there. Dalits are still working as the bonded laborers; they are not the leaders in communist organizations. There is a difference between Doaba Dalits and Malwa Dalits, the latter one is the most backward one.

One of the respondents who activist of Dalit rights, on the question of consciousness among Dalits said, 'In the Scheduled Caste community the caste identities were maintained in the past and the present also, there is lack of commonality, no common symbols to relate with each other. There is no umbrella party or an ideology where they feel the belongingness. In the search for identity different Dalit communities followed different routes and practices. Political parties are also not interested to make them united, the division and marginalized status of Dalits benefitted the political parties. The westernized education and lifestyle helpful to have a good life but it is not working about their unification'.

The respondent belongs to the Chura community and an Ambedkarite said 'Sikhism main reason for not having the consciousness among Dalits. Sikhism is good in the initial years but now dominated by Jatt Sikhs, who have a Brahmanical mindset. Lower castes follow Sikhism, are not able to get the true teachings of Ambedkar. The Chamar are the most prosperous community among the Dalits in Punjab as they studied hard and followed the teachings of Ambedkar. Among the Balmiki's only a few prosperous mostly are deprived. Those who are prosperous dominate the large community. The prosperous don't guide their community and people for the upliftment who are backward. Most of the Dalits still under the below poverty line only a few of them are economically prosperous.

The respondent, on the issue of consciousness, said, 'The reservation has the false propaganda that only conscious class and the creamy layer is getting benefitted by the reservation making the deserving lower caste, not the beneficiary. In the 'A' or 'B' group jobs the reserved seats not get filled whereas the group 'D' jobs reservation overflows. If the so-called creamy layer doesn't get it then who will? The poor are not educated how can they get the job.' Only a few are educated get the reservation benefits. The 'circulation of Dalit elite' concept is there when it comes to the benefits of reservation.

Creamy layer concept not applied to SCs. Discrimination is only legally eliminated but still in practice and can be seen in the attitude of the people. The superiority attitude and complex behavior of the upper caste with the lower one are still there.

The respondent working as the town planner said on Dalit consciousness and upliftment that 'Employment is the most important thing for consciousness and upliftment. But there is a low literacy rate among the Dalits, mostly are unemployment. Poverty among Dalits is another major problem. The unemployment led them to be inclined towards drugs & alcoholism. He further added "*Nasha sudha rgaya to bahut kuch sudhar sakta h*".

The respondent from Mazhabi Sikh community on the fragmentation of Dalits said, Division among the Dalit community is planned and it was the conspiracy of Manuwadi people. There are different jatis in SCs. It has been done to maintain them as separate and easy for domination. Jatt's were also Shudra's, but they were getting highlighted. The Dalit communities follow the teaching of Ambedkar get flourished and become the elite class in Dalits. Some communities have the clashes like Balmiki and Mazhabi communities have clashes in Amritsar.

Dalit Literature and Consciousness

Literature always played a major role, to make people awaken & conscious. The intellectual activities reflected in literary expressions have a major contribution to the formation of Dalit dialogue and consciousness of Dalits. The writings from the Dalits are one of the visible forms of protest. The Dalit concerns can be traced in the writings of Gurmat, Bhakti movements, and the Sufi movements. The poetic style of literature with folklore and folktales makes a great impression on society. The untouchability and discrimination within the Punjabi society addressed by the writings and poetry.

As per Prof. Raj Kumar Hans's the literary tradition of Dalits is age-old. It was getting started in (1655-1705) with Bhai Jaita also known as Jeevan Singh. It was said that he carried the severed head of Guru Teg Bahadar Ji from Delhi to Amritsar. He composed the devotional epic 'Sri Gur Katha' based on Guru Gobind Singh's life. There were several Dalit poets and writers get noted that was Sadhu Wazir Singh (1790-1859), Giani Ditt Singh (1852-1901), Sadhu Daya Singh Arif (1894- 1946) was the first Dalit Punjabi poet

who enjoyed the popularity as enjoyed by Waris Shah, Daya Singh's poetry was secular and contemplated as the Sufis way.¹⁰

In the 1920s the Ad-Dharm movement strongly opposed the caste system and its two weeklies namely *Adi Danka* in the 1930s and *Ujala* in 1948 had a significant role in raising the Dalit consciousness. *Adi Dharm Mandal* from Jalandhar circulated the *Adi Danka* weekly in both Urdu and Punjabi languages. *Adi Danka* not only renowned and successful among the *Adi Dharm* community of Punjab but also among the NRI's who hails from Punjab. '*Ujala*' was started in 1948, at Dr.B.R.Ambedkar's birthday. The weekly brought the consciousness among the Dalits through the philosophy of Ambedkar and views of other prominent writers published in it. The weekly was followed by other monthly and weekly papers, which served as the means of social activism. The two poets namely Gurdas Ram Aalam and Chanan Lal wrote in a very radical way regularly in the '*Adi Danka*' columns. Gurdas Ram Aalam was said to be the first Punjabi poet with Dalit consciousness. The poetry books written by him were revolutionary in writing, they were focused on the social and economic segregation faced by the marginalized section due to the caste system.¹¹

Bhagwant Rasulpuri, in '*Dalit Literature in Punjabi*', extensively analyzed the writing on the Dalit issues in Punjab, from the time of pre-independence of India to the present time. He divided the writings of the Dalit literature into four stages. The first stage consists of the time of pre-independence of India, the writers raised the voice of Dalits through poetry and brought out social, economic & mental plights of Dalits through the collections of a poem like '*Je mai mar giya*', '*Alle Phatt*', '*Uddiya andhooraan*', '*Apna aap*'. Prof. Puran Singh, Mohan Singh, Dhani Ram Chatrik, and Dhani Ram Chatrik were the famous poets of that time. The second-generation Dalit writings were more rebellious in writings, they criticize the Brahmanic character of the society. The writer highlighted the miserable conditions of Dalit in society and the socio-economic exclusion they face in their day-to-day life. The main writers of second-generation are Dr. Manmohan in his work '*Neelkanth*', Jaipalin '*Nazam Kadon Chupsi*', Mohan Tyagi in '*Dhooa in da*

¹⁰ Hans, Rajkumar. (22Nov.2011). *Rich Heritage of Punjabi Dalit Literature and its exclusion from Histories*; retrieved from https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3085:rich-heritage-of-punjabi-dalit-literature-and-its-exclusion-from-histories-12022&catid=124&Itemid=140#:~:text=The%20Punjabi%20dalit%20literary%20tradition,around%20Guru%20Gobind%20Singh's%20life.

¹¹ Ibid.

dastawej’, Boota Singh Ashantiin ‘Chanani do Boota’, Sadhu Singh Shudrakin ‘Nav Manthan’, Nanak Singh Sant Sekhon, Gurbaksh Singh Pritlari, Santokh Singh Dhir, Hira Singh Dard, Sujan Singh.¹²

Later in the third generation, writers wrote about the multi-faceted expression of Dalit life. It presented the horrifying details of Dalit life, the tragedies they faced, exclusively the slavery, poverty, and atrocities faced by the Dalits from the upper castes. Kirpal Kazak, Prem Gorkhi, Bhoora Singh Kaler, Nachhattar, and Atarjit were the main writers at that time. Atarjit’s ‘*Bathloo Chamar*’ was a very famous book written on the mental state of the Dalits. The writer also wrote the Dalit labour sufferings and presented the caste & class dimension in their stories, ‘*Mitti de rang*’, ‘*Jeen Maran*’, ‘*Arjan Safediwala*’, ‘*Dharti Puttar*’ were the famous ones. 1980 onwards the fourth generation of Dalit writers, were considered the golden age of Punjabi Literature. Dalit stories were written in an effective manner and also became an integral part of research and teaching at an academic level. The Dalit plight and their exploitation are expressed through autobiographies, novels, and plays as well. The sufferings of women were also get addressed¹³.

Sant Ram Udasi and Lal Singh Dil were considered the revolutionary poets in the Punjabi literature; they brought the Dalit consciousness with their writings to the masses. Sant Ram Udasi, a Mazhabi Sikh by caste, risen with a strong Dalit consciousness and emerged as the strong powerful Dalit poet. He addresses the plight of the Dalit landless peasantry through his poetry books, ‘*Lahu Bhije Bol*’, ‘*Saintan*’ and ‘*Chounkarian*’ and created consciousness among them. The Ghettos of Dalits, also known as Chamarlees and Thattis in Punjab, were portrayed in Udasi’s writings. Udasi wrote in one of his well-known novels,

¹² Rasulpuri, Bhagwant.(Jan-Dec 2009). Dalit Literature in Punjabi, in *Journal of Literature & Aesthetics*, Vol 9, Number 1& 2.pp131-140; Retrived from <http://www.parwazparkashan.com/pdf/journal-of-lit.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid

“ਮਾਂਧਰਤੀਏ! ਤੇਰੀਗੋਦਨੂੰ ਚੰਨਹੋਰਬਥੇਰੇ

ਤੂੰ ਮੱਘਦਾਰਹੀਵੇਸੂਰਜਾਕੰਮੀਆਂਦੇਵੇਹੜੇ

ਕਿਥੇਤੰਗਨਾਸਮਝਣਤੰਗੀਆਂਨੂੰ,

ਜਿੱਥੇਮਿਲਣਅੰਗੂਠੇਸੰਘੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ,

ਜਿੱਥੇਵਾਲੇਤਰਸਦੇਕੰਘੀਆਂਨੂੰ,

ਨੱਕਵਗਦੇ, ਅੱਖਾਂਚੁੰਨੀਆਂਤੇਦੰਦਕਰੇੜੇ¹⁴

English : *Maa dharteye, Teri godh nu chann hor bathere, Tu magh da rahin ve surja kammian de vehre, Jithe tang Na samjhan tangiaan nu, Jithe Milan anguthhe s anghiaan nu, Jithe Vaal tarsade kanghi aannu, Nakk vagade, Akhaan chunyaan Te dund Kar here.*”

Due to his radical writings, against the exploitation of upper caste, rich peasants, and governmental issues, he is popularly known as a Naxalite poet.

Another revolutionary Dalit poet Lal Singh Dil was born in the Ramdasia Sikh family. He had a very unique place in Dalit literature have the literary status of ‘poet’s poet’. His writings and poems were very sensitive and gave the true expression of poverty, injustice, and oppression faced by Dalits. His autobiography ‘*Dastan*’, about the caste-based discriminatory behaviour in school, Naxal parties, and the police force. His writings make assertiveness among the downtrodden of the society. His writings were based on real experiences that highlighted the sufferings of being Dalit and compels for intellectual exploration. It is said that at the time of his college days when his female friend invited him for tea at her home. The mother of the girl reminded his caste to him while offering the tea, from the humiliation he faced, inscribed that in the poetry as:

“ਮੈਨੂੰ ਪਿਆਰਕਰਦੀਏ

ਪਰ-ਜਾਤਕੁੜੀਏ

¹⁴ <http://punjabijanta.com/bhangra-punjabi-lyrics/magda-rahi-ve-surja-26062673258425982622-2608261726242562-26132631-2616262626082/msg390549/?PHPSESSID=qj188fo8aonsrtc1trkk3l3ch0#msg390549>.

ਸਾਡੇ ਸਕੇਮੁਰਦੇਵੀ

ਇਕ ਥਾਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਜਲਾਉਂਦੇ।¹⁵

(the high caste girl loves me but she didn't know that even after death the kin's of our not allowed to burnt together)

His famous work was '*Satluj di Hawa*', '*Bahut Saare Suraj*' and '*Sathar*', through his writing he gets a unique place in Punjabi Dalit literature. Through his writings, he makes assertiveness among the downtrodden of its society. Sant Ram Udasi and Lal Singh Dil were the two revolutionary poets of 1990 among the Dalits, who challenged the dominant discourse of upper caste literature by their poetries.

Alternative Media and Identity in making

Dalit communities of Punjab also created their alternative media, as they believe caste-based discrimination is rampant in mainstream media both print and electronic. With the social consciousness and efforts, they created their own resources for their development. Through them, they get the opportunity to get recognized in the modern world of multimedia. They have their own magazines, newspapers, journals, even very much active in social media through Facebook, Twitter, some groups also have their youtube channels.

In the modern digital world, different multimedia platforms are the new sources for exchanging information and forming solidarity. The various options of Social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube are there. These platforms are utilized by communities to exchange and spread information about their action, struggles, reactions, to form the belief system and emancipation also.

The Popular Dera's of Dalits in Punjab namely Dera Sachkhand Ballan, Dera Radha Swami, and Dera Sacha Sauda have their websites, their own YouTube channels, and Facebook pages. Dera Sachkhand Ballan, of Jalandhar, belongs to the Chamar community, it has the highest place in the Dera's Contribution in assertion among Dalits

¹⁵ <https://www.punjabi-kavita.com/PunjabiPoetryLalSinghDil.php#Dil5>.

of Punjab. Dera Sachkhand Ballan has its YouTube Channel, has its own website, and owns an e-paper weekly known as 'Begum Pura Shehar' which is published in three languages, Hindi, English & Punjabi. It is one of the famous mouthpieces, based on the principles of Guru Ravidass, an icon for Dalits and religious figures of the Bhakti movement in the 15th and 16th centuries. The mouthpiece is the product of globalization as it starts in 1991. The new initiative of subaltern literacy fulfills the vacancy felt by the absence of Dalit literature at the streets of print media. The basic objective of the weekly mouthpiece is to raise the issues of the oppressed and downtrodden communities.¹⁶ Guru Ravidass believed in humanity, Karma, and the unity of human beings, known as the poet of egalitarianism, and propounded the idea of 'Begumpura', which means the city where there is no suffering or fear and all human beings were considered as equal.¹⁷ This was the initiative of the 4th generation of Dera Ballan, Sant Garib Dass Ji was the first one to publish the mouthpiece on 15th August 1991.¹⁸ Now the weekly is weekly at online also has its audience at national and international level. 'Begumpura' is based on the composition of multiple feeds, based on political, cultural, economic, and religious debates. The prime focus is to provide the alternative to their masses of mainstream media, which is always claimed as the biased media by the Dera and editorial of the weekly. On the issue of reservation weekly wrote, "*Reservation is not a charity, not a Maundy, nor a service and not even a security. It is our freedom, which was suppressed from decades*"; ('*jo sadio se dabayigayithi*). The weekly has dedicated a regular full page for the biography of Dr. Ambedkar to enthusiast and educate the society and compels them to think in a rational manner towards social justice. The issue of the subaltern community was continuously raised weekly. The mouthpiece consists of the spiritual teaching of Guru Ravidass towards an equal society, 'according to the weekly human existence is in danger because they abscond the idea of unity, and believe in superiority and inferiority of human and forget the message of Guru Ravidass to make the egalitarian society'.¹⁹ The issue of health of the deprived section does not get enough attention from the mainstream media but 'Begumpura' has immensely written over that issue, they wrote, the marginalized people died regularly due to lack of health facilities and basic

¹⁶ <http://begumpurashaher.net/index.php>.

¹⁷ Mishra, Vandita. (6th Feb, 2012). Anti- Dhakkashahi in *Indian Express*; retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/antidhakka-shahi/>.

¹⁸ Begumpura.op.cit.

¹⁹ BegumpuraShehar, 06/03/2017.

health services.²⁰The weekly also provides a space for the new writings, religious preachers, community events, and the activities of Dera.

Dalit Rap and Pop Music

Alternative media is providing the platform for the unheard voices and building their own narratives. In the digitalized world the reach and impact of social media are all and music is one of them. Punjabi rap and pop music is a well-established and internationally flourished one. With time & space the forms of assertion got changed, music is one of them. Music by Dalits and Bahujans is very bold and full of confidence, writing the new narratives of identity assertion. The Dalit rock music, Dalit pop, the music of Ravidass, Bhim rap music, chamar pop are making their place in the market and blooming in the market. Several Dalit singers, composing & singing the songs on the caste discrimination & atrocities faced by the people of Dalit communities in the various spheres of life.

It has widely observed that most of the songs valorized the Jatts, pictorized with fast-moving cars, flashing the guns, big houses, foreign locals, lavish life, and unchallenging dominance over the region. Dalit pop & music comes as retaliation to the Jatts dominancy. Roop Lal Dhir, a singer from Nawashehr is considered one among the genre of the Chamar pop community. He started making the Chamar pop in the '80s, '*Risky chamar*', '*Charche Chamara de*', '*Putt Chamaran de*' were some famous songs of Dhir.²¹Raj Dadral another famous from Nawashehar claims that had written & sung more than 200 songs in the chamar community. He also performed overseas mainly in U.K, France, Italy, and Canada, '*Hummer gaddi wich aaunda putt Chamar da*', '*Munde Chamara de*', '*Balle Balle Chamaran de*', '*Tor Chamaran di*', '*Jhande GadeRavidass ne*' were the songs of him.²² It has been said that the murder of Saint Ramanand in Vienna hails to the Ravidassia community led to the rise in Dalit political music, which gets famous all over the world.²³

²⁰ BegumpuraShehar, 19/06/2017.

²¹ Kohli, Namita.(NOV 03, 2016). Punjab's protest pop: How the Dalits are telling the world they've arrived, *Hindustan Times*; retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/punjab-s-protest-pop-how-the-state-s-dalits-are-telling-the-world-they-have-arrived/story-8UxGda8YwWcf0PDT6dc1RJ.html>.

²² Bhalla, Manisha.(15 Nov.2018). How Dalit music in Punjab transformed from a religious to a political soundtrack, *Sabrang India*, retrieved from <https://sabrangindia.in/article/how-dalit-music-punjab-transformed-religious-political-soundtrack>.

²³ Ibid.

Gurkanwal Bharti alias Ginni Mahi from Jalandhar, a Ravidassia Sikh by faith is among the young sensation in Dalit pop music. Her songs are tuned on Punjabi folk, she started with devotional songs, hymns, amritbani of Saint Ravidass. Now it also includes praising songs on Dr.Ambedkar to valorizing the Chamar identity in pop songs. Gini Mahi emerged as a brave new voice of the Dalit community in Punjab. Her two songs in particular—‘Danger Chamar’and ‘Fan Babasaheb di’ (I’m a fan of Babasaheb) caught particular attention from the local people of Punjab and at the national and the international press also.

Ginni Mahi performed at the opening ceremony of the Deutsche Welle Global Media form 2018. Her song “ *Mein dhee hann Baba Saheb di, Jinhe likha Samvidhan*” is the most popular song that has more than 42lakh views at youtube.²⁴ Her song “*Agar Bheemji iss dunia mein aate naa*”²⁵ is for paying gratitude to Dr.Ambedkar for being the torchbearer to the Dalit community. ‘Raaj Baba Saheb da’, ‘Har de Nishan’, ‘Balle Balle Ravidass ki Kirpa’, ‘Chadat Chamar de’, ‘Bolo Jai Bheem’ were some of the most popular songs sung by her. The recent song of her ‘Danger Chamar 2’²⁶, is different from the earlier songs, it is picturized with the rough & tough image of Ginni Mahi, with bodybuilders in the background. On the Facebook page, Ginni Mahi has around six lakh followers.

With the inflow of economic resources, other new Dalit singers are also launching their music albums, glamorize the caste-based identity of theirs with the iconography of Ravidass and Dr.Ambedkar in the chamar community.

The other majority caste among the scheduled caste in Punjab ‘Mazhabi sikhs’ has also their songs, they have sung the gallantry of Bhai Jaita Singh, dedicated to saint Kabir and courage of Majhbi Sikhs. The song “*Mazhabia de munde nahi darr de, Balmikia de munde nahi darr de*”, about the fearless attitude of the boys who belongs to the Mazhabi community. Sahota Brothers, are one of the composers, singers of the Mazhabi community-based songs. Their youtube channel named ‘Sahota Brothers’, compile a number of songs on the fearlessness of Mazhabi Sikhs, the song “*Majbi Singh aaj bhi taiyar khaade, Panth de Raksha lai*” had around 1.5 lakh views, the song visuals has

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5XzHJBNoI>

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4BEMoPZ0i0&pbjreload=101>

²⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSBHI_wh8vk

some 'Gatka' playing Sikhs and some Sikhs display the guns and swords in their hands.²⁷ Another song "*Mazbi Singh de Itihass bolde*", is about the courageousness of Bhai Jivan Singh, who bring the severed head of Guru Teg Bahadar from Delhi for the cremation. The song "*Navratre , Dussehra, Diwali tyohar naa hunde, je shrishti karta Balmiki Bhagwan na hunde*"²⁸, the song directly staunching the Hindu lord's Ram, Krishna, and Hindu religious festivals, said they all are the propaganda of the Mannuvadi thoughts. The songs praise the Lanka king Ravana, Saint Balmiki, and sung about the injustice done with the Shambhook rishi and Eklavya. The aarti of Balmiki has also there onyoutube, has more than 14lakh views.

Now the songs and raps are coming forward from Dalits showing the pride of their caste. They are working as the counter to the upper caste, especially 'Jatts' songs, and making themselves inferior to no one.

During the fieldwork , when asked about the consciousness of identity through songs, the majority of the respondents said, 'Initially not liked the concept of songs which exaggeration of some caste names. Initially not like the songs by Ginni Mahi, but these songs are also an option and an answer to the JAT songs. 'Till date, we are dancing on the songs of somebody else, the persons or the class which dominates us from centuries did discrimination and atrocities but now we have our songs.' "*Aaj tk mein kisi aur ke ganno pe naach rha tha*, but now we have our songs".

The respondent from the Mazhabi Sikh community said, In Punjab, all songs are for Jatt only, nothing written for any other caste. Now the songs of '*Putt Chamara*', are very aggressive (*bhadkau*). The old people don't like these kinds of songs. It will lead to clashes or hidden hatred.

One of the Ravidassi community respondents said, the songs, the Dalit Dera's, and caste & community name embossed T-shirts strengthen the community in some sphere. But community emancipation only possible with education, if the person would get the right education then he or she will be able to get the right path in life. If the person only gets the money mostly will be get spent on alcoholism.

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTMVii-jJBE>

²⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR_hYaNm-p0

The respondent belongs to the Chura community on the songs of Dalits responded that 'Don't like the songs which exaggerate the caste names either on 'Jatts' or on 'Chamars'. But till there were songs on 'Jatts' then 'Putt Chamara' is also good and acceptable. 'If Jatts' have Guns as they flaunt them in their songs, we also have guns. Proud to wear T.shirts with caste names, printed T.shirts of Baba.

During the fieldwork, I got the opportunity to attend the wedding from the Chamar community, where I observed the DJ was playing the songs of Ginni Mahi 'Danger Chamar' & songs related to the chamar community only.

Now the new song by the Dalits of Punjab following the same trend of songs they picture with the big and costly cars, having bouncers at the background, flashing guns, foreign locations, and glorification of the caste. It is just like the 'Sanskritization' of the music, following the trend of the dominant caste and showcasing they are not less than anyone.

The Dalit music industry or the personnel comes from the Doaba region of Punjab, which is more upward mobile and economically affluent region in the state of Punjab. These songs are mostly focused on 'Chamar caste not focusing on other Dalits of Punjab'. It brought a sense of solidarity among the people of the Chamar community internationally.

The platform of alternative media providing as the strong medium, which let the feelings of excluded classes against the inequitable social, political and economic conditions of the existing society. These alternative media paves the great role in the construction of the new identities, knowledge and awareness which further leads to the mobilization of the marginalized classes of the society.