

# CHAPTER-1

## INTRODUCTION

### Conceptual Framework

The history of humankind is believed to begin with the nomadic phase, in which individuals enjoy natural equality and freedom. In the first part of “*Discourse on the origin of Inequality*”, Rousseau portrayed the man in nature: “it was a solid, nimble, and more modest yet more coordinated than the other creatures. His body was his main instrument and his main weapon. His thought was made out of straightforward tasks. He had not many necessities, and for that, he effectively used to figure out how to fulfill them. His interests were those of nature: food, sex, and rest were the main things useful for himself as well as his main concerns were pain and hunger only<sup>1</sup>”. He says that interests that create indecencies barely existed in the state of nature, however started to create when individuals framed social orders. He proceeds to propose that societies began when individuals assembled their first huts, an improvement that worked with living together of men and women; that thus created the propensity for living as a family. “With the tender passion of love, there was also born the destructive passion of jealousy. Neighbours started to compare their abilities and achievements with one another, and that marked the first step towards inequality and at the same time towards vice.”<sup>2</sup> The concept of property denoted a further advance toward disparity since it made law and government fundamental for protecting it. Rousseau mourns the "deadly" idea of property in one of his more-articulate writings, portraying the "horrors" that have come about because of the take-off from a condition wherein the earth had a place with nobody. Those entries in his second Discourse energized later thinkers like Karl Marx and Vladimir Ilich Lenin.<sup>3</sup> Since then, inequalities in one or the other form have been presented in every human society. Many hierarchies have been evolved over time based on class, race, gender, ethnicity that

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau—Major works of political philosophy | Britannica. (n.d.). Retrieved December 24, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Jacques-Rousseau/Major-works-of-political-philosophy>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

persist in different societies. Their formation has changed over time but they still exist in one or another form.

In India, the system of caste provides one such grounding. *Manusmriti* divides and arranges the social classes on the basis of 'Guna' (Instinct) and karma (deeds) into four-folds. This is very much similar to Plato's classification of three classes based on three instincts. *Manusmriti* and some other shastras mention four Varna: the *Brahmins* (the scholar and priest) the *Kshatriya* (King and warrior), the *Vaishyas* (agriculturalist and traders), and *Shudras* (artisan and service provider). All those including foreigners, tribals, and nomads, who do not subscribe to the norms of the Hindu society were contagious and untouchables. Another group excluded from the main society was called '*Prajanya*' or '*Antyaja*'. This group of former untouchables or Dalits i.e., downtrodden were considered either the lower section of the Shudras or outside the Varna system altogether. A passage from *Manusmriti* indicates that the Varna system was originally non-hereditary.

Scholars are not of unanimity about the origin of the caste and related system in India. J.C. Nesfield<sup>4</sup> advanced the occupational theory of caste origin. He says the division of occupation is the basis of the caste system. He provides grading to the occupations. People who are engaged in primitive occupations were part of the lowest caste. Similarly, priests who used to provide education and Kshatriyas, who protected the people from invaders, were at the top two levels respectively. Artisan class was at the third position in the hierarchy. Sir Herbert Risley<sup>5</sup> proposed the Racial theory of Caste in which he considers Aryans as the invaders, with a patrilineal nature of social order. They took the country's women (who were matrilineal in nature) as concubines or as their wives. Children from these marriages did not get acceptance in society and were called 'chandals'. The traditional theory of the caste system is based on the divine origin which is to be found in Hindus' sacred book *Purshasukta*. According to this theory, there is a fourfold division of society which came from the four body parts of the Brahma. The Brahmans among the four varnas are at the top who were created from the mouth of the Brahma. The second varna, known as the kshatriyas, was created

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<sup>4</sup> *Theories of Caste System in India*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 24, 2021, from <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/caste/theories-of-caste-system-in-india/47378>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*.

from the arms of the Brahma and they were assigned the work of protectors of the society. *Vaishyas* who come next in the descending order were created from the thighs of Brahma. They were given the task of meeting the material needs of society. The last varna consists of the Shudras who were created from the lower part of the Brahma.<sup>6</sup>

Abe Dubois and thinkers such as Dr. Ghurye<sup>7</sup> defended *Brahmanical* theory of the origin of the caste system. It is also known as the political theory of the caste system. He wrote that Brahmins in order to retain and maintain their higher position in society created the caste system. They declared all other three varnas inferior to them. Denzil Ibbeston<sup>8</sup> presented an evolutionary theory of the caste system's origin. According to this theory, the caste system is a result of a long process. It came into existence gradually through social evolution. Conquest by another's army, karma's theory, consistency to one profession were some of the features that contributed to the evolution of the caste system. According to religious theory, different religious norms had given birth to the caste system in India. People who were connected to religious practices were given a higher position in society such as kings and the Brahmins. As people started practicing various Gods, they were given various positions in society because their food habits changed according to their religious practices. After that, restrictions on food habits led to the origin of the caste system.<sup>9</sup>

According to various interpretations, caste is very peculiar to India, in which society is divided among different small social groups. Hierarchy among caste groups, hereditary occupation according to one's caste, social segregation, cultural differences, endogamy, hereditary status, restrictions on food and drink are some of the principal characteristics of the caste system but the most critical feature of this caste system is untouchability which is based on the notion of purity and impurity. Caste groups are unequal, ranked on a scale of hierarchy based on their

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<sup>6</sup> Teli, A. H. (2017). Theories of Origin and Changes in Indian Caste System. *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 29–32.

<sup>7</sup> Ghurye, G. S. (2019). *Caste and Race in India*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

<sup>8</sup> *Caste System in India—Origin, Theories, Significance and Present Condition—India*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 19, 2021, from <https://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/india/caste-system-in-indiaand-its-changing-scenario>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

ritual status, from pure to impure. Their status or position in the system determines with whom they can interact and with whom they cannot. The idea and practice of untouchability is an integral part of the caste system. Endogamous marriage and **inter dining** are some of the norms to keep practicing the caste hierarchy.

The term schedule caste emerged through the Government of India Act 1935 when an attempt had been made to notify the depressed castes and tribes. Subsequently, terms such as 'Dalit', 'depressed class', 'schedule caste' has been used as synonyms in different writings and movements. Scheduled castes are at the bottom of this caste system. They are considered untouchables and they have faced discrimination in various social spheres. They faced marginalization in terms of economy, culture, political, education, intellectual field, etc.

Within the framework of caste structure, Dalit women are even more deprived. They face discrimination being as women in general and being as Dalit also, this further leads to deprivation in other spheres as well, like in educational, economical, and social terms. Though feminists in India from the 1970s started raising their voice for women issues in general, they seem to ignore the fact that Dalit women have a different set of problems and they suffer from multiple hierarchies.

### **Gender, caste and class: An Interface**

The tendency for generalization and of creating a grand construct unintentionally somewhere put specificity aside and makes a homogenized image of a section called women, generally in a binary form of a human, the men, and women. This bifurcation strikes out the disparateness and ignores the various realities within a particular category. Plurality, specificity and differentiation make it impossible to draw a truth, which is rather constructed and complicated as said by Lyotard. In 1984 he gave the term "post-modernism" in which "objectivity of knowledge and language and the appropriateness of applying generalized world views to all human beings are questioned."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cannella, G. S. (1998). *Critical Research: Postmodern Methodologies for the Examination of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Education*.  
[http://advancingwomen.com/awl/winter98/awlv2\\_1pix.html](http://advancingwomen.com/awl/winter98/awlv2_1pix.html)

There are differences among women as well. There are “high-caste”, “lower-caste”, rich and poor, and also women from various religious categories. Women cannot be homogenized in a single category. According to their respective categories, all women faced different problems and also the different benefits of development. The policies which could be beneficial for the women living in high societies or who are working outside, which can have opposite effects for Dalit women. Also, it is not like a high-class woman always get benefit from development. That could bring different sort of restrictions which they are unaware of.

Belonging to a privileged class can help women to overcome barriers that obstruct women from less thriving classes. Gender is certainly an additional contributor to societal inequality, but it does not act independently of class. A congruence of class deprivation and gender discrimination can disrupt the lives of poorer women very severely indeed. It is the interface of these two features of deprivation-being low class and being female-that can massively impoverish women from the less privileged classes.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, turning to caste, even though being lower caste is undoubtedly a separate cause of the disparity, its impact is all the greater when the lower-caste women also happen to be very poor. The blighting of the lives of Dalits or people from other disadvantaged castes, or of members of the scheduled tribes, is particularly severe when the caste or tribal adversities are further magnified by extreme barrenness.

**“Ruth Manorama, an active member of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women,** once stated that “in a male-dominated society, Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class, and gender”.<sup>12</sup> Caste discrimination in the form of social deprivation and norms such as untouchability, class marginalization as they are economically deprived and do not have many job opportunities due to lack of education and are exploited due to the patriarchal structure of society in general.

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<sup>11</sup> Sen, A. (2005). *The Argumentative Indian*. London: Penguin Books.

<sup>12</sup> Valarmathi, T., Jaiswal, S., & Jaiswal, A. (2018). *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Social Science An Anthropological Analysis about the Condition of Dalit Women in India* (pp. 1–8).

## **Literature review**

In the succeeding section, an attempt has been made to review the earlier works on Dalits and Dalit Women. A considerable section of the feminist writers discussed the intersectionality of gender, class, and caste in general. Some of them are discussed here below.

### **On Dalits**

Jodhka (2012)<sup>13</sup> describes the classical notion of caste which emphasizes the orientalist view to understand caste. He argues that caste is a dimension of power in which status is related to the political and economic relations as landholdings and land relations decide who will plough in fields and who will get what.

Author talks about the most critical feature of caste that is untouchability which was defined by the line of pollution and the notion of purity and impurity. He traces their journey of becoming scheduled castes through constitutional reforms and also examines how the upper caste are having problems with the status given to Dalits and resisting them through various means like social boycotts. Further, he discusses Reform Movements, protests, and Government measures which he feels aim to make sure that untouchables remained within Hinduism.

He argues that the caste system has weakened over the years due to some set of policy interventions, but he argues that these reforms were largely caste-blinds that worked along with the categories of rich and poor or peasants, farmers, and laborers etc. Dalits still face discrimination and exclusion both in the government and private sector.

Guru (2000)<sup>14</sup> discusses some important points related to Dalit marginalization. First, he discusses various processes of marginalization which operate among Dalits like political marginalization, cultural marginalization in terms of restricted symbols, marginalization in the material realm, marginalization in terms of time and space, in the intellectual field. In the later part, author brings in the core-periphery theory to define the political position of Dalits. He says the space created

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<sup>13</sup> Jodhka, S. S. (2012). *Caste: A Short Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Guru, G. (2000). Dalits From Margin to Margin. *India International Centre*, 111-116.

for the Dalits at the core in politics is just symbolic. This relationship between core and margin is always hierarchical. While concluding, Gopal argued that Dalits are partially forced to accept their marginalization and are forced to remain on the margin. They need some radical changes in their situation.

Shah (2002)<sup>15</sup> is raising concern about using Dalit as a homogeneous category. He says that social scientists must be very cautious while making statements about discrimination against Dalits because these are jati specific. He describes the differences among Dalits with the help of a study conducted in Gujarat while taking into consideration the 'chamar' and 'senwa' dalit castes. According to author there are Dalits among Dalits and hierarchy within Dalits.

Reddy (2002)<sup>16</sup> disagrees with Shah on the point of how he uses the term dalit and makes us see the importance of using the term dalit while addressing larger audiences. While explaining the origin of the term she argued that dalit is not a caste, it is a constructed identity. It encompasses all those considered to be either similarly placed or natural allies. Dalit uses this word very proudly and unites themselves against the other oppressing groups.

Judge (2003)<sup>17</sup> takes consideration of two castes- Chamar, and Churah of Punjab to support the argument made by Shah. He describes how some Dalit castes there like ad-dharmis occupy high caste positions among the Dalits. They benefitted from the economic policies of the British era and established themselves as distinct social groups. He reached to the conclusion that there is a prevalent caste system among the Dalits as well.

Muthaiah (2004)<sup>18</sup> studies the designation of Dalits in different contexts like Chandala, Bahujan, etc., and the politics of both designators and designates behind this. Britishers designated them as a depressed class to prove the legitimacy of their rule in India. Later, different groups tried to include them in their groups with

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<sup>15</sup> Shah, A. (2002). The 'Dalit' Category and its Differentiation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 14, 1317-1318.

<sup>16</sup> Reddy, S. (2002). 'Dalit': A Term Asserting Unity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 42, 4339-4340.

<sup>17</sup> Judge, P. S. (2003). Hierarchical Differentiation among Dalits. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 28 (Jul. 12-18), 2990-2991.

<sup>18</sup> Muthaiah, P. (2004). Politics of Dalit Identity. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July-Sept.), 385-402.

the intention to swell their respective majority in politics. Gandhi termed them as Harijans for unified opposition to Britishers. He included them in Hindus to make them a majority. Dalits who adopted Christianity saw no change in their condition even after conversion. Protection through acts was denied to those converted Dalits.

The term Bahujan was used by Kanshiram to form the BSP party inspired by Buddha which usually means the tradition of majority welfare. In the conclusion, he contended that these terms should not merely be multiple identities but should be made ideologies to give benefits to all the Dalits and not to the advanced castes within SCs, STs, and OBCs.

Singh (1997)<sup>19</sup> while visualizing the situation in 1997 argues that the Dalit leadership was accommodated in congress earlier in Haryana. But now they are seeking a new independent identity and BSP became the first party there which has mobilized Dalits as a distinct political group in Haryana. Apart from this, he discusses the regional variations in the socio-economic conditions of the Haryana Dalits. The dependence of Dalits gets reduced in the areas near to the city because they have work alternatives there. According to author Chamars have become more politically conscious among Dalits in Haryana.

Guru (2011)<sup>20</sup> discussed in details that how marginalized sections deployed the language of self-esteem and self-respect for the articulation of their normative aspiration through the idea of democracy and nationalism. He analyzed the impact of liberal democracy on Dalit pursuit of self-esteem and self-respect. He argued that the legal system also allows the upper caste to deal with dalits much more confidently without showing any respect for law. Then he comes to the roles of educated dalits and toiling masses who does not seem to be averse to the idea of participating in liberal democracy.

Therefore, liberal democracy has promises for a sizeable section. Identity politics also requires liberal democracy. This creates a new class among Dalits known as

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<sup>19</sup> Singh, J. (1997). Dalits in Haryana Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 43 (Oct. 25-31), 2787-2788.

<sup>20</sup> Guru, G. (2011). Liberal Democracy in India and the Dalit Critique. *Social Research*, Vol. 78, No. 1, India's World (SPRING 2011), *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, 99-122.



Dalit millennium and leaves behind the others and creates fragmentation between these two classes. Therefore, Ambedkar also argued that how liberal vocabulary of individualism tends to destroy the moral resources necessary to build up solidarity for Dalit emancipation.

Judge (2012)<sup>21</sup> explores the alternative strategies adopted by dalits in various time periods namely, the medieval period, renaissance, post-colonial modernity, and post modernity to improve their social status in India. They did so through the Bhakti movement, by exploiting economic opportunities provided by the Britishers and then the reservation policies after independence. But it is a postmodern state that the Dalit discourse of equality has shifted its emphasis from inclusion and quality to exclusivity and difference.

Now their attention has shifted from equality to gaining power through identity politics. Identity assertion is one of the tools of doing that. Here, he takes the example of Chamar in Punjab, that how they are trying to create a counter structure.

However, author argues that Dalit discourse in order to come out of the casteism may require the politics of inclusion rather than exclusivity and caste differentiation among them has prevented them to adopt such inclusionary strategies.

### **On Dalit Women**

Malik (1999)<sup>22</sup> wrote an article “Untouchability and Dalit Women’s Oppression”. Bela Malik wrote this article after attending a convention against untouchables and dalit women’s oppression, organized by the AIDWA on 20 December 1998. She talks about the gap between the reality of socio-economic conditions of these dalit women and the legal rights that they possess. She discusses how they are deprived of land rights and deprived of access to public resources especially by upper-caste women. She mentions that organization is important to claim their legal rights in reality.

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<sup>21</sup> Judge, P. S. (2012). Between Exclusion and Exclusivity: Dalits in Contemporary India. *Polish Sociological Review*, No. 178, 265-279.

<sup>22</sup> Malik, B. (1999). Untouchability and Dalit Women's Oppression. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, Issue No. 06, 323-324.

Irudayam, Mangubhai, & Lee (2006)<sup>23</sup> argue that the violence against Dalit women in the cases that are not spoken out in public by women and the result of this is the creation and maintenance of a culture of violence, silence, and impunity. While giving many case studies they mention cases of violence in a general community like verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual exploitation, forced incarceration. There is violence in families in form of child sexual abuse, female feticide, and infanticide, etc. This happens at workplaces, government places, etc. done by landlords, higher caste people, business people, other Dalit persons, majority by the forward castes. In the later part of the article, they identify some factors of violence- Dalit women's sexual availability and bodily integrity, caste hierarchy, and lack of economic resources and when they demand their civic-political rights. They talk about remedial actions and the effects of violence.

Guru (1995)<sup>24</sup> in his article entitled "Dalit Women Talk Differently" argues that Dalit Women's mobilization is a unique epistemological standpoint because it allows real representation of social reality because only Dalit women can represent themselves on the basis of their experience. Rege (1998)<sup>25</sup> does not agree with him. She says this can lead to identity politics and limits the emancipatory potential of the Dalit women's organization. She says that Dalit Feminist Standpoint may arise from the intellectual works of Dalit feminists because of their struggles and practices but if it is isolated from the ideas and experiences of other groups, who should be knowing about the historical journeys, struggles, and social relations of those who are marginalized in the society then this Dalit Feminist Standpoint cannot thrive. She argues that non-Dalit writers start considering Dalit's problems as their problems then individuality can be transformed and non-Dalits won't need to write or speak always for the Dalit women or on behalf of them, rather by doing this, they can recreate their identity as Dalit feminists. Therefore, it avoids narrow identity politics based on the direct experiences of Dalit women. Hence, Dalit women should not be a homogenized category.

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<sup>23</sup> Irudayam, A., Mangubhai, J., & Lee, J. (2006). *Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India*. Chennai: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights; National Federation of Dalit Women; Institute of Development Education.

<sup>24</sup> Guru, G. (1995). Dalit Women Talk Differently. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(41/42), 2548–2550.

<sup>25</sup> Rege, S. (1998). Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, Issue No. 44, WS39-WS45.

Datar (1999)<sup>26</sup> criticizes the Dalit standpoint as an alternative on many bases. According to him Rege placed the current feminist debate within a narrow framework of feminist versus post-modernist stream and did not represent eco-feminism. Datar says, “who regenerate both natural and societal resources can claim a standpoint and their knowledge becomes liberatory and becomes an alternative standpoint. In assuming Dalit women as an alternative torch-bearing force for the women’s movement, it copies the same act of collapsing the categories of class and caste which Rege accuses the left of doing”. Datar talks about the ‘*Brahminisation*’ and ‘*Sanskritization*’ in terms of politics as they encourage bargain politics for seats. While supporting his argument Datar says, caste oppression started by denying access to natural resources, therefore, there is a need to claim these resources instead of living them to the savarnas.

Rege (2000)<sup>27</sup> wrote as a response to Datar’s article. She argues that Datar misrecognizes the DFS as being located within the narrow confines of postmodernism versus feminism rather it emerged from a concern with the emphasis on ‘differences’ in feminist politics.

Eco-feminism as a standpoint ignores many works done by women. Rege argues the point of discussion should be locating historically how the different new social movements have not addressed each other’s issues. Internal critique means recognition of connections of power that exist between women. It is, speaking about the space between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

According to Rege, while talking about *Sanskritization* in politics, Datar fails to note the significant spaces within the anti-caste struggle made by Dalit and Bahujan women. Datar misunderstands the standpoint theory as a practice to certain organizations. DFS is a collective subject position and not to be seen in terms of the aggregate of individuals.

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<sup>26</sup> Datar, C. (1999). Non-Brahmin Renderings of Feminism in Maharashtra: Is It more Emancipatory Force?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, Issue No. 41, 2964-2968.

<sup>27</sup> Rege, S. (2000). ‘Real Feminism’ and Dalit Women: Scripts of Denial and Accusation. *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 6 (Feb. 5-11), 492-495.

Guru (2012)<sup>28</sup> defines the empowerment of dalit labour women in terms of their intellectual/spiritual stamina to produce the language of resistance through oral poetry. It is their experience of labour activity that triggers off the intellectual imagination. He gives certain reasons for that-it is clean labour that leads them to creative imagination, collective form of labour makes knowledge-generation a participatory activity, and this form of presentation does not require any interpreter. He further discusses various dimensions of these labouring intellectualism-they enjoy freedom from dalit patriarchy and from dalit cultural establishment, the logic of possessive intellectualism (fight for copyright) did not overwhelm their intellectual creativity. Their experiences made their literary creations resonate with Ambedkar's thoughts. Guru argued that but there is a decline in this labouring intellectualism because of TV serials, because of professional dalit singers, and because of individualization of interest as they are aware of fixed working hours and rights and migration to urban sectors. Meanwhile, there is also the emergence of critical thinking.

CSW in Beijing Declaration and platform for Action's 59<sup>th</sup> session urges to address the link between caste and gender. In this report, it was mentioned how dalit women suffer from forced and bonded labor forced prostitution, and don't have land ownership. They face discrimination in education, health, and decision-making power. Certain forms of violence have been described in this report. Recommendation has been given to states and Commission on the Status of Women and UN Women to stop discrimination, to organic regional South Asian Study. A specific and time-bound action plan is needed. According to this report intersection between caste and gender is the structural factor for poverty and as a root cause of structural inequalities in the post-2015 development framework.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Guru, G. (2012). Laboring Intellectuals: The conceptual world of Dalit Women. *India International Centre quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3/4, WINTER 2012-SPRING 2013, 54-68.

<sup>29</sup> (2015). *IDSN Input on Dalit Women in relation to the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of women: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. New York: International Dalit Solidarity Network.

Sabharwal & Sonalkar (2010)<sup>30</sup> highlights the specific challenges facing Dalit women in India in the field of economics (wage labor), literacy, health status, and political participation. She argues that mainstream feminist discourse and evaluation in India focuses on gender discrimination and issues of economic, educational, and political empowerment, ignoring the realities of the link between caste and gender. She analysis various theoretical discourses-On Gender and Patriarchy, citizenship and rights of women, Feminist Discourse with respect to Social/cultural Groups (black feminism, Feminist Discourse in India, and Dalit Women Discourse). Authour argues that it is their exclusion-induced deprivation that differentiates Dalit women's problems from the rest of the women. This requires a dual solution- in general policies against discrimination and poverty of women, second policies for dalit women.

Rao (2005)<sup>31</sup> argues that democratizing and modernizing rather than eliminating caste, they constitute the form of identity through which gender and also sexuality can be reimagined and reshaped. She accepts that the caste system subordinates both the upper caste and lower caste women. To describe that she discussed 'dasiputras', how the upper caste women were not allowed to marry a lower caste. They do this due to their supposed responsibility of preserving the caste system by maintaining chastity and purity of body. After 1989, it was recognized that Dalit women are burdened with double oppression-from upper caste and from Dalit men.

Govinda (2006)<sup>32</sup> with the example of women who work with regional organizations, argues that caste identity still determines the place that women activists are given by villagers in their feedback and within women's organizations. The article also explores how Dalit women are using their caste identity, alongside their identity as village-level activists, to further their interests beyond the realm of women's activism. They do that to make a difference and to

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<sup>30</sup> Sabharwal, N. S., & Sonalkar, W. (2010). *Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India*. New Delhi: IDRC; Indian Institute of Dalit Studies. Retrieved from czech-in.org: [http://www.czech-in.org/EES/Full\\_Papers/19.pdf](http://www.czech-in.org/EES/Full_Papers/19.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Rao, A. (2005). Sexuality and The Family Form. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 8 (Feb. 19-25), 715-718.

<sup>32</sup> Govinda, R. (2006). The Politics of Marginalized: Dalits and Women's Activism in India. *Gender and Development*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Marginalised Peoples (July), 181-190.

change the system. This confirms that they are aware that political society operates differently from civil society. They understand the importance of political power.

Chattopadhyay (2003)<sup>33</sup> argues that Dalit women are triply oppressed in society in the form of caste, class, and gender. Rape and molestation are new dimensions of a caste war, used as weapons of reprisal against the dalits. She especially mentions the 'Debdasi' ritual in some of the regions of south India. But now Dalit women are courageously speaking out. They are now pursuing higher education and securing jobs. They are participating at various platforms like the National Federation of Dalit Women. There are now 33% reserved seats for Dalit women in panchayats though with all its loopholes.

In the wake of growing rape cases in the state of Haryana and Maharashtra Teltumbde (2014)<sup>34</sup> criticizes the very idea of democracy in India. He says, for Dalits, democracy has been a veritable rule of demons. He argues that rather than *Brahmanical* mindset, the very secular intrigues of this democratic system have created the demons that lynch and rape Dalits with impunity. He highlights the ignorance of the political system and media towards such cases.

Soam & Singh (2019)<sup>35</sup> in their study find that deprivation and discrimination with the Dalit women persist in multiple spheres. The HDI Index for Dalit women is lower than the non-Dalit women. Dalit women face exclusion in political participation and policy making, disadvantages in economic opportunity, and are vulnerable to poverty. They are 'unfavourably included' in the socio-economic construct through the differential treatment or they are included in the society to do the jobs which the dominant caste does not perform.

## Research Gap

The problem within the discourse is that women are usually seen from the gender perspective and they are considered within the traditional boundaries of the binary division of men/women which makes us unable to see the differences among the

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<sup>33</sup> Chattopadhyay, M. (2003). Dalit Women ask for Human Rights. *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 64, 878-882.

<sup>34</sup> Teltumbde, A. (2014). Dance of Democracy. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, No. 23, 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Swati Soam & Rajeev Kumar Singh (2019). Insecurity and Exclusion among Dalit Women: A Case Study. *Indian journal of Political Science*, Vol. LXXX, No.4, Oct-December, 633-642.

women themselves. In India, caste-constructed culture puts the triple burden of caste, class, and gender on Dalit women. Despite this fact, there are also differences in the form of structural violence in the regional culture. These different forms of structural violence do affect the personal and social dignity of women differently, according to their culture. Therefore, the study on Dalit women should also be regionally specific. **Haryana has been selected for the field study as here Dalits are not unified though they construct more than 10% of the population and the stories of marginalization on Dalit in Haryana are very less in the academic field.**

There is rare literature on the socio-economic positioning of women in Haryana. The work which is based on Dalit women in Haryana is mostly based on sexual abuse and violence. Questions like discrimination among Dalit women have also not been addressed yet. The present work seeks to rectify some blind spots in earlier done works by addressing some additional questions and this makes it more significant to understand the situation of these women in Haryana.

### **Aims and Objectives of the study**

Discriminatory practices against females persist all over India due to the belief in deep-rooted patriarchy. Over the years Haryana has been the state which is been successful in reserving its position as the state which has the lowest sex ratio. The birth of a girl child is generally not welcomed in Haryana. Sex-selective abortion has been indeed a matter of great concern here. Females of Haryana have to face many numbers of crimes like sexual violence, rape, kidnapping, etc. Haryana has a long history of honor killing and subjugating cultural norms for women. This along with the caste hierarchy in Haryana brings more plight when it comes to the Dalit women which consist 47% of the total population of scheduled castes in Haryana according to the 2011 Census. Along with the crimes mentioned above, there is a long roaster of problems that these women have to face being Dalit as well. Some of the problems faced by them are following:

- ❖ Physical abuse and violence from upper-caste men
- ❖ Eve teasing

- ❖ Work as Labourer in other's field
- ❖ Domestic violence from their family members
- ❖ Doing works like sweeping, cleaning, and mopping as a domestic worker due to poverty and caste specificity
- ❖ Humiliation and untouchability
- ❖ Political and Economic deprivation in both public and private spheres etc.

The main aim of this study has been to examine the social, economic, and political status of Dalit women in Haryana. It is anticipated that the development of any demographic area in terms of social, economic, and educational spheres may bring changes in beliefs and attitudes of women concerning independence, equality, and individuality. When socio-economic and demographic variables pertaining to Haryana's social structure are examined it is seen that the situation of women in Haryana is highly pathetic. The institutional norms related to age-old traditions and patriarchy in rural areas of Haryana still restrict women to participate actively in social, economic, and political areas. While taking into consideration these factors, this study has tried to observe whether there is unanimity between value patterns of social structure. Therefore, taking into account the above stimulation, the following are considered as the objectives of the present study: -

- ❖ To assess the socio-economic positioning of Dalit women in society in general and in the Dalit fold in particular
- ❖ To find out the nature of subjugation and structural violence and the role of the dominant cultural construct for the Dalit women
- ❖ To find out the role of Dalit women in the caste consciousness movement in Haryana.

## **Hypotheses**

Following are the hypothesis to test for the present work:

- ❖ Along with the division of labour between the public and private sphere Dalit women also face division of labour in terms of caste.



- ❖ Dalit women are socially and economically more marginalized not because of their class character but also of their caste character.
- ❖ A multi-layered hierarchy exists among the Dalit category itself which hampers any unity among themselves even against the atrocities from the patriarchal structure itself.
- ❖ Violence against women in India is structural and cultural in nature and dalit women are no exception.

### **Methods and Tools of Data Collection**

The present research is descriptive and analytical in nature. The study made an attempt to describe the socio-cultural and political construct of the Dalits in Haryana in general and of Sonipat in particular. Also, the present work tried to analyse the factors which led to the marginalization of the dalit women and existing multi-level hierarchies within the gender and dalit fold especially in the context of the universe of study.

Data for the present study was collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. For the purpose of quantitative methods, the interview schedules were used for collection of Data from the field. In qualitative methods, empirical evidences were collected from the field through observations. Along with in-depth focused group interviews, some informal interviews were also conducted in sample villages.

An informal schedule was prepared pertaining to the variables identified in the study. The schedule contained questions related to socio-economic background of the respondent and questions related to status indicators. Both primary and secondary sources of information were used for collecting the data. Research reports and documents published by government sources have been used for secondary data. It includes various government's published materials such as census reports, National Crime Bureau Records, data from Ministry of Human Resources and Development, data from National Sample Survey Office, and other official records which were relevant to the topic. Newspaper clippings were also

used wherever required. Electronic sources are also used as per requirement. Appropriate tools are being used for analysing the data.

## **Field of Study**

In the present study, empirical evidence has been collected from the district Sonipat, which lies in the northern part of the Haryana. The Sonipat district has progressed economically a lot in the last two decades. It is known as the education city. More medical facilities have been developed here. Sonipat is becoming a hub of public and private industries. But that does not bring desired changes in the social structure of this demographic area. It is still lagging behind in social and cultural development. The sex ratio of Sonipat district is 856 out of 1000 males, which is one of the lowest in Haryana state. The rate of female literacy is 69.80 in Sonipat. It is ironic that despite having the highest female literacy rate comparatively the sex ratio here is the lowest.<sup>36</sup>

The reason to choose the Sonipat as the field of study is that the Dalit population here is 18.62. Dalits in the other regions of Haryana like in Jind and Hisar are still politically aware of their rights. But in the northern part of Haryana, they are more fragmented and are at the margins of society. The Sonipat district is divided into seven blocks. The three blocks have been selected for the study. Purposive Random Sampling methods are being used for the selection of the blocks and villages therein. Areas are chosen according to the proportion of Dalit community in respect to the population there. It includes villages like Pabnera from Murthal block, Haryana Kalan from Sonipat Block, Patti Kalana from Gohana block. These are the villages that have Dalit population above 40%. It is going to be a combination of primary data collected on the basis of the experience of Dalit women and secondary data collected from some government or private sources.

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<sup>36</sup> *Census of India Website: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.* (n.d.). Retrieved December 19, 2021, from [https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/dchb\\_haryana.html](https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/dchb_haryana.html)

## **Chapter Plan**

1. Introduction
2. Positioning Dalit women in India
3. Positioning Dalit women in Haryana: In special reference to Sonipat district
4. Field study
5. Findings and suggestions