

## CHAPTER – I

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India has a unique social system popularly known as “Caste System”, so the Caste system has an important place in the study of Indian society. The most ancient scriptures – the Shruti texts, or Vedas, place very little importance on the caste system, mentioning caste only rarely and in a cursory manner. A hymn from the Rigveda seems to indicate that one’s caste is not necessarily determined by that of one’s family. In the Vedic period, there also seems to be no discrimination against the Shudras (Which later became an ensemble of the so called low-castes) on the issue of hearing the sacred words of the Vedas and fully participating in all religious rights, something which became totally banned in the later times. <sup>1</sup> Later scriptures such as Bhagavad Gita and Manusmriti state that the four varnas are created by God. However, at the same time, Gita says that one’s varna is to be understood from one’s personal qualities and one’s karma (work), not one’s birth. Manusmriti, contains some laws that codified the caste system. Varna is mentioned as caste equivalent in Manusmriti. Manusmriti and some other shastras mention four varnas like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The Brahmins (teachers, scholars and priests), the Kshatriyas (kings and warriors), the Vaishyas (traders, landowners and some artisan groups). Another group of untouchables excluded from the main society was called Parjanya or Antyaja.<sup>2</sup> Avarna can be viewed as a group of castes or a social division that consists of various sub-castes called jatis.

The contradictions of socio-economic order in India remain almost the same even after 69 years of independence. Half a century is a considerable period of time for a society, state and nation to realize its mistakes and imbalances. But, even at the beginning of the 21st century neither the society nor the state in India has been able to resolve its contradictions. Despite the Constitutional commitment of the post-colonial state towards the goal of equality, liberty and justice, the age old structure of inequality has not been dismantled. Social and economic inequality still occupies the centre-stage of Indian reality. The ideals of social democracy and distributive justice, in their essence, remain elusive. On the contrary, the vast majority of the Indian

population is deprived socially, economically, politically and educationally. The social opportunities, offered to the citizens by the state, are confined to the privileged sections of society.

The deprived and disadvantage groups are still exposed to the experiences of cumulative inequality. These marginalized groups have yet to experience fully the so-called fruits of modern development. There is a tremendous gap between the population of the upper castes and the Lower Castes (generally called Dalits in the recent period) who constitutes more than 16 per cent of the Indian population. The upwardly mobile other backward castes have, of course, challenged the hegemonic structure of the upper castes order and they have crystallized themselves as a major economic and political power in independent India. But, as far as the social status of Dalits is concerned, no substantial changes have taken place during the six decades of development planning. They are still rated at the underside in the socio-economic structure. It is widely acknowledged that traditional Indian society was based on Varna and Jati. This system is very ancient in origin and through the passage of time it has undergone profound changes, but caste is still a very powerful institution in our socio-economic, religious and political organization. The most disquietening and disturbing feature connected with the caste system has been the concept of Untouchability. Those who were engaged in unclean occupation were considered as polluted persons and had to go with this stigma in the prevailing reality and had to accept for themselves the status of Untouchables.

Indian society is a heterogeneous, wherein people belonging to various castes and communities reside. The people of Indian society are divided on the basis of castes. Caste system is based on Varna System where the Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy, followed by Vysyas, Kshatriyas and Sudras. Those people who are outside the varna system are known as Avarnas or Antajas or Panchamas or Chandalas<sup>1</sup>. They are external in the sense that they were required to stay outside the village settlement. The concept of pollution attached to them was responsible for treating or categorizing them as Scheduled Castes. There are more than 3743 castes and sub-castes in Indian Society<sup>3</sup>. The caste system is characterized by a status hierarchy, the scheduled castes or the so-called untouchables are at the base, in fact, at the lowest of

the social and ritual status. These sections had, on account of their low social and ritual status, been subjected to a variety of disabilities under the traditional caste system. All through the ages, the Scheduled Castes had suffered from social injustice and exploitation. They were denied all privileges and benefits as had been enjoyed by the upper castes. Their entries into temples of upper castes, public places, educational institutions, etc. were restricted. On account of their being on the lowest rung of the social ladder, they were forced to take up unclean and menial occupations and jobs, which yielded low incomes. They were associated with a variety of specialized traditional occupations such as scavenging, cobbling, disposal of carcass, basketry, etc. As a consequence, these castes have remained socially, economically and educationally, politically and culturally backward for several centuries .

During British period, many of the socio-political reform movements were organized to empower the weaker sections especially, scheduled castes and after independence, the Constitution emphasize social equality, that is equality irrespective of race, caste, religion or gender. Consequently, to achieve equality and social justice, reservation in education and employment was provided to the scheduled castes. Due to these efforts of the government, scheduled castes are getting education and employment in society and thereby showing development