



ROLE OF EDUCATION IN BRINGING SOCIAL CHANGES: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE DALITS OF MALWA REGION OF PUNJAB

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Abstract- Education is one of the most important factor that plays a leading role in human development and emancipation of humankind. It promotes a productive, wellinformed and enlightened citizenry and creates opportunities for socially and economically underprivileged sections of the society. In the modern life, education occupies an important role and more so, in case of groups which are historically deprived and marginalized in society, namely scheduled castes or untouchable people who are also known as Dalits in the day to day political discourse. After independence in 1947 ensuring access to education for the Dalits and diminishing the social effects of the caste system in the society were the greatest challenges for the Indian government. Therefore the government framed many policies to increase the assess of education for the underprivileged sections of the society and as a result remarkable changes occurred in the traditional caste system. The present paper tries to explore the impact of education in bringning social changes among the educated dalits of Malwa region of Punjab. Attempts have been made to present the impact of education on the intercaste relations, untouchability, caste based discriminations, commensality among castes and occupational mobility among the Dalits.

Keywords: human development, enlightened citizenry, dalits

I. INTRODUCTION

Social sciences grow and change continuously in response to new phenomena within world societies, to discoveries and insights within the disciplines itself. Therefore, during the last few decades the social changes occurring due to advancement in education has attracted many scholars from various disciplines study its importance, needs and its impacts on the various elements of the society. Many sociologists beganing from Durkheim (1956) consider that education is among major factors and causes of social change. Similarly Parsons (1951) argues that education is the base of any society and a link between society and family through which socialization of a children is defined. Ambedkar (1988) believed that education was the necessary precondition for the reconstruction of the society on the principles of equality and social justice. According to him education would greatly contribute to the improvement of untouchables. Similarly, Rao (1972) considers that education is the major determinant in the socialization of the younger generation which influences the value, attitude, and norms of behaviour accepted in the society to which they belong as by passing on specific forms of knowledge, skills or occupational techniques

But unfortunately for centuries, Dalits of India have been forbidden from gaining access to education. Originally reserved for higher castes only the denial of conventional education to Dalits was designed to prevent them from increasing their quality of life and to highlight caste divisions. But inspite of this some Indian social scientists such as Singhi (1979), Parvathamma (1984), Rao (1981b), Jha (1973), Panday (1988), Judge (2009, 2010) highlighted that by virtue of getting educations, Dalits have improved their social, economic and political status in the society. Still, all these studies leave the scope for further studies on education among the dalits and consequential social change. Therefore, to broaden the base of generalization on the issue continues scientific studies are required. The present paper aims to find out the social changes occurring as a consequence of education among the dalits of Malwa region of Punjab. Before evaluating the changes among the Dalits due to education it will be worthful to discuss socio- demographics of the Dalits in Punjab.

II. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF DALITS IN PUNJAB

Punjab is one of the advanced and prosperous states of India. It was Punjab state, which led the other states in agricultural development in the form of Green Revolution, which brought far reaching changes in its social, economic and political spheres. It is a Sikh-dominated state with 63 percent of Sikh population. Tenants of Sikhism do not favour any type of discrimination based on birth, however, the practical life depicts a quite visible influence of the Hindu caste system (Marengo, 1976; Gill, 1997; Jodhka, 2002; Puri, 2003). Although Punjab is a state which distinguishes itself in terms of the lowest poverty levels in India, international migration, in terms of agriculture and social egalitarianism under the influence of Sikhism. However, it does not mean that the caste system has vanished and discrimination and social exclusion have disappeared in the Punjabi society. Sikhism and agricultural development in Punjab have not been able to erode the cultural ethos on which certain forms of social segregation are based (Judge, 2010).

Like other caste groups scheduled castes are also divided among the various castes and ethnic groups in Punjab. According to Ram (2017) Dalit in Punjab have been categorised into 39 castes of varying numerical strength, geographical spread, religious and political affiliations, social mobility, status and identity, economic conditions and cultural outlook. He further categorised Dalit population in the state in four major caste clusters. He noted that out of the 39 SC castes, the four major castes of Chamar, Ad-dharmi, Balmiki and Mazhabi constitute 74.44 percent of the total Dalit population in Punjab. These four major castes belong to two broader ethnographic umbrella caste categories of Chuhra and Chamar castes. These two umbrella castes are generally referred to as two distinct clusters of Chamar and Chuhra castes. The rest of the 35 castes putting together constitute less than one-third of the total Dalit population in the state (Ibid)

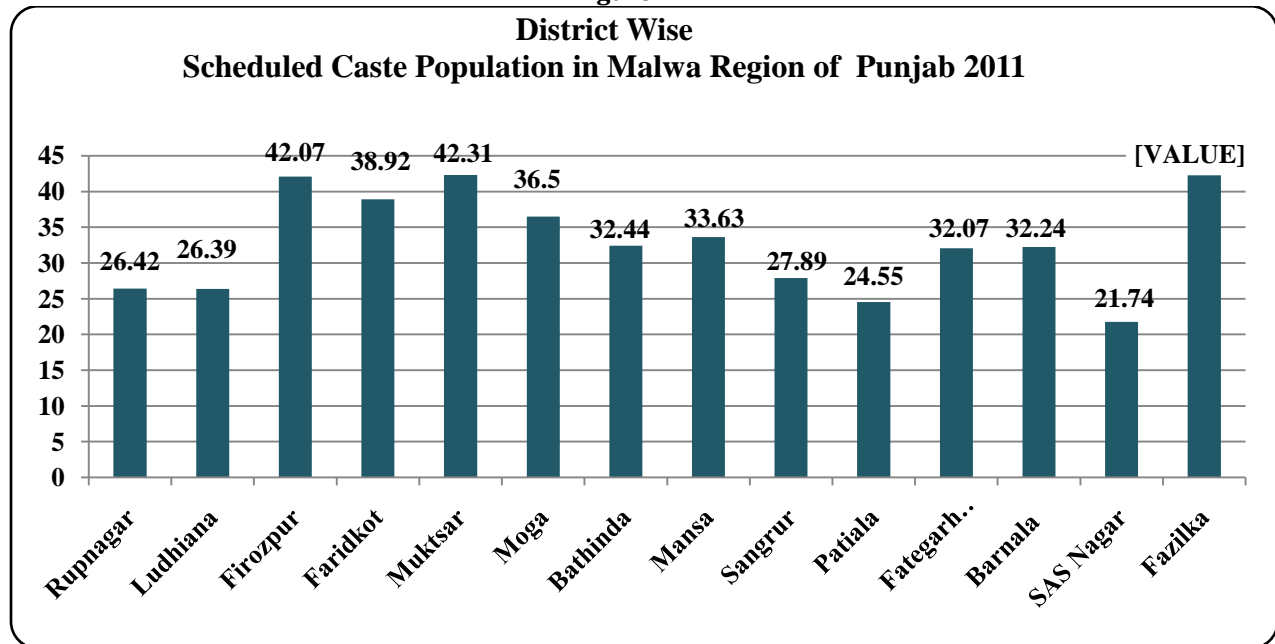
Similarly, looking at the caste compositions among the dalit of Punjab, Judge and Bal (2009) also noted that 92 percent of the total scheduled castes are comprised of only ten castes, viz, Mazbis Sikhs, Ramdassia, Ad-dharmis, Valmikis, Bazigars, Dumana, Megh, Sansis, Julaha and Dhanak. Therefore, it may be discerned that these are the major dalit caste groups in Punjab and other are marginally represented. Among these caste groups Ad-dharmis are numerically, politically and economically powerful and dominating in the Doaba region of Punjab.

In Punjab many dalit caste groups are known by various names, according to Judge (2010) Bhangi were known as Valmiki in Hindus, Mazbies as Sikh and Mussali as Muslim. Even conversions to Christianity have just given them a new name i.e. Masih. Such change of names had no implication for improvement of their status. It has been observed that among converted, the Churhas form sizable proportion that Christian and Churhas have become synonymous in Punjab (Ibid).

Dalit population varies from area to area in Punjab. These people are widely distributed all over, though in varying degrees. There is hardly any village or town in the state which does not have a noticeable cluster of dalit households (Gosal, 2004). They have been providing several types of menial services to all the people, irrespective of their caste, creed or economic status. The Bhangis and Churhas have been doing sweeping and cleaning; Julahas have been engaged in weaving cloths; Chamars have been disposing of dead cattle, processing hides and skins, and doing leather work. This was the general scenario almost all over the country, with Punjab being no exception. But due to various developmental processes such as emigration, access to education, reservation and other affirmative actions of the government the social and economic status of the dalits has changed in the state.

Dalits of Punjab also geographically diverse group. They have different proportion in three cultural zones of the state. Ravidassias and Ad-Dharmis are mostly concentrated in the Doaba region of Punjab. Their percentage is very low in the Majha region. Mazhabis are mainly settled in Majha and Malwa regions. Ramdasias and Rai Sikhs are largely concentrated in Malwa, and Balmikis in both the Doaba and Malwa regions

Figure 1.1
District Wise
Scheduled Caste Population in Malwa Region of Punjab 2011



Source: Statistical Abstract Punjab 2015

As per Census 2011, the State of Punjab has the highest percentage of the Scheduled Caste population amongst all the states of the country. The Scheduled Caste population in Punjab is 88.60 Lac which is 31.94 percent of the total population (277.43 Lac) of the state. Punjab accounts for 2.3 percent of the total population and 4.3 percent Scheduled Caste population of India (DSJEM, 2020). Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of SC population among the districts of the Malwa region indicates in the Malwa region of Punjab that the percentage of SC persons is higher in the districts of Sri Muktsar Sahib (42.31), followed by district Firozpur (42.17), Faridkot (38.92), Moga (36.50), Mansa (33.63), Bathinda (32.44), Barnala (32.24) and Fatehgarh Sahib (32.07). This is to say that in the majority of the districts of Malwa region of Punjab have one third or more of their population belongs to the Scheduled Castes category. On the other hand in Punjab most of the Dalit population lives in rural areas than urban. About 73 percent lives in rural whereas only 26 percent Dalits lives in urban areas. With this data one can easily understand the poor condition of Dalits as caste system mostly affected the rural areas unlike urban areas (Ibid)

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

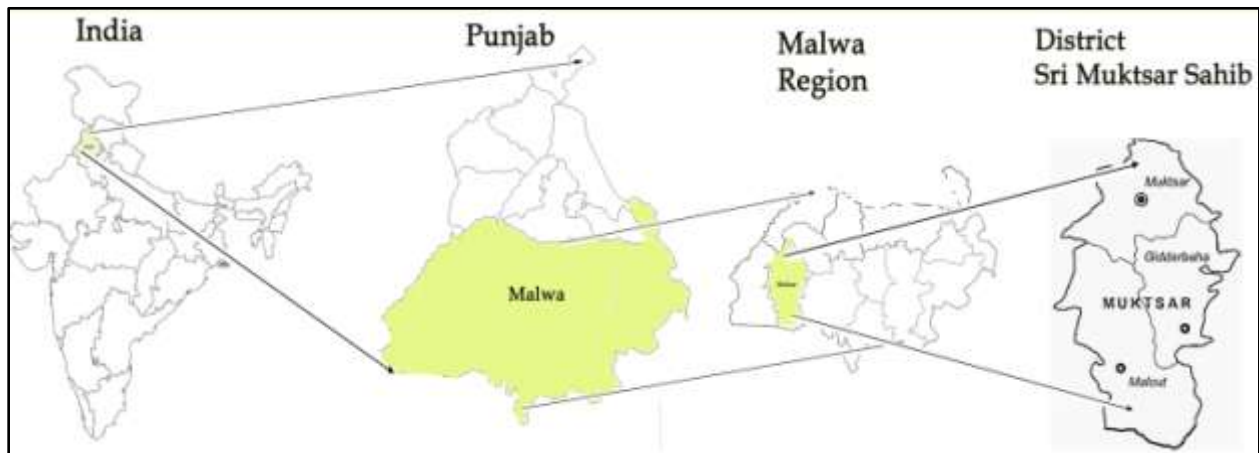
The present study has three major objectives. First, to present socio demographic profile of the Dalits in Punjab. Secondly, mapping the educational change among the dalits of the Malwa cultural zone of Punjab. Thirdly, consequential changes occurring in the life of dalits due to education, such as social life pattern, political and economic aspects etc.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Punjab state is divided into three major cultural zones, namely, *Majha*, *Malwa* and *Doaba*. This division of Punjab is basically due to the rivers *Sutlej* and *Beas* flowing through the land of Punjab. The region of Punjab towards the left bank of *Sutlej* river is called *Malwa*. *Malwa* extends upto Ambala district in Haryana, beyond the borders of Punjab state (Figure: 1.2). The Malwa region is a region of Punjab and parts of Haryana between the *Sutlej* and *Yamuna* rivers. In Punjab Malwa region have 12 administrative districts. The present study was conducted in two cities namely Sri Muktsar Sahib and Giddebaha of Sri Muktsar Sahib district that fall in the Malwa region of Punjab. The data were collected with the help of pre tested structured

interview schedule. For the present study, 100 respondents from two scheduled caste groups, i.e. Mazhabis (Valmiki), Chamars (Ramdasias) were randomly selected. Equal representation has been given to the each caste group among these castes.

Figure 1.2
District Sri Muktsar Sahib on Political Map of Punjab



V. EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AMONG THE DALITS OF PUNJAB

In the first part of the paper we have discussed the caste composition among the Dalits and their socio demographic profile in the state. This section mainly aimed to know the education of respondents and its impact on the inter-generational mobility and social, economic changed occurred among the dalits due to educational advancement.

According to Kundal (2004) the education system has a capacity to retain Dalit students and provide them resources both material and cultural to have access to education. Education and occupation are inter-related. In modern times, many occupations demand a good educational level and skill. Judge and Bal (2009) rightly pointed out that the education was destined to play a radical role by contributing to separation between caste and occupation. Despite the increase in educational level of Dalits, it could not provide them with occupational mobility. Though they try to gain respectful work on the basis of educational qualifications but very few of them succeed. Ad-Dharmis and Chamars have succeeded to get out of their traditional occupations and improve their status. But in case of other 37 Dalits castes including *Balmikis or Majhbis* they could not get rid of their traditional work as they had been engaged in a lowly work like manual scavenging, leather work, picking the dead animals etc.

Before presenting the data on educational profile of the respondents, it is worthwhile to provide data on the educational profile of dalits in Punjab. As per Census 2011, the literacy rate among SCs is 64.81 percent as compared to total literacy rate of 75.84 percent of the state and 73.00 percent of the country as a whole. The female literacy rate of SCs at 58.39 percent in the state also lags behind that of the total 70.73 percent of the State. However, it is better than the SC female literacy rate at 56.46 percent of the Country. The SC male literacy rate at 70.66 percent of the state is also lower than the total male literacy rate of 80.44 percent in the state.

Table: 1.1
District wise Literacy Rate of Scheduled Castes in Malwa Region of Punjab in 1991, 2001 and 2011

Districts of Malwa Region	Years		
	1991	2001	2011 (*)
Rupnagar	57.38	70.17	78.4
Ludhiana	50.48	65.07	72.65

Firozpur	32.49	40.12	55.38
Faridkot	24.27	42.17	54.91
Muktsar (**)	NA	38.11	50.46
Moga (**)	NA	42.22	55.23
Bathinda	20.68	41.45	53.09
Mansa (**)	NA	42.22	48.72
Sangrur	27.15	44.45	57.6
Patiala	38.53	53.47	62.28
Fategarh Sahib (**)	NA	63.63	72.19
Barnala (**)	NA	NA	54.91
SAS Nagar (**)	NA	NA	76.10

Source: Judge and Bal, 2009, (*) Statistical Abstract Punjab 2015

Note:(**)All districts of Malwa region were covered out of the existing districts between 1999 and 2011

A comparative analysis of the district wise literacy rate of Dalits of Punjab for the year 1999, 2001 and 2011 has been shown in Table 1.1. It is clear from the data that in addition to the rise in literacy rate by 14 percent, the pattern of literacy varies according to district. Some of the districts have lower literacy rates than the average rate among the scheduled castes of Malwa region of Punjab. Sri Muktsar sahib has the lowest literacy rate of 39.11 percent, where Rupnagar tops the list with a 70.17 percent literacy rate. It is clear from the data that the overall scenario of the literacy rate of dalts is far from being satisfactory. Even some of the studies in the late 80s (D'souza, 1980, Pimplay, 1980) also noted the caste wise variations in the literacy rate of scheduled castes in Punjab. They noted that in 1961 and 1971 the literacy rate was highest among Chamars and lowest among Balmikis. These were other castes, such as Bazigar and Dhanak, which had a literacy rate even lower than the Balmikis. Even after four decades the situation remained the same.

On the other hand there is clear cut difference between the literacy rate of urban and rural Dalits and non Dalits of the state. As per Census 2011, the literacy level among Scheduled Castes (64.8 percent) was considerably lower than that of non-Scheduled Castes (82.07 percent) pointing towards the gap of 17.26 percent. The gaps were found to be slightly on the lower side for rural segments than their urban counterparts. However, the literacy rate was the highest in the case of non-SC urban males (90.65 percent) and lowest for Dalit rural females (58.39 percent). This shows that different sections of society stand at historically different stages of progress as far as literacy goes. On the other hand the drop-out rate is high after primary level among the Dalits as the percentage of matriculates is half of the primary level literates Figure 1.1. There is a sharper decline in the percentage of students at the higher levels of education.

While talking about the education level of the schedule castes in higher education, Gill (2002) also points out that "in spite of the policy of reservation for scheduled castes, the SC students constitute only 9.70 percent of the total students in the higher education in 1991 and 9.71 percent in 1998.

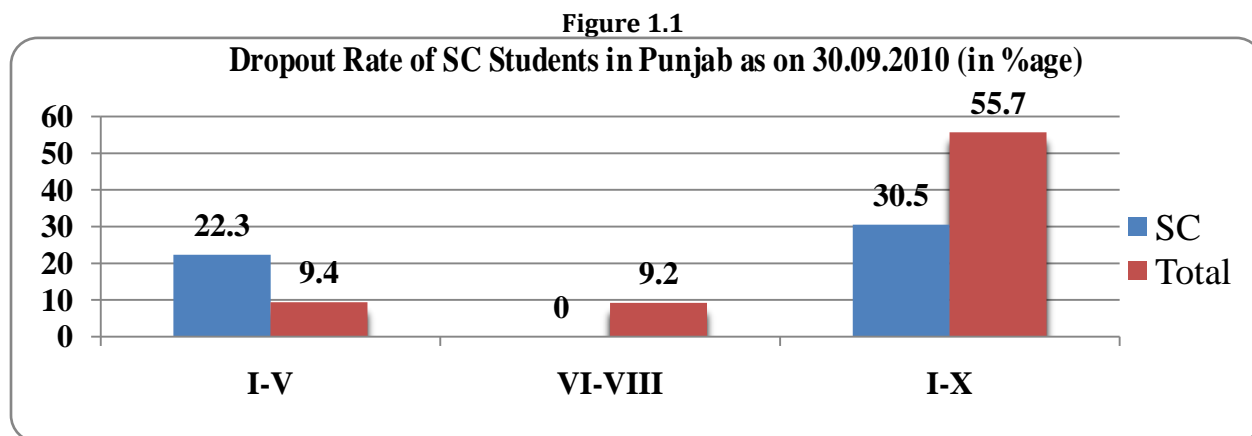
He pointed out that the system is unable to raise the proportion of schedule castes students in the higher education and end discrimination against them. On the other hand it is interesting to note that among the Dalits while Mazhab has the highest percentage of literates at lower levels of education (primary and below), Adidharmi/Chamar have higher percentage of literates in the upper level of education including graduation and above (Table 1.2). But the condition is worse among the other 37 castes groups among the Dalits in Punjab.

Table 1.2
Educational Levels among the Scheduled Castes

Name of SCs	Literate without Education Level	Blow Primary	Education Level Attended				
			Primary	Middle	Matriculation, Higher Secondary, Intermediate	Non Technical	Graduate and Above
All SCs	2.4	26.5	31.6	16.6	20.3	0.5	2.0
Ad	1.2	19.8	30.7	18.7	25.8	0.7	3.0

Dharmi							
Balmiki	2.6	28.3	33.5	17.2	16.8	0.2	1.3
Chamars	1.8	23.5	30.7	17.5	23.01	0.8	2.6
Mazhbi	3.8	34.2	32.5	14.0	14.5	0.3	0.7

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India



Source: Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, Punjab. (DWSCBC)

VI. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

After having discussed the literacy rate of Malwa region of the state, it is important to present the data on the educational characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1.3
InterGenerational Educational Change among the Dalits Respondents

Education	Past Generation	Present Generation	Change
Illiterate	80	08	-72
Primary	15	09	-06
High School	00	18	+18
Intermediate	00	15	+15
Graduation	00	24	+24
Post Graduation	00	21	+21
UG/PG + Professional Course	00	05	+05
Total	100	100	

Table 1.3 presents the data on the educational level of the respondent and their past generation. It is evident from the data that the 80 percent of the respondent's previous generation was illiterate where 08 percent of respondents are illiterate in the present generation. The findings of the present study are in turn with the earlier research and educational scenario of the state discussed above. In the present generation about 50 percent of the respondents are highly educated. Thus we can say literacy rate among the Dalits of the Malwa region of Punjab has been increasing day by day.

Education and Inter Caste Relations

The society develops if there is fraternity and strong bonding among people of all castes and creeds. The study of social aspect is much vital in the case of Dalits as in most of the part of the country they have not been able to improve their conditions and have failed to get respectful place in the society. Therefore the social aspect is important to understand the changing condition of Dalits in Punjab. It is also true that in some manner, Dalits in Punjab are in a better position than Dalits in other states.

Commensality among the Castes

The commensality refers to the interaction of schedule castes with the other castes which are hierarchically higher on social auspicious and festivals. Table 1.4 shows that largest number, 30 percent of high educated respondents have better commensality in festivals and other social auspicious with the higher castes people and the lowest number 5 percent are less educated respondents having commensality

Education	Commensality with Higher Castes	With Equal Castes	With Lower Castes	No of Respondents
Less	04	10	03	17
Moderate	21	08	04	33
High	30	15	05	50
Total	55	33	12	100

Caste Discriminations and Untouchability

According to Michael (2007) "to be an untouchable in the Indian caste system is to be very low in and partially excluded from, an elaborate hierarchical social order,". Historically and even in the present discourse these untouchable people were known by various names such as *Harijan*, *Shudra*, Depressed castes, out castes, Scheduled castes and dalits etc. in the most ancient times, the term *Mlecha*, *Chandala*, *Panchma*, *Averna* were used for them. But it will not be an exaggeration to say that one of the profound change in the contemporary Indian society has been the transformation in the socioeconomic and political conditions of dalits in our time. In the 20th century, various social, religious and political movement rose up in India against the caste discrimination and in support or aware of the human rights of the Dalit community. Indian constitution provides equal rights and opportunities of each citizen and also prohibits the practices discrimination and untouchability in any form. By virtue of this change the social face of dalits has also changed. Apart from other responsible factors, modern education is one of the influential factors responsible for this transformation. Even in the present study 96 percent respondents (Table 1.5) believe that there is sharp decline in terms of caste discrimination and untouchability in the Malwa region of Punjab. The highly educated and moderate educated respondents feels that untouchability has decreased but on the other hand few less educated respondents say that the there is no change in caste discrimination and untouchability.

Education	Increased	Decreased	No Change	No of Respondents
Less	00	13	04	17
Moderate	00	33	00	33
High	00	50	00	50
Total	00	96	04	100

Inter Caste Conflicts and Harassment of Dalits

Caste discrimination and inter caste conflicts are highly politicized and sensitive issues in India. In Punjab whether the caste clashes are social, economic, or political in nature, they are premised on the same basic principle such as any of demand land, increased wages, any attempt to alter village customs or political rights leads to violence and economic retaliation on the part of those most threatened by changes in the status quo. Recently there was a clash between the Dalits and Jat castes on the issue of common land in *Husnar* village in Gidderbaha subdivision. People belonging to one community were in favor of carcass disposal point on the village *Shamlat* land while others were opposing it. After violence erupted between two communities which left over a dozen people injured, the upper caste people, announced the social boycott of Mazhabi Sikhs until the issue of carcass disposal point is resolved. Further, in the announcement made at a village gurdwara, it was said that if someone gave work in the fields or green fodder to the members of the Dalits community, the farmer will have to pay a fine of Rs 10,000 (The Tribune, September, 8 2019). Although such issues are still prevalent in the rural areas of the states but the educated respondents condemned such incidence by saying it

political instead of caste based clash. It is evident from Table 1.6 that a majority of the educated respondents 89 percent believe that there is sharp decrease in caste based discriminations and untouchability in the modern society.

Education	Increased	Decreased	No Change	No of Respondents
Less	02	13	02	17
Moderate	01	32	00	33
High	06	44	00	50
Total	09	89	02	100

Education and Political Consciousness

In the contemporary society, social consciousness and social action are decidedly associated with education. Although education is not only the factor for generation of political consciousness among the Dalits but its role can not be ignored. It can be assumed that the greater amount of political consciousness would increase and enlarge the level of political participation. It has been observed, in the present study, that the greater amount of articulated political consciousness among the Dalit community has increased and broadened the level and scope of political participation. During the field work it was observed that educated respondents were more conscious about their socio-political rights as compared to the uneducated respondents. To check political awareness among the respondents they were asked many questions regarding their voting rights, election, reservation of seats in the political and education institutions, constitutional provisions for the welfare of scheduled castes etc. It was observed that highly educated respondents were more aware and politically conscious about their rights as compared to the less reeducated respondents. Even the educated respondents were found actively generating political consciousness among the other members of community.

Education	Not Aware	Less Aware	Highly Aware	No of Respondents
Less	00	17	00	17
Moderate	00	05	28	33
High	00	04	46	50
Total	00	26	74	100

Occupational Changes and Social Mobility

Traditionally, Dalits who are known by various names had been deprived of their basic social, economic, educational and political rights for centuries and were subjected to perform hereditary menial jobs with a miserable and disabilities. Their unclean occupations were the major cause of untouchability and their poor economic conditions. Dumont (1970) noted that in the Indian caste system the untouchables are impure since the tasks they perform are considered as 'impure', making them 'impure' in turn. Similarly, Jodhka (2002) also noted that the involvement of dalits with 'unclean occupations' has often been viewed as the primary reason for the practice of untouchability. Dealing with dead cattle, scavenging and other occupations that were considered polluting in the Hindu culture were left to be done by the dalits.

In the present study, very few of the respondents (14 percent) were engaged with the unclean and manual workers in different fields. While majority of them 50 percent per cent people were in doing service in the public sector, while 12 per cent were serving in the private sector and 24 per cent were in shop keeping or doing their independent business (Table:1.7).

It may be noted that many of the respondents whose forefathers used to work as *Sepi* or *seeris* (Attached Labourer) under the *Jajmani System*. Nowadays, have changed their traditional hereditary occupation and daily labour is much popular in the villages. Similarly, the tradition of working as *Sepi* or *seeris* in which the landowner gives some money or produce to their servants seasonally or annually as wage of their service has diminished. Earlier most of scheduled caste ladies used to work on *sepi* in the houses of non-scheduled caste

and major works were removing the dung of animals, cleaning the houses and street etc. Presently, this practice is not popular in the villages of Punjab. In the present study only 5 percent respondents are doing this type of labour.

Occupation	Past Generation	Present Generation	Change
Small Agriculture	15	00	-15
Labourer(<i>Sepi, Seeri</i>)	60	05	-55
Unskilled Labourer	18	09	-09
Government Job	00	50	+50
Private Job	06	12	+06
Business	01	24	+23
Total	100	100	

VII. CONCLUSION

There have been many attempts of governments and social reformers over the past seventy years to help increase the quality of life for the Dalits of India through affirmative action and modern education. In the traditional education system of Indian society Dalits were not allowed to get education, change their traditional occupation and to improve their socio economic and political position in the society. But after independence new education system was established and this new education system granted right of education to the most downtrodden and oppressed section of the society after thousands years. As a result of this there are remarkable changes occurred in the traditional caste system in the society. Due to educational advancement has changed the social face of Dalits in society by generating social and political consciousness among them. Now educated people as compared to the uneducated do not give importance to untouchability as as a result caste discrimination decreased in the society. Now education has opened new job avenues for the Dalits to change their tradition occupation and improve their socio economic status in the society.

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