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The Untouchability of Dalits: The Economic and Social Exclusion of Dalits in the Post-Independence Era

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The Untouchability of Dalits:
The Economic and Social Exclusion of Dalits in the Post-Independence Era

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother.

Ma, your intellect never ceases to inspire me, and it is exactly what inspired me to write this thesis. Thank you for participating in endless rambles about this, and everything else, with me.

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Introduction

The study of poverty and inequality has become a significant focus worldwide, even finding its way onto one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The goal is to reduce inequality, especially among low-income and ‘developing’ countries, under the broad goal that ‘no one is left behind.’ This goal hopes to empower and promote social, economic, and political inclusion of peoples, irrespective of ‘age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status’ (SDG, 10.2). There is no mention of caste, a system that serves as a determinant of one’s identity for a fifth of the world’s population. Caste has been a long-time determinant of opportunity and outcomes but is not given the same significance in development policy as other identity characters, such as the ones the SDG’s include. When examining the poverty and inequality in India, it can be seen that caste is treated as a traditional and archaic system which overlooks its importance as a structure of discrimination in the modern economy.

India is a complex nation serving as the largest democracy to exist, the second most populous globally, and known to have extreme wealth inequality (Bharti, 2018). To understand the phenomena behind the extreme inequalities within India, one cannot ignore the caste system’s role and how it has created and perpetuated the issues of wealth inequality over time. After the caste system was abolished constitutionally in 1950, post-independence, it would be wrong to say that it no longer holds relevance in society, even though it is often thought of as a structure of the past. To understand the significance caste holds in the structuring of society, there must be an examination of the origins of caste and how the manmade social structures have

shaped India's economic makeup. This structure points to the need to address market and non-market discrimination due to the caste system's longstanding effects.

This paper will explore how discrimination due to the entrenched caste system has excluded Dalits from economic development for growth and mobility, particularly in the post-independence era. Caste has been a determinant of opportunity and outcomes for centuries given its rigid nature within Indian society and economy. Dalits, formerly known as 'untouchables', have thus been systemically excluded from development regimes as they are seen as a lingering issue society, rather than a relational issue. The entitlement of rights becomes narrower down the hierarchical ladder of the caste system and in the modern day, the bulk of India's wealth largely remains in the hands of upper-caste members of society, while Dalits struggle to achieve occupational mobility.

After India achieved independence, it was faced with the task of establishing a new constitution, a new democracy, and an economic regime. The state of India's economic affairs was poor in 1947 as the new nation faced extreme famines, high levels of poverty, and low levels of growth and development. The new government had promised its constituents that they would try and eliminate poverty and tackle the widespread issues of inequality across the nation, but unfortunately, several decades passed and the state was unable to meet the needs of the people and keep their initial promises.

In this paper, there will be a historical overview of the roots of the caste system and the pervasive practice of 'untouchability' in the first chapter. The framework of social exclusion will be introduced to better understand how Dalits interact with market and non-market forces. Then, there will be a chronological examination of Dalit rights and policy and how they intersect with

India's path for economic development in two time periods. Then there will be a dive into India's pro-Western political and pro-Soviet economic period from 1947 to 1991 and its impact on Dalit mobilization. Finally, there will be an analysis of India's economic liberalization period from 1991 to the 2011 and whether the reforms and policies have been effective with Dalit development.

Chapter 1

An Overview of the Exclusion of Dalits in India

1.1 Origins of the Caste System

There are conflicting viewpoints regarding the caste system's origins in Indian society and the extent to which Hindu religious tradition and British imperialism played in creating the caste hierarchy. The broad belief is the idea of caste originated around 1500 BCE from the Vedas, whereas others believe caste is derived from a legal text for Hindu code, Manusmriti (c. 2nd and 3rd century BCE). Throughout Indian history, the country has long battled with the legacy of caste discrimination. According to the popular view, caste is an ancient Indian institution that was derived from the dominant Hindu ideology. Around the time of 1500 BCE, there were people living in Punjab who composed the texts called the Vedas, which were the earliest Hindu texts. The origins of the caste system are found to be in the Vedas, the most ancient Hindu scriptures. The Rig Veda (the first Veda) describes everyday life, family life, sacrifice, and even diversity, (Vaid, 2014; Doniger, 2009). The caste system is the ordering of social groups into a hierarchical structure, a defining feature of Hinduism and features of social, economic, and political life in India. The description of "Purusha", the cosmic man, in the Rig Veda, that the interconnection between social hierarchy and religion is first mentioned. This became known as the varnashrama dharma, or varnas, which became the four major castes of Hindu society, (Vaughn, 2016). These are "four mutually exclusive endogamous groups, with a

fifth segment getting added later—those who were considered to be beyond the pale of the caste system and were often called the Untouchables,” (Thorat and Newman, 2010). Each of the four varnas are believed to have come from a passage in the Rig Veda. The Sanskrit passage in the Rig Veda translates to:

When the divided up the Man,
 Into how many parts did they divide him?
 What did his mouth become: What his arms?
 What are his legs called? What his feet?

His mouth became the brahmin, his arms
 Became the warrior-prince, his legs
 The common man who plies his trade.
 The lowly serf was born from his feet (Vaughn, 2016).

The specific social classification of the varna can be interpreted from this passage. Brahmins were classified as the elite at the top of the social system; below them were Kshatriyas, who were warriors and royalty; below them were Vaishyas; and at the bottom of the structure, Shudras, (Deshpande, 2010). Much later on, a group called the ‘untouchables’ became outcasts of society, outside of the varna system. Each part of the man became a caste in the varna system and is characterized by inherited membership, endogamy, and lifestyle. The significance of varna was pronounced in a text called the Manusmriti, a book of Hindu code dated back to around the 2nd and 3rd century BCE, long after the Rig Veda (Jodhka, 2015). These are then further broken down by the tradition of occupation specialization in a hierarchical system. It leads to the division of peoples through elaborate rules of social interaction and eventually, leads to the practice of ‘untouchability’. While the word varna technically means color, it can also be seen as a broader sense of characterization and categorization (Vaid, 2014; Jodhka, 2012). It is broken

down to the four-tiered caste system: the Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, and eventually the Dalits, or untouchables. Although, the caste system is multidimensional and the broad group identity system is far too simplistic to describe its structural complexities.

When the Vedas were written, varna was more fluid but eventually, the system grew and became a much more complicated structure of hierarchical separation. Research has shown that there are countless subcastes to each caste, which are called jati's. Jati's are theoretically ranked by 'ritual purity' and can be "regarded as the empirical manifestation of caste and the level at which occupational diversification, endogamy, and purity and pollution rites are actually performed" (Vaid, 2014). Formalizing the distinctions between jati's can be a difficult task given that in practice, the distinction between jati is heavily dependent on a particular region or setting. Each jati is composed of a group whose livelihood primarily performs a specific occupation and the classifications are done so on a sliding scale of 'purity' (Deshpande, 2010). Broadly, the caste system originally stratified Hindus through the mutually exclusive castes, where membership is determined by birth. One is born into their familial caste and acquires their jati-specific occupations, which were purer at the highest-caste of being Brahmin, descendingly less pure at the lowest caste groups. While this description may seem like each caste was homogenous, each caste was in fact composed of "hundreds of different narrower versions of castes (jati) in hierarchical fashion," (Bharti, 2018). Although the caste system is believed to have come from the varna system, the two are not identical as the varna system makes more sweeping generalizations of caste identity. Jati can be seen as a narrower version of caste and a system that understands more of the complexities and dynamics that exist within caste identities. Viewing caste through the lens of jati provides more acknowledgment of the inter-group

dynamics that persist in modern politics and economy today, rather than over-generalize group identities.

The Manusmriti formalized the type of occupation each caste held, categorizing occupations and duties of the higher castes as better off and purer than those obtained amongst lower castes. According to the Manusmriti, Brahmins were traditionally priests and doctors and represent the highest caste; Kshatriyas were traditionally rulers and warriors; Vaishyas were businessmen and merchants, and Shudras were the lowest caste, artisans and manual laborers that had menial occupations (Vaid, 2014). Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas were considered to be high-caste groups whereas Shudras were considered to be of the low caste. It was this system of occupational categorization and division of labor that placed more value on high-caste occupations through the rhetoric of ‘purity’. There was the emergence of the ‘untouchables’, a fifth group that was seen not as low caste, but seen outside of the varna system entirely due to the nature of their occupations. Their occupations typically had to do with being sewer cleaners, garbage collectors, and occupations dealing with the management of waste. These occupations were seen as dirty and impure, therefore, this group identity remains outside the caste system and is called ‘untouchables’. This term is meant to describe the nature of interpersonal and physical interaction with high-caste individuals and ‘untouchables’ were seen as polluting and unclean. ‘Untouchables’ came to be called Dalits more recently, which is Marathi for ‘oppressed’ (Thorat and Newman, 2010) or defined as ‘broken’ in Hindi, suggesting that not only were Dalits outcastes or ‘avarna’, but their place in society was ultimately labeled as being oppressed by other castes.

1.2 Who is a Dalit?

There are many words to describe the large and complex groups this paper will refer to as Dalits. ‘Untouchable’, ‘Backwards Caste’, ‘Other Backward Caste’, and ‘Scheduled Caste’ are the most common terms used in literature. Today, ‘untouchable’ has been substituted with ‘Dalit’ but is also often used interchangeably with ‘Scheduled Caste’ which is typically used in policy by the government. The scholar, Rupa Viswanath, (2014) points out that that this practice is incorrect since the term ‘Dalit’ includes ‘untouchables’ who have converted to other religions in order to escape the stigma of caste. In literature, these groups will often be referred to as ‘Dalit Sikhs’, ‘Dalit Muslims’, or ‘Dalit Christians’. The term ‘untouchable’ was used to describe this group because their “presence, touch, very shadow is considered to be polluting by privileged-caste Hindus,” (Roy, 2014). ‘Untouchables’ were not only outside of the caste system, but they were considered to be so polluted that they belong outside the hierarchy. The structure of the system revolved around the elements of purity and pollution, given that polluted individuals could not physically interact with those who are pure. More specifically, high-caste individuals are considered to be pure and have numerous entitlements whereas the bottom of the caste pyramid is considered to be polluted with countless duties and no entitlements. B.R. Ambedkar, a critical advocate against discrimination towards Dalits, found the caste system is not merely a division of labor, but it is a division of laborers. While civil society needs a division of labor, the caste system is,

A hierarchy in which the divisions of labor are graded one above the other...this division of labor is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the Caste System, in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to

individuals in advance—selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents. (Ambedkar, 1936).

Growing up a Dalit, Ambedkar extensively reflected on the sentiment that if Hinduism created caste, then Hinduism gave birth to classes such as Dalits, and allows for such occupations and peoples to be degraded given its place in social hierarchy. Today, there are many accounts of life as a Dalit in India, the exclusion one faces, the violence, and the inhumane treatment that has become entrenched in Indian society that largely prohibit the mobility of Dalits. Being a part of a group that is labeled as oppressed certainly suggests the disparity that exists between Dalits and high-caste individuals and how this may contribute to issues of inequality and poverty on a larger scale.

While the theory that caste originated from ancient scriptures and has evolved overtime to fit society today while still holding onto the main tenements of Hindu ideology, there is concern that caste was not as concrete as many thought it to be prior to the period of British imperialism in India. Nicholas Dirks (2011) put forth the theory that caste is neither an unchanged survival of ancient India nor is it a single system that reflects a core cultural value, it is a modern phenomenon that is the product of British colonial rule over India. When the British colonized India, not only did they extract resources from the nation and change its economic structure, the British also found it necessary to place formal labels on different social groups, making caste divisions between people more concrete. Caste is not an institution deeply rooted in traditional Indian culture and Hindu religion, but at least partly shaped by British colonial practices. He claims it is an “effect of the British colonial system of knowledge that produced caste as India’s ‘traditional’ religious and ritual order,” by classifying and organizing the various and diverse forms of social identities (Mosse, 2018; Dirks 2011). Before British rule, he reflects

that Indian society was fragmented into various groups that served as centers for social identities, but the British expanded on the idea of various identities in order to establish order in an extremely vast Indian society. Dirks writes that the organization of a hierarchical structure promoted what was necessary to have a census conducted by the British. The census served as a tool to formally characterize caste and have a tool for social identification which left “unprecedented effects on the social realities it claimed merely to represent ” (Dirks, 2011). Should this theory hold true, it would suggest that although fragmented social identities existed within Indian society, they did not become formalized until Indians would have to identify themselves on a census physically. The extent of the mark colonialism left on India is still highly contested, just as the debate around the birth and implementation of the caste system, but the British did conduct massive restructurings of economic, social, and physical landscapes in India. In terms of the British’s impact on society, Dirks argues that colonialism reconfigured the Indian’s perception of caste by legitimizing it in the census and formally ingraining into societal and economic interactions. While Dirks’ argument for the creation of caste is vastly different from that of the popular view, both theories substantiate the view that caste is deeply entrenched in Indian society and perpetuates the rhetoric of hierarchy amongst social groups.

1.3 Is Socioeconomic Status tied to Caste?

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, also known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, the social reformer who inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement in the 20th century believed that caste was an “ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt,” (Ambedkar, 1936). Popular textbook view of the principle of caste is that there is a hierarchical structure with specific types of duties

and entitlements according to caste, and the notion of purity and pollution remain constant. Subsequent to ancient times of the Rig Veda and Manusmriti, each Indian state had their own unwritten code written in regards to the treatment of Dalits. Broadly, Dalits were not allowed to use the same roads high-castes used, drink from the same wells, allowed entry into Hindu temples, allowed into 'pure' caste schools, and were obligated to dress in a manner completely separate from the 'pure' castes. More than simply a religious rendering of how a social structure should look, caste produces and perpetuates prejudice and discrimination within Indian society.

The structure that was created and written by ancient religious scripture gave way to the material human effects on economic, political, and social welfare. Specifically, the classification of Dalits as being polluted paved the path for increased levels of discrimination that manifested itself into all walks of life: land and assets, education, and health outcomes. As states created unwritten measures to separate the pure from the polluted, the ability for polluted individuals, or Dalits, to partake in society in a productive and just way became prohibited. There are many issues with the account that caste is a uniform structure throughout the Indian subcontinent derived from dominant Hindu ideology. There cannot be a simple labeling of the caste structure as a traditional institution since it perpetuates within social, political, and economic life, but the simplistic rendering of caste as a uniform structure came to be the view of Indian society only during the British colonial period during the 19th century (Appadurai, 1988).

The view of caste as a uniquely Indian ideological reality distinguishes social order in India from the 'modern West' and suggests that Western societies are at a different evolutionary stage than India. Jodhka (2015) writes about the view the British popularized in India where Western societies see their inequalities as a result of economic structure, rather than a result of

biases and discrimination that persists through societal distinctions of race, sex, gender, and religion). This Western view of the caste system as functioning independent of material realities and political dynamics, suggesting it may not hold as much significance in terms of market structure and discrimination as it is rather an element of cultural dynamics. Yet, evidence shows that individuals that identify as Dalit struggle to reach levels of development upper caste individuals are able to.

Dalits in India have faced extreme levels of social discrimination in various forms, directly impacting their ability to become economically empowered to lead a more free life. To better understand how discrimination against Dalits has impacted economic mobility and prosperity, the framework of social exclusion can be used. Buvinic explains social exclusion as “the inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic, and social functioning of society,” which involves the “denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups in society upon others,” (Thorat and Newman, 2007; Buvinic, 2005). Social exclusion (on in some cases, forced inclusion) can take an active form, where there is deliberate policy conducted by state or private agents that keeps or leaves out individuals leading to direct negative effects on the individual, or passive exclusion, where state and private agents are not creating interventions, but similarly lead to negative outcomes. Economic discrimination through the lens of exclusion can take place in an active or passive form, where active exclusion and economic discrimination will take form in instances such as the refusal to hire or accept an individual based on their social group, despite their formal qualifications. Additionally, there are consequences of passive discrimination that indirectly lead to deprivation through the discouragement of success or more direct routes which limit the access to income or education.

It is difficult to place caste discrimination into a singular economic discrimination framework that fits perfectly. There are also very few studies that have been done related to market and non-market discrimination associated with caste, both theoretically and empirically. Market and non-market discrimination should not be excluded due to the consequences it poses on economic growth, income distribution, and poverty.

Gary Becker theorized that discrimination occurs due to employer distaste towards minorities. The amount of discrimination that occurs is measured by the amount of income the employer is willing to give up in order to avoid hiring the group they have distaste for; employers have a disamenity value to employing minorities (Becker, 1971). Rene Lenior developed the social exclusion framework in 1979 as a complement to Gary Becker's market discrimination framework. 'Social exclusion' refers to citizens who are unable to gain access to government services due to various forms of vulnerability and discrimination, not solely due to economic impoverishment caused by personal biases towards certain identities. Excluded people encompasses the disabled, substance abusers, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits' (Thorat and Newman, 2007). Social exclusion recognizes that people are excluded due to ascribed features, not achieved features. Development economist Amartya Sen, expanded on social exclusion theory to say these groups are denied a livelihood, secure and permanent employment, earnings, and property, education, cultural capital, democratic participation, public good, humanity, and respect, all as a result of exclusion (Sen, 2000).

The social exclusion framework can best describe the particular standing and treatment of Dalits in social, political, and economic interactions in India. We can further understand the

treatment of Dalits and the modes of discrimination transpires which results in their inability to mobilize (in market and non-market practices) through the examination of passive and active discrimination, as well. Sen explains active exclusion as the inhibiting of opportunities through direct policy interventions conducted by the government or other private agents. Passive exclusion is not conducted by these interventions but will see deprivation in agents through “discouragement” and “lower self-confidence result[ing] in poor performance,” (Thorat and Newman, 2007). Both passive and active discrimination limit access to income and education that enhances mobility.

The question arises, does the caste system determine one's socioeconomic status, and are they tied? With the rigid structures of the caste system persisting over centuries, Dalits have been forced to occupy low-paying jobs and have been excluded from access to land, education, and general resources that are granted to other castes. This has impacted their ability to equally participate in the economy and have the economic mobility other upper caste groups can experience. Data offered by the Government of India presents the incidence of poverty amongst Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and Scheduled Tribes (another disadvantaged social group often presented alongside Scheduled Castes). An important indicator of economic progress of Dalits is the incidence of poverty, the table below shows the incidence of poverty amongst Dalits in contrast to the general population in the years prior to India's liberalization, and then a second incidence of poverty in the years after. While the significance of the time period (the effects of economic liberalization in 1991 and its effects on Dalits) this table presents will be expanded upon in later chapters, it is critical to observe that the percentage of Dalits who are impoverished is significantly higher than that of the general population.

Incidence of poverty among social groups (in percentages)

Year	General Population	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes
1983-84	44.48	52.6	63.14
1993-1994	35.97	48.37	51.4

Source: Nancharaiah (2000); Govt. of India, IX Five Year Plan

The caste system produces effects on social inequalities, economic disparities, violence, and the denial of success for those who are not of high-caste, in particular: Dalits who are subject to extreme notions of exclusion, and a result of social discrimination is the superimposition of poverty among Dalits. Indian society has become characterized by pervasive inter-group inequalities that take form in economic life. While hierarchy, purity, and pollution are at the core of how caste is organized, the reality of how these elements affect economic mobility and can be witnessed through group access and ownership of land, participation and attainment in education, and outcomes of welfare outlays. Nancharaiah (2000) presents a statistical picture of the economic standing of Dalits, showing there is a substantial gap in the level of development between Scheduled Castes (SC) and members of other castes. In the First Five Year Plan, there was legislation directed towards offering Dalits more access to land through land reform and welfare outlays. The need for any legislation targeted for the development of Dalits suggests that they face disadvantages that must be reconciled and addressed through state policy.

The disparity between those from higher castes and Dalits, officially labeled as Scheduled Castes, which became the term recognized by the Indian government and Constitution of India,

is made evident in Nancharaiah's research of Dalit development from the First Five Year Plan to the Eighth Five Year Plan. After India's independence in 1947, a series of programs

Population of Dalits (SC)

Year	Total Population	SC Population	Percentage of SC Population
1951	356	52	14.61
1961	439	65	14.6
1971	548	80	14.5
1981	685	106	15.5
1991	846	138	16.33

Source: G. Nancharaiah (2000); National Commission for SC/ST, Fourth Report, 1996-97 and 1997-98

were implemented in order to target issues of economic inequality. Table 2 shows the significant population increase in Scheduled Caste, or Dalit, from 52 million to 138 million people from 1951 to 1991, suggesting development policy and post-independent reforms certainly did not improve the numbers of those identifying as Dalits. Nancharaiah emphasized that in order to improve conditions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, there must be improvement in their access to land, education, and non-farm employment levels, and consequent improvement in consumption levels.

Share of Scheduled Caste households in total area owned and landlessness among them (rural)

Item	Year	Scheduled Castes	Others	All Households
Percentage of distribution of households	1982	19.7	70.6	100
	1992	21.5	67.4	100
Percentage of distribution of area owned	1982	7.9	82	100
	1992	10.2	78	100
Percentage of landless households (owning no land less than 0.03 ha.)	1982	12.6	10.2	11.3
	1992	13.3	10.5	11.3
Percentage of semi-landless households	1982	48	24.9	28.6
	1992	47.5	27.4	35.2
Source: Nancharaiah (2000); NSS Report No. 399 (1997)				

In India, land is a symbol of social status in addition to being a prime source of income, therefore the association of land distribution and caste is important to note. Land ownership being used as an indicator of social status is particularly relevant in rural India, therefore the size of land distribution in terms of caste distribution can connote how upper caste members have more economic ability to own land and therefore acquire higher social standing. The table below presents that while Dalits constitute nearly 20% of rural households, they only constitute around 8% of total area owned. This is in stark contrast to other households who constituted about 70% of total rural households but controlled 82% of total area owned 1982. In a post-independence India in the year 1992, there is a slight shift in rural total area owned, where Dalit ownership of

total area increases by around 2% and non-Dalit ownership shrinks by 4% (Nancharaiah, 2000). While landlessness amongst Dalits living in rural areas does not connote a stark contrast to that of non-Dalits, semi-landlessness amongst Dalits occurred nearly twice the level of the others. The substantial gap between Dalits and other castes in terms of land ownership and landlessness in comparison to household distribution paints an extremely gloomy picture of inequality and economic disparity between the various groups. Land reform was one of the prominent policy

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Source: Nancharaiah (2000); NSS Report No. 399 (1997)				

goals in the post-independent era, but the issues seem to pervade over time. Prominent working groups addressing the welfare of Dalits observe the failure of land reforms and how only a

fraction of surplus land had been distributed to Dalits. The massive amounts of surplus land that exists either through illegal encroachments and government waste land that could be efficiently redistributed has the power to improve the economic empowerment of Dalits.

Table 4: Literacy Rate of Dalits, 1961 - 1991

Year	SCs	Rest of Population	Gap between others and SCs
1961	10.27	27.86	1.59
*	3.24	16.59	13.3
1971	14.67	33.8	19.13
*	6.49	17.11	10.67
1981	21.38	41.22	19.84
*	10.92	29.51	18.68
1991	37.41	57.4	19.99
*	23.76	44.96	21.2
(Figures with a * represent female literacy rates)			
Source: Nancharaiah (2000);			
Govt of India, VIII Five Year Plan;			
Govt of India Edu. Development of Scheduled Castes and Tribes 1995			

Education serves as an important component of human resource development, as it not only improves the skills of people, but it increases the level of productivity one has. Nancharaiah states that technical and vocational education attainment will help with securing employment, increasing income levels, consumption, and socioeconomic status. India's government has

allocated resources for the educational development of Dalits since the First Five Year Plan. Literacy rates are a vital indicator of educational development. As seen in Table 4, literacy rates of SC's are significantly lower than the rest of the population, even though there is significant increase from the year 1961 to 1991. The gap between SC's and the rest of the population's literacy rate widened over time, especially seen in the rates amongst females. This widening gap can potentially be attributed to the Dalit students discontinuing their studies at an early age for countless reasons such as health, access to schools, necessity for labor, the discouragement to attend school due to social discrimination, and many more.

Thus, from the above analysis it is clear there are staggering gaps between Dalits and the rest of the population in India in respect to incidences of poverty, land ownership, landlessness, and literacy rates. While these gaps vary, it can be concluded that Dalits are a largely disadvantaged population within India who have struggled to gain economic empowerment due to the caste system and its pervasive effects on human and economic development. Many of these tables show how Dalits have far less than that of the rest of the population, even during the period of post-independence where the government was meant to offer outlays and tools to help Dalits develop, but the efforts seem to not have been effective given the persistent low levels of attainment decades after independence. As India grows as an economic power in the 21st century, economic growth and levels of wealth have certainly increased but the welfare of all of their peoples still remains as one of their biggest economic challenges as a nation.

1.4 Development Theory and the Exclusion of Caste

To examine the poverty and inequality issues that exist in India, given the nature of the caste system and how it is based off of an ancient division of labor, there must be an examination of whether or not there is a caste basis to poverty and inequality in India or whether distributional and deprivation outcomes have not to do with caste and are caste blind. Does one's capacity to attain higher levels of wealth or prosperity solely depend on independent attributes such as educational attainment and assets or also dependent on features such as group identity? As economic opportunity becomes more narrow down the hierarchical ladder therefore perpetuating economic inequality, one might think it is necessary to find ways to bridge economic gaps through direct policy intervention, especially when India gained independence and reorganized its political and economic structures.

The period of British colonization and their views on industrialization, modernization, and urbanization had long-lasting effects on Indian policy makers after independence. The British's vision of prosperity and modernity clearly stemmed from Western societies and economies, and suggested that Indian society was in a different evolutionary state than that of the West (Dirks, 2001). Their pervasive view of India as a whole made their systems look archaic, and such rhetoric heavily influenced the policies India would go on to implement upon their independence from imperial powers. It was thought the caste system, which was seen as a defining element Indian society and its place in societal evolution would eventually disappear through the processes of economic development, modernization, and urbanization. This view of caste as an ideological fact that can be eliminated over time and through the proper processes of

development neglects the deeply entrenched system of caste that is exhibited through material disparities. While each Indian state varies in how caste is approached and the severity of how elements of purity and pollution impact society, this generalized view that caste will be eliminated through market powers is overly simplistic and idealistic but was a lasting effect on policy long after colonization.

The process of modernization was introduced to India through the colonial implementation of Western style education, infrastructure, and administrative systems. Efforts to modernize and industrialize became a central focus in the post-independence period using a route that differed from the British after 1947. There was the “introduction of development planning, a democratic system of governance and a ‘modern’ Constitution with an elaborate legal and administrative framework that actively worked to undermine the traditional order of caste,” (Jodhka, 2015). Given the British rhetoric that India was evolutionarily behind due to social systems such as the caste system but could reach higher levels of equality through urbanization and modernization neglected to address the root issues of discrimination that persist due to the caste system and focus solely on caste as a traditional element of Indian society. Believing that market forces would eliminate discrimination because economic agents were thought to be profit-maximizing, and economic discrimination is not efficient, caste was seen as something that would simply fade over time. Without taking an institutional approach when addressing caste, the study of social, political, and economic structures in India are incomplete and fail to address the entirety of the structures since they are so intertwined.

A main focus of economic development has been to help low-income countries, like India, transition into becoming higher-income countries. India underwent heavy structural

changes in infrastructure and society during the British Raj and was coming out of a wartime economy when independence was achieved (after World War II), therefore the state sat in a vulnerable position. Not only had the British influenced social structures, the state had been transformed into a capitalist export economy with cash crops and large systems of agriculture, causing major disturbance to the economy. Nationalists and key leaders of India's independence movement, specifically Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, saw the effects of the British as draining to their economy and a reason for the country's struggles with literacy, mortality, and health. While Nehru and Gandhi had quite contrasting views when it came to the path India should take, they agreed there should be focus on the ending of poverty and inequality of opportunity.

Upon India's independence from colonial powers, there was debate as to what economic model the state would follow. There were three main competing ideologies when considering what path India should take upon: Nehru favored a secular and modern state following a Fabian socialism model; Gandhi favored a secular, traditionalist, and self-reliant model; and Sardar Patel advocated for a Hindu Nationalist, pro-West, and pro-market method for industrialization. The path that eventually emerged was a combination of Patel's pro-industrial, pro-market views and Nehru's Fabian socialist and secular state. The initial plans of the economy followed a Planning model (Harrod-Domar and Solow models) of Import Substituting Industrialization, there would be a depression of consumption, mobilization in savings, and investment in the production of capital goods in order to achieve economic growth. This model emphasized self-sufficiency as a driver of growth using taxes, import controls, and licenses to allocate resources to strategic areas. The hope was that through industrial growth, there would be GDP growth and the development

of peoples. This economic model is purely driven by the idea of growth as a tool for development rather than direct investiture on human development. It failed to acknowledge the wide disparities between group identities and failed to address issues of systemic discrimination due to caste. Failure to recognize such identities as determining economic outcomes of vast groups of people is detrimental to the health of the economy and the general welfare of such groups.

Nehru moved on to becoming the first Prime Minister of India, but this did not erase the significance of Gandhi. Gandhi, one of the main figureheads of the nonviolent movement against the British colonizers, had and still has immense influence over politics and modes of governing. He has been deified by millions of people and his glory persists over time, becoming a beacon for freedom across the world. He is, “the Saint of the Status Quo” (Roy, 2014) according to many and remains the ultimate visionary and humanitarian around the world. Gandhi used to call Dalits ‘harijan’, or the ‘children of god’ and believed they should be included within the system instead of remaining ‘avarna’. He believed there should be no hierarchy between castes, but admired the system because he saw it as the reason Hindu society still stands and the elimination of it would mean acquiring the societal structure of the West, which he condemned. Ambedkar responded to this sentiment with, “the outcaste is a byproduct of the caste system, There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system,” (Roy, 2014). Unfortunately, while Ambedkar was a prolific writer and emissary of profound social and political conflict, he did not receive the shine that others during his time did, like Nehru or Gandhi. Ambedkar served as a writer of the Indian Constitution in 1950 while also remaining an advocate for anti-caste policy and political empowerment.

Monumental pieces of his agenda never made it to Congresses table, nor did Gandhi or Nehru provide him any support.

Thorat and Newman propose that in order to develop the appropriate remedies to eliminate caste inequalities, there must be a critical understanding of how caste affects individuals' economic lives, how the economy interacts with the elements of caste, and what behaviors produces persistent inequalities and economic barriers for groups based on caste, (Thorat and Newman, 2007). The issue of economic discrimination has not become a central focus of research in India, therefore making it difficult to have extensive insight into the nature of economic discrimination based on caste identities. Mosse (2018) finds there has become a large separation between caste and development. The tendency to talk about class without discussion of caste inherently excludes an entire social structure that plays a large India's socio-economic profile.

Development economists have often left caste out of the picture, specifically when speaking and analyzing the role inequality plays in the broader scale of economic outcomes. Even though the structure of caste applies to a fifth of the world's population, it has remained largely untouched by policy. With caste being outlawed in the Constitution of India in 1950, an undermining of its significance, it has made it more difficult to understand certain concrete disparities between castes through data sets and archival tools like the census. Unlike countries like the U.S. where identities such as race and sex are used to make conclusions about discriminatory practices through data specific patterns, caste is no longer an identifier in India. Oftentimes, the only way to identify and distinguish between castes is through surnames, although there are limitations to this as certain surnames can belong to a variety of castes. Dalits

are slightly more identifiable due to policies intended to benefit (through self-identification) Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backwards Castes. While this may be interpreted as an improvement on the part of the government and push for equality, it is an attempted erasure of the structure that so heavily affects and it does not allow for an official understanding of how the role of caste takes place in society and the economy in a post-independence context.

The study of economic inequality has become a significant focus worldwide, where even the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals include “Reduce Inequality” as one of their 17 goals. With more and more research on economic inequalities globally, there is a gloomy picture painted of unequal societies that persist. In order to understand the economic inequalities that exist in India, the issue of caste cannot be ignored. The disparities between the high-caste, low caste, and Dalit are visible through their access to land, occupations, education, and consumption levels. Caste persists as a contributor of economic disparities and has major impacts on social and economic freedoms. Indian policy has failed to acknowledge the extreme damage caste makes on the country and a potential reason for its growing issues of poverty and inequality by focusing on growth policy rather than human development. This paper will examine how India approached economic development in the post-Independence era and its effects on Dalits (1947 to 1990) as well as the period after economic liberalization in 1991. There will be an exploration of development and state policy and its continuous neglect of caste as an indicator of economic inequality and poverty.

Chapter 2

Post-Independence Economic Policy and Constitutional Rights for Dalits (1947 - 1991)

2.1 Transition from the British Raj to the License Raj

“Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance, or with social modernization” (Sen, 1999).

As it finally became recognized that the treatment of Dalits was greatly inhibiting the new nation’s ability to succeed and reach, there were constitutional safeguards and measures put into place for the improvement of Dalit conditions upon India’s independence. It was found necessary to include some constitutional protections for Dalits, who have been historically and structurally excluded, to empower, uplift, and enable Dalit development. Over the decades following India’s independence, it was made clear that the scar social exclusion left on Dalits and Indian society could not be mended easily, regardless of what was written in the Constitution of India. It is disturbing to note that “the gains of development have not yet reached the intended classes to the desired extent” (Devanoor et al., 2017). Government programs like affirmative action in political representation, education, and the public sector had all been implemented since independence, in addition to the abolishment of untouchability. Yet, the educational levels of Dalits continued to lag behind that of high-caste Indians and the general population. In the meantime, other developing countries have been more successful at such tasks through their

pursuit of other types of economic policies. This chapter will focus on India's post-independence period from the year of independence in 1947 to when India underwent massive economic reforms in 1991.

India's independence called for the construction of a new government and the choosing of a new economic path. India's economic development and trajectory were predetermined by paths set by the Soviets. After hundreds of years under the British Raj, an independent nation meant an end to the control and draining of resources from Indian land and labor and economic and social hardship due to British policy and control. The country, made up of separate states, languages, and religions was coming together with a new democratic government and with that, an entirely new agenda. There was a milieu of issues that India needed to tackle to accomplish some of the goals it hoped to achieve: industrialization and modernization. The aftermath of the British Raj and World War II left India's economic systems in ruin, requiring the nation to transition from not only colonial control, but a wartime economy as well. India had faced famines (the last major famine having been in Bengal, killing between two to three million people in 1943), their growth rate had plummeted, and their ability to innovate and become a global competitor with Western nations had not been possible until their independence (Dreze and Sen, 1995). It has been made evident that while India has succeeded in addressing many of the issues they were left with post-war such as being able to eliminate famines, creating a multiparty democratic system, and various areas of some economic and social development, India has also struggled in numerous aspects of overall development, and has been left behind by many other developing economies.

The British had been known to deepen caste divisions during the Raj, and the stain that left on economic and social interactions was far from gone upon independence. The social exclusion of Dalits had made it so upper caste members could find reasons to discriminate towards Dalits, especially through the lens of untouchability. The British's formalization of the caste system into Indian politics, especially the national census, engrained caste into society in a way that had not existed prior to colonization, restructuring how caste could operate within society. The departure of the British Raj brought to light economic and social reforms that were long overdue and finally gave India the chance to tackle them after being "suppressed by overuse of control and by the limitations of what had been called the 'license Raj'" (Sen, 1999). Yet, even though the reforms were overdue, they could have been "far more productive if the social facilities were there to support the economic opportunities for all sections of the community," (Sen, 1999).

Spreading economic opportunities to all members of society would be crucial creating a more efficient economy by promoting basic education, good health care, and completed land reforms. India is, of course, a diverse country where reforms have taken form in different ways in different states but above all, "development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation" (Sen, 1999). To develop somewhat of a sense of how India's development fares today, India's Human Development Index (HDI) score is currently a 0.645 with medium human development and position 131st of 180 countries. The economic decisions and path taken in the immediate post-independence period surely affects where India stands today, as such decisions have strong implications for all members of society in terms of economic and social well-being. By

unpacking the policies and economic development strategies the nation decided upon as done in this chapter, it can become more clear why and how India stands where it is today.

The birth of a new nation could have meant a reevaluation of economic and social structures that were entrenched in India that could serve as a hindrance to high levels of development, increase in income, and GDP growth. The rise of a new government could have allowed for a complete restructuring of the social and economic systems through targeted policies to address the inequalities that lived within the nation. The clearest and most troublesome issues India had to do with its levels of inequality, disease, and famine. Those who lived in rural areas and worked in the agricultural sects were struggling, and the social and economic exclusion of Dalits perpetuated these issues. Had more economic and political action been taken to mobilize weaker parts of society when initial action was being taken, the current position of Dalits could be stronger. This includes having a greater focus on education, health, and eradications of discriminatory practices towards marginalized groups.

Under the new regime, the policies implemented seem to be such that would help improve the conditions of Dalits. Instead, caste was able to adapt “rather easily to the modern democratic politics,” and it “also survives in urban labour markets and business,” (Jodhka, 2015). The unspoken nature of caste identity and how it is so deeply intertwined with daily life prevents policies to undo the history of discriminatory practices. An understanding of group disparities that is mirrored in caste inequality is necessary when analyzing the causes of economic inequality and poverty, and their remedies. In India today, much of the wealth and high-status occupations remain in the hands of the upper castes, whereas lower caste Indians are participating in the economy as wage-laborers (Mosse, 2018). It has been shown that statistically,

the caste into which a person is born into remains an important determinant of their life opportunity. The hierarchy and status are not simply matters of cultural differences, but they are also “dimensions or forms of ‘power,’” (Jodkha, 2015). Such a dynamic is pervasive in economic and social practices, adding further complexity to how lawmakers would go on to address the discrimination through policies and constitutional rights.

2.2 India’s Lag Behind East Asian Powers

India’s development progress in comparison to many other developing countries, especially those in Asia, has been meek. Many of India’s East and Southeast Asian neighbors were embarking on journey’s of their own as they emerged from colonial powers in the early to mid 20th century. They pursued various economic policies ranging from market-oriented capitalism to communist party led socialism, and all of the countries had been able improve the conditions of their peoples by reducing human deprivation and insecurities. Western leaders were attracted to and were impressed with the high incredible growth rates achieved by multiple Eastern economies, even though they were initially poorer and smaller than many Western economies. This development was coined as the ‘East Asian Miracle’, a phenomenon the world had not seen before, where nations in the East were rapidly developing, catching up to and even often succeeding Western powers, a threat to their success.

The East Asian Miracle was taking place in economies such as South Korea, Vietnam, and Singapore, where a human development approach was used to mobilize their peoples. This meant focusing on educating their bases, providing them with opportunity to good health, and assisting with industrial and modern growth. Meanwhile, India had decided to follow a separate

model that focused heavily on economic growth in hopes of catching up to Western powers. Although the economic policies varied from these developing and economically diverse countries, they all had a particular commonality in their focus on the expansion of basic healthcare and education. Not only are basic education and health care fields that India has especially struggled in, income inequality has been widening and the conditions of socially disadvantaged communities like Dalits seem to have not improved. Even though the birth of a new nation and government could have meant a reevaluation of social and economic structures, India decided to not follow the economic policies that had led to the rapid levels of growth and human development in its neighboring East Asian countries.

2.3 Nehru's India

Jawaharlal Nehru assumed the role of India's first prime minister at the start of India's independence from colonial powers. At the time, he reminded the newly free nation that there was much work ahead of them, and "the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity" was among their great tasks. Prominent Indian economists Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze's *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* use Nehru's words as the basis for their book as they unpack how India largely failed to accomplish the task. It is important to note that in India's development journey in the post-independence era, there were successes, like the elimination of severe famine, the creation of the multi-party democratic system, and the emergence of a scientific community, as noted by Dreze and Sen (1995). However, India continued to struggle with accomplishing Nehru's tasks in terms of basic needs for all citizens including health outcomes and education. Nehru often touched upon the fact that

he strove to eliminate inequalities of opportunity and poverty, but he did not acknowledge how social exclusion of Dalits and of the caste system in general had enabled inequalities in the labor market and development to persist.

In order to understand the course of action India took, Nehru was a strong believer in socialism and was an advocate for Fabian socialism as the path India needed to take to achieve such goals, with the Harrod-Domar model in mind. He believed that socialism was the answer for India, and other nations because its promise to transform and improve the quality of life. However, assuming this economic policy as a means to reach Nehru's task of 'ending poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity,' did Nehru actually address the cause of such happenings? Nehru's influence came second only to Gandhi's, who although has become the beacon for freedom and equality, had also revealed himself as someone who did not denounce the caste system, the intrinsic system which implements social divide and social exclusion, causing there to be inequality of opportunity and inequality between the castes overall.

Prime Minister Nehru had emphasized the importance of the new path India was on meant it was time to promote the betterment of "weaker sections of the people and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes" (Article 46, Indian Constitution, 1950). Scheduled Castes made up 14.61% of the population and a large proportion of Dalits lived below the poverty line (Nancharaiah, 2000). Protections written in the constitution ought to be emphasized in development policy if one of the main goals of the new nation was to economically empower weaker communities and according to Nehru, socialism was the answer to many of the issues India faced. Publicly opposed to any use of religion in politics, Nehru

agreed with Gandhi in believing that caste is a social group based on work which made society efficient. Simultaneously, Nehru believed in humanism instead of religion, and found humanism to be the highest form of religion. Clearly, the contradictory nature of such beliefs were common amongst many of the new leaders of the nation, something Ambedkar advocated so arduously against.

Nehru idealized the secular and mixed economy model by believing it would patch up the struggles of the nation, but he failed to recognize that the caste system plays one of the largest roles in economic outcomes, and therefore, India's success. It became clear that those writing the Constitution saw caste as a piece of society whose relevance would diminish with the constitutional abolition of it, rather than acknowledging its place in society and relevance to economic development. During this period, the Harrod-Domar model became a popular economic model for economic growth, but this model fails to capture that economic growth does not necessarily improve standards of living and development. While "growth of GNP or of individual incomes can be very important as *means* to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the members of the society. But freedoms depend on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements as well as political and civil rights." (Sen, 1999). India's development and success cannot be based on the economic growth, but the development of its peoples. Such ideas were narrow-minded pipe dreams various elites had idealized when planning out the nation's future.

It is "the intersecting nature of identities (caste, class, gender, religion) that give poverty in India its distinctive social face means that ultimately caste cannot be independently examined," (Mosse, 2018). While the new government of India was reluctant to use caste as an

indicator or measure of poverty, there was an abandonment of the use of caste in the national census. Gandhi's 'utopianism' and 'socialist universalism' had expected caste, in their eyes, an archaic practice, to disappear with modernization (Dirks, 2001). Ultimately, in the writing of the Indian Constitution in the years following independence, there was evidently a commitment to equality in its principles and a full acknowledgement of the historical disadvantaged members of society. This resulted in special protections and benefits to untouchable groups, also referred to "backwards" groups—since their "extreme backwardness arose out of the traditional practice of untouchability" (Mosse, 2018) marking the groups as 'ex-untouchables'. The utopianism exhibited by the writers of the Indian Constitution arose out of the belief that untouchability was a Hindu practice, and therefore could be eliminated through modernization and the Fabian socialism model chosen for India's new path. Even though evidence proves that untouchability is *not* strictly a Hindu practice as 'Scheduled Castes' excluded Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist converts who experienced equivalent untouchability (Mosse, 2018). Abolishing the practice of untouchability was monumental in mobilizing Dalits by finally granting freedoms that would help them to break from the rigid constraints of the caste system.

The blatant disregard of untouchability and its entrenchment in Indian society coming from upper caste Indians further the argument that social exclusion continued even upon a new constitution and even amongst leaders that serve as pinnacle's of peace and hope, like Gandhi. With higher-caste individuals making decisions on what to prioritize as a nation, Dalits and other marginalized communities became excluded from development policies as their needs were not central focus, but the betterment of elite institutions, typically dominated by the high-caste, were. The juxtaposition of anti-poverty programs alongside an even greater focus on strengthening the

industrial sector and higher-educational institutions to achieve greater economic growth fail to address the institutional atrocity of untouchability and the necessity for the former. With greater focus on top-down policy with an emphasis on self-sufficiency rather than human development, India became unable to address some of the root causes of poverty and inequality that was stagnating the country's development and growth. Using top-down policy only strengthened the capabilities of the wealthy and upper-castes, excluding Dalits and other low-caste members of society from such benefits and modes of mobilization.

2.4 The Abolition of Untouchability

The Constitution of India written in 1950 abolished the practice of untouchability and granted safeguards for Dalits; such monumental actions can be largely attributed to the tireless work and advocacy of B.R. Ambedkar. In the Indian Constitution of 1950, Articles 15, 16, and 17 address caste and Dalits in particular, a formal acknowledgement of the fact that Dalits belong to a marginalized caste and therefore require specific protections and safeguards. Given the nature of social, economic, and physical discrimination Dalits faced, such policies and measures were crucial for Dalit inclusion and development. Although, given the nature of social exclusion and how intermixed caste is with daily life not only in terms of occupation and where one lives but with identifying features like one's surname, the clothes one wears (Dalits were historically prohibited from wearing certain clothes or sandals), and how clothes were worn can indicate one's caste (Dalits will often wear their religious threads in a specific and distinguishable style). There were specific symbols of 'untouchability' that could not disappear with the new articles in the constitution, especially if societal and economic interactions were based on such functions.

Article 15 prohibited ‘discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, sex or place of birth as well as disabilities in regard to access to public spaces,’ and nothing can prevent the State from enacting special measures for the advancement of ‘backwards castes’ and Dalits (Devanoor et al., 2017). Not only did this article prohibit caste discrimination, it also ensured that over time, there could be additional policies that would protect and promote the advancement of Dalits. Article 16 provided that Dalits would have equal opportunity in terms of public employment and special reservations for any marginalized groups such as ‘backwards class’ citizens, as well. Article 17 *abolished* untouchability, “forbidding its practice in any form and making the enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability a punishable wrong,” (Devanoor et al., 2017). Clearly, there was attention being paid to the discrimination that Dalits undergo due to their caste and how such practices should not only be addressed in the social sphere, but in the economic sphere as well. These articles were imperative in building the first steps to Dalit freedom, something that was desperately needed if India wanted to address the inequalities and poverty inducing practices in the country.

Population of Scheduled Castes (Population in Millions)

Year	Total Population	SC Population	Percentage of SC Population
1951	356	52	14.61
1961	439	65	14.6
1971	548	80	14.5
1981	685	106	15.5
1991	846	138	16.33

Source: Nancharaiah (2001); National Commission for SC/ST, Fourth Report, 1996-97 and 1997-98

There was a large increase in the Dalit population and much of the improvement in their conditions was largely dependent on access to land, education, employment, and increase in consumption levels. The steady increase in Dalit population indicate that there needed to be more heavy-lifting policies to ensure that all Dalits were being uplifted. This calls for more resources overall and increased government assistance.

2.5 Economic Policy in the Post-Independent Era

During India's colonial era, the government's economic policies were more concerned with the promotion of British interest than with the advancement of welfare of the India population. This led to a laissez-faire like attitude towards government led development which resulted in a limited investment in infrastructure like roads, education, and irrigation (Vaidyanathan, 1983). The pre-independence period was truly a time of stagnation for the Indian economy; productivity levels remained at the same low levels, and so remained extremely low levels of growth in modern manufacturing. India continued to be a largely rural and agricultural economy, where about 85 percent of the population lived in villages where their livelihoods depended on agricultural pursuits. Dalits make up nearly 85% percent of the agricultural and rural sects then and in the state of Punjab, 90% of Scheduled Castes are landless (Nancharaiah, 2000).

As Nehru famously said, and development economist Amartya Sen constantly shines light on, Nehru's goals were "the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity," (Dreze and Sen, 1995; Nehru 1950). Eventually, India adopted an Import

Substituting Industrialization (ISI) model to tackle the inequalities and weaknesses of the economy. The domestic policy favored protectionism and the goal of the plan was to depress consumption, mobilize savings, and invest in the production of capital goods. With self-sufficiency in mind alongside such actions, there would be industrial growth and eventually GDP growth leading to a successful and a better off economy. This led to an expansion of basic goods production by the public sector, deficit financing, and indirect taxation.

Nehru's trusted planning advisors encouraged the investment in capital goods production "by means of a public sector dominated 'industry first' policy was the key to growth," (Tomlinson, 1993) and by depressing consumption, there would be a release of savings for future investment. This translated to the increase in public investment in the production of capital goods and large-scale industry. Social and economic policy should be a "socialistic picture of society," according to Nehru (Tomlinson, 1993). Eventually this resulted in the concentration on industrial production, rather than agricultural production. The proportion of total investment in agriculture fell from 27 percent in the First Plan to 18 percent in the Third Plan, and agriculture eventually began to heavily lag in the 1960s, whereas simultaneously, rapid strides in industrial development occurred. More than half of total investment went towards heavy industry, and agricultural production began to fall, leading to a balance of payments crisis.

Rates of Growth of Agricultural Production, Industrial Production, and National Product, India 1950/1-1971/2 (three year moving averages, percentage change)

Years	Agricultural Production	Industrial Production	National Product
1950/1-53/4	7.03	5.11	4.23
1951/2-54/5	6.3	8.56	4.06

1952/3-55/6	4.32	10.51	3.45
1953/4-56/7	2.13	8.95	3.16
1954/5-57/8	-0.35	5.01	1.96
1955/6-58/9	4.66	4.89	3.67
1956/7-59/60	1.78	6.76	2.65
1957/8-60/1	7.1	8.95	3.29
1958/9-61/2	2.04	9.62	2.2
1959/60-62/63	2.4	9.05	2.38
1960/1-63/4	0.39	8.84	3.92
1961/2-64/5	3.89	8.85	5.3
1962/3-65/6	-1.78	5.45	2.39
1963/4-66/7	-2.57	2.35	1.29
1964/5-67/8	0.59	1.57	1.92
1965/6-68/9	6.13	4.32	4.14
1966/7-68/9	8.16	6.06	5.12
1967/8-70/1	4.15	4.84	3.55
1968/9-71/2	3.91	5.01	3.65
Source: Tomlinson (1993)			

The growth-oriented Harrod-Domar model is based on depressing consumption, increasing savings, and investing in capital goods to promote industrialization and result in economic development and the overall betterment of society. This model was assumed in the First Plan to counteract and repair the damage caused by the British Raj, where India's growth rate had plummeted. During this period, there were still extremely low levels of growth due to a number of factors, one main one being the low levels of employment growth. The Indian government decided that focusing on internal affairs as a means to achieve the growth they set

out for rather than opening up its borders to foreign trade. This particular economic model became popularized in the post-war era, and quite popular for countries whose growth rates were stagnating and were looking to catch up to rates exhibited by many high-income and Western nations at the time. India has an incredibly plentiful supply of labor, but they did not have a plentiful supply of physical capital, making it difficult to achieve the rates of saving they had hoped for.

The objective and development policy goals were to bring about rapid increase to the standard of living, provide full employment at an adequate wage, and the removal of inequalities. There became a strong focus on the growth of the GDP, a coordinated program of development where the state would play a leading role. “The shortage of savings and foreign exchange were seen to be their critical constraints on growth,” and therefore, by raising the state of savings to increase income and the need for rapid import substitution in the intermediate and capital goods sectors was critical in industrialization, and specifically in heavy industry (Desai and Kumar, 1983). These were the elements that became common of the Five Year Plans, succeeding independence.

This economic path ruled for a closed economy, which ultimately resulted in the deterioration of India’s balance of payments in the 1950s partly due to the stagnation of exports and due to the earlier import policy. The Harrod-Domar model carried implications for India’s already slow-growth and developing economy. Such policy and course of action from the First and Second Plans led to crisis mediation in the Third Plan (Desai and Kumar, 1983). India began to face a milieu of issues, and most importantly, was not able to mitigate the issues it had set forth. The strategy for development neglecting the agricultural sector which meant the neglect of

unemployment issues in the nation, which gave face to the growing issue of poverty. Although targeting poverty alleviation was one of the government's main goals in order to 'catch up' to Western and high income and high growth countries, the government outlays and allotment of money targeting the weaker sections of the population were lackluster and failed to complete the task it intended. This resulted in not only the stagnation of exports in the economy and a balance of payments crises, but the continued struggle for Dalits who were hoping to reap benefits from government legislation.

2.6 The Planned Economy: Five Year Plans

In the post-independence era, several specific welfare measures were taken for the social, educational, and economic development of Dalits through India's 'Five Year Plans' in accordance with the provisions and protections outlined in the constitution. Five Year Plans are a centralized method of planning for economic growth in short increments of time, in this case, five years at a time. Emerging from World War II, India had been a wartime economy for many of the years leading up to its independence. Under Nehru's socialist influence, he strove for a modern state with a secular democracy. India's fragile state after the achievement of independence as British colonization brought upon an extreme drainage of resources to the nation led to a state of devastation. India's growth rate had fallen from 24% to 4% in the years 1700 to 1950, and thus the focus on growth-oriented progress became dominant (Maddison, 2003). The first and second Five Year Plans were largely confined to improving education and distribution of land, whereas the third Five Year Plan focused heavily on vocational training and education, along with special schemes directed towards industrialization.

There were a number of policies used by the government in various Five Year Plans to address and plan the development of Dalits under the new democracy, yet they seem to have been executed in a way such that the status of Dalits had not truly improved under the special schemes. The First Plan targeted the development of various industries including energy and agriculture whereas sectors such as social services and land reform were of lesser priority to the state until the second plan began to focus on education and the distribution of land. The Third Plan focused more heavily on vocational training and education along with special schemes directed towards industrialization. The lesser focus on land reforms and distribution was a questionable decision given that land and access to land is often a primary source of income and a symbol of social status, especially in rural India, and the inequalities that could persist due to a lack of well targeted reform policies would be detrimental to mobility of marginalized classes (Nancharaiah, 2000). The large-scale landlessness of Dalits led to a dependence on land owning upper-caste communities and such communities tried to maintain their hold over agrarian systems and structure, regardless of land reform attempts. This led to further Dalit dependence on upper-castes as they continued to control the sources of sustenance and the inability to reform the structures that excluded them from achieving economic independence through land access.

Composition of Aggregate Investment, India 1950-1 to 1968-9 (Rs. billion at current prices)

	First Plan (1951-6) %		Second Plan (1956-61) %		Third Plan (1961-6) %		Annual Plans (1966-9) %	
Agriculture	9.1	27	12.6	19	21.2	18	19.4	20
Industry and minerals	4.4	12	18.1	27	29.9	25	23.8	25
Power	2.7	8	4.8	7	12.9	11	12	12

Transport	5.9	18	14.1	21	23.5	20	14.6	15
Others	11.5	35	17.9	26	32	26	27.9	28
Total	33.6	100	67.5	100	119.5	100	97.7	100
Source: Vaidyanathan, 'The Indian Economy Since Independence, CEHI, 2 (1983)								

With heavier focus on the development of industry, Dalits were vastly excluded from occupational opportunities in the new era. The push to urbanize also meant further exclusion as Dalit populations mainly resided in rural areas, preventing them from having access to those job opportunities as well as the infrastructure and resources. In order to understand the effects of programs implemented for the upliftment of Dalits, the incidence of poverty and consumption levels can well demonstrate the story. In the Ninth Plan, it was found that 50% of Scheduled Castes were living below the poverty line as opposed to the 36% of the general population that lived under the poverty line, as estimated by the government of India. Over thirty years after independence and nearly eight Five Year Plans later, the incidence of poverty had actually declined since in the 1980s to 1990s, as seen in the table below, but the gap between Scheduled Castes and the general population remains significant. In terms of consumption levels, specifically in rural areas, Dalits were spending about Rs. 25 (Indian rupee = Rs.) less than the general population, and within a decade, consumption levels had risen by nearly Rs. 40 to Rs. 133.35. It is critical to note the significant and increasing gap between Scheduled Castes per capita consumption levels and the general population. While consumption was rising, the economic upliftment of Scheduled Castes were lagging behind.

Average monthly per capita consumer expenditure *rural

Year	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Others
1983	94.31	87.15	120.42
1987-88	133.35	123.04	169.23
1993-94	154.83	151.82	189.01

*By social groups at all-India levels in Rural-value (Rs.) of total consumption per person 30 days

Source: Nancharaiah (2000); Sarvekshana (1993)

Average monthly per capita consumer expenditure *urban

Year	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Others
1983	128.95	133.11	172.11
1987	185.03	201.79	256.5
1993-94	200.53	225.84	262.47

*By social groups at all-India levels in urban-value (Rs.) of total consumption per person 30 days

Source: Nancharaiah (2000); Sarvekshana (1993)

Enrollment of Scheduled Caste Students in Higher Education*

Year	Total	Scheduled Castes
1978-79	25,43,449	1,80,058 (7.08%)
1995-96	79,55,811	10,58,514 (13.31%)

*Higher education is undergraduate, post-graduate, Technical and professional courses)

Source: Nancharaiah (2000); National Commission for SCs/STs, Fourth Report, 1996-97 & 97-98

In the table above, it appears that there are nearly nine million more students enrolled in higher education by the start of the liberalized period, but the gap between Dalits and the general population is staggering. Reservation policy became one of the main programs the government implemented in order to achieve Dalit development. It has been widely acknowledged that caste inequality is quite prevalent in rural India, there is often less attention paid to the inequalities that take place in the formal sector in urban India. In particular, the inequalities that exist in terms of caste-related income and employment gaps among highly educated individuals. According to Thorat and Newman (2010) suggests there is incentive to acquire more education in order to increase labor market returns. When observing the table below from Thorat and Newman's studies, it can be noted that the rate of return to education is much lower to Scheduled Caste workers than for high-caste workers. Such differentials suggest substantial amounts of labor market discrimination, preventing Scheduled Castes from reaping the benefits of increased education [note: table contains figures from both pre and post-liberalization eras]. According to the decomposition results, it was found that Scheduled Caste workers earned 5% less than high-caste workers in the year 1983 and made 8.4% less in the year 1993-4, around the same time as India's official liberalization.

Average Private Rate of Returns to Education by Caste (in per cent)

Education Level	1983		1993		1999-2000		
	NSC	SC	NSC	SC	NSC	SC	OBC
Primary	4.21	4.48	3.26	1.39	3.1	1.92	3.55
Middle	5.05	6.43	3.54	3.19	2.56	4.31	3.83
Secondary	16.95	16.28	9.86	4.77	11.26	8.16	8.22

Higher Secondary	15.21	12.92	6.46	8.8	5.88			
Graduate Professional	9.61	7.47	9.67	7.23	12.62	9.32	11.61	
Graduate General	8.08	5.98	7.87	4.65	9.6	5.3	8.21	
Professional Degree compared to a general degree	12.66	10.44	12.3	7	11.1	17.15	15.34	16.7
Notes:	NA: Not Available							
	SC: Scheduled Caste							
	NSC: Non-Scheduled Caste							
Source: Thorat and Newman (2010)								

Despite the Government of India having undertaken various special schemes for Dalit development, the share of the government's outlay for Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes were less than 1% in the first five Five Year Plans (Nancharaiyah, 2000). According to the National Commission for SC/STs, plan outlays rose to 3.0% in the Sixth Plan in the 1980s and onwards, when India began to transition into a liberalized state. With the Sixth Plan marking the beginning of India's transition, we can observe a significant increase in outlays

Plan Outlays for SCs

Plan Period	Plan Outlay (Rs. in crores*)		
	Total	Scheduled Caste	Percentage
First Plan	1,960	6.13	0.35%
Second Plan	4,672	28.56	0.61%
Third Plan	8,577	40.82	0.48%
Fourth Plan	15,779	72.19	0.46%
Fifth Plan	39,426	204.9	0.52%

Sixth Plan	1,09,292	3,722.97	3.41%
Seventh Plan	180,000	7,233.32	4.02%
Eighth Plan	181,735	22,380.80	12.32%
*Crore denotes 10 million			
Source: Nancharaiah (2001); National Commission for SCs/STs, Fourth Report, 1996-97 & 97-98			

for Scheduled Castes and importance placed on social development, an indication that Nehruvian Socialism was coming to an end. After the Seventh Plan, there is a significant jump in outlays to 12%, at last signaling the importance of government outlays as a means for the development of Dalits. India's Eighth Plan took place at the very start of India's liberalization period, where we can observe the significant increase in plan outlays for Scheduled Castes—a staggering 12.32% as compared to the previous high of 4.02% of outlays.

2.7 B.R. Ambedkar's Role in Shaping Dalit Rights

In light of India's independence, B.R. Ambedkar was pivotal in advocating for Dalits and giving voice to Dalits in India. As India grappled with the difficulties of establishing new economic and political paths, Ambedkar called for a separate electorate for Dalits. His aim was to empower Dalits and annihilate the caste system to achieve the levels of development and economic growth India had the potential for. While Nehru wrote in his *The Discovery of India*, “in the context of society today the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within this framework,” (Jodhka, 2015; Nehru, 1946). This came in contrast

with Ambedkar ruling that one cannot build on top of a foundation of caste, as it “anything you build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be whole,” (Jodhka, 2015; Ambedkar 2002). While in the early stages of India’s Five Year Plans ‘untouchability’ was abolished and there was recognition of the population identifying as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes, the status of such groups largely remained similar to levels as at the time of independence, even years after independence.

After independence was gained, B.R. Ambedkar rallied efforts to incorporate constitutional safeguards for Dalits to protect their interests and assist with economic development. There needed to be formal measures taken in order for the socioeconomic conditions of Dalits to be improved given their exclusion from much of national life. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, Ambedkar served as the prominent advocate for the annihilation of caste and the newly founded democratic republic was finally made aware of the marginalization of such groups and the necessity for outright protections. Ambedkar struggled to actualize many of his proposals to the new government, but his efforts to constitutionalize more safeguards for Dalits continues to be a struggle, as we will continue to explore in the next chapter.

Dalits have been systematically disadvantaged through social exclusion and have not had the ability to grow due to physically being excluded from aspects of social and economic life, resulting in inefficiencies in the market, preventing India to reach its highest potential of economic development and growth. Of course, Ambedkar wholeheartedly believed in the elimination of caste in all systems and representation in the government for Dalits to actually address the roots of many of the issues prominent political leaders spoke of. By outlawing

practices related to the caste system, the constitution only scratched the surface of issues and discrimination that existed due to the caste system. Without the specific acknowledgement of how discrimination due to the caste system has been a roadblock to the developments of nearly one-fourth of the population counteracts the founding member's goals for India. This is exactly what Ambedkar pointed out: without representation in the government and separate policy just for Dalits, there would be no change in systems because bias due to the caste system cannot be eliminated by only constitutionally outlawing discrimination based on caste, but there needed to be abundant support for the mobility of Dalits in order to achieve the levels of development India's founding fathers strove for.

2.8 The Reality of Dalit Programs

The constitutional safeguards that were implemented to protect the interests of Dalits were not properly monitored. The evaluation of these specific welfare programs were something that fell through the cracks, and something that has continued to occur to the present day with not only government programs but privately sponsored programs meant to uplift weaker sections of society. Implementing policy directed toward poverty alleviation and economic growth alone seemed to place a bandaid on a gaping wound since the measures were so general and not specifically tailored to benefit populations that were struggling the most. Creating policies that hoped to eventually lessen inequality did not guarantee the removal of discriminatory bureaucratic practices. In addition, giving constitutional rights to members of their population who had been systematically disadvantaged and treated poorly for centuries was the bare minimum and long overdue. Not fully addressing the systems that inhibited economic

development directly was detrimental to fully and actually mobilize the weaker sections of society. Without addressing how pervasive the caste system is and how intertwined it was with the economic health of the country resulted in poor implementation of policies that over time were ineffective.

Having high GDP growth does not indicate whether the conditions of the people are improving in terms of education, health, and whether inequalities are shrinking. Amartya Sen challenges the mainstream approach of measuring economic development in terms of economic growth by arguing that economic development is freedom. The ISI model was a compromise that came out of fragmented groups of elites (all members of upper-caste identities). The state and the market were established as separate institutions, unlike in East Asia where the tools for private and public sectors were there to connect, India's bureaucratic and businesses systems are intrinsically linked to the caste system. Even though the work of the government was to outlaw caste discrimination and the caste system itself, the group of elites that were elected into power were in their positions due to the caste system. Nehru was a high-caste individual who pushed for a secular economy and chose to reject religion as a political practice which might be far more effective in other countries. But in the case of India, where the very reason he was even able to enter the role as the first Prime Minister at a time like this was because of his upper-caste identity, which is intrinsically linked to religion. If we consider caste as an element of Hinduism and view social exclusion as a result of religious practices that determine social standing, then we can see that caste, and therefore religion, must be considered when determining solutions for the economic conditions of disenfranchised populations.

Through this, we find that Dalits have been economically disadvantaged and excluded from the mainstream economy or have not been able to switch occupations due to their caste being seen as a determinant of the extents of their economic status, abilities, and occupations. Certainly, caste becomes tied to socioeconomic mobility and standing, and therefore, absolutely necessary when thinking about how India could lift its various populations out of poverty.

Reservation policy was one of the main tools used by the government to address and ensure some level of institutional support for Dalits. The Indian Constitution outlined and attempted the use of reservation policy to support Dalit improvement. Reservation policy originated from the British Government in the early 20th century to reserve a definite percentage of vacancies in government jobs for Scheduled Castes, which was described in the Government of India Act of 1935 (Devanoor et al., 2017). By 1943, 8.5% of vacancies had been reserved for Scheduled Castes, then 12.5% in 1946. In the table below, it is clear that there are some improvements in Dalit representation, but there remains a 5% gap in representation in respect to their quota.

Employment Profile of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Central Government (1965 and 1995)

Group	Total 1965	Total 1995	SC 1965	SC 1995	% Total 1965	% Total 1995
Class I	19379	65408	318	6637	1.64	10.12
Class II	30621	108857	864	13797	2.82	2.67
Class III	1082278	2341863	96114	378172	8.88	16.15
Class IV excluding sweepers	1132517	1041082	101073	2211380	17.75	21.26
Total excluding	2264795	3557210	298369	619986	13.17	17.43

sweepers						
Sweepers	***	177527	***	78719	***	44.34
Grand total	2264795	3734737	298369	698705	13.17	18.71
*Figures relating to sweepers in 1965 included in the figures for Class IV Group						
Source: Nancharaiah (2001); National Commission for SCs and STs, Fourth Report, 1996-97 & 1997-98						

Occupational Distribution at all India level

Category	% in total workers of SCs			% in total main workers of general population		
	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991
Cultivators	27.87	28.17	25.44	42.9	41.58	38.75
Agricultural laborers	51.75	48.22	49.06	26.9	24.94	26.15
Non-farming workers	20.38	23.61	25.41	30.2	33.48	40.1
Source: Nancharaiah (2001); 1. Government of India, VIII Five Year Plan (1987-1992), Vol. II 2. Census of India, 1991, Series 1, Paper-1						

One of the popular anti-poverty programs became land reform, as it not only served as an anti-poverty program, especially for Dalits who have historically been excluded from having much land, a prominent status symbol. Land reform was also the reason for the Indian government to increase productivity in the agricultural sector, theoretically hoping to stimulate change and progress. In the Second Plan, nearly half of the total expenditure on agriculture was directed towards community development, targeted at the restructuring and reorganization of rural social hierarchies, like the caste system, yet it achieved very little in actually increasing agricultural output or minimizing social conflict (Tomlinson, 1993). Further, land reform

legislation that was directed towards removing intermediaries between cultivators and the state had also begun to fail. There arose the issue of ensuring fair treatment of ‘under-tenants’ and sharecroppers, who typically found it difficult to assert themselves even if the law was in their favor. Land reforms largely failed the expectations of planners. In the mid-1950s, “large landholders had ample time and opportunity to exploit the many loopholes that remained in the ceiling legislation, especially by distributing nominal ownership of land among different family members” (Tomlinson, 1993). Once it was realized that this first round of land reforms were not taking place as expected, the late 1950’s legislation called for collectivization as the future of agrarian pattern. Village lands would now be pooled, ‘peasants’ (who seem to be anyone who is low on the social hierarchy) would keep their nominal property rights and be paid ownership dividends and returns for work that was done, and the surplus would be given to the landless who would administer the land as joint farms (Tomlinson, 1993). Even though such a bold resolution had been passed, it provoked outcry within Congress which led to the declaration of co-operatives alone would be the main focus of agricultural policy. Of course, it resulted in the rural poor who continued to be exploited.

India had averaged approximately 3.5% of GDP spending on education in the post-independence period, extremely low compared to their spending on the industrial sector. During the 1951-1956 planning period, significant energy was poured into the creation of elite higher education institutions in order to use those who will become highly educated to develop high-skilled industries (fields such as engineering and computer science). This became a prominent aspect of the state’s focus, and eventually a prominent aspect of Indian culture. Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have often reflected on the fact that the Indian state’s focus on

developing higher education rather than focusing on mobilizing primary and secondary education was a failure of the state (1995). The development of basic education in many East Asian countries was a priority and ‘very much more advanced in all these [East Asian] countries with growth-mediated progress at the time of their economic breakthrough compared with India today’ (Dreze and Sen, 1995). With heavier focus on higher education benefited populations that had access to resources that would allow them to enter those spaces in the first place.

Adult Literacy Rates in Selected Asian Countries

	1960	1980	1992
India	28	36	50
South Korea	71	93	97
Hong Kong	70	90	~100
Thailand	68	86	94
China	n/a	69	80

Source: Dreze and Sen (1995); World Development Report 1980; World Development Report 1983, Human Development Report 1994

All India Literacy Rate of SCs and others

Year	SCs	Rest of Population	Gap between others and SCs
1961	10.27	27.86	1.59
*	3.24	16.59	13.3
1971	14.67	33.8	19.13
*	6.49	17.11	10.67
1981	21.38	41.22	19.84
*	10.92	29.51	18.68

1991	37.41	57.4	19.99
*	23.76	44.96	21.2
(Figures with a * represent female literacy rates)			
Source: Nancharaiah (2000); Govt of India, VIII Five Year Plan; Govt of India Edu. Development of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (1995)			

There were programs that were put into place to enable historically deprived groups to participate in social and economic life, and “while these achievements are certainly commendable, it has not meant an end of caste in the social or political life of the nation. In fact, many would argue that politically caste is a much more active institution today than it ever was in the past, and it is largely thanks to the electoral processes and competitive politics” (Jodhka, 2015). The creation of higher education and specialized universities did not address the low levels of literacy rates, high levels of drop outs, and lack access to primary and secondary education. Focusing on these elements of education instead would have uplifted and mobilized Dalit populations as they constantly trailed behind non-Dalits in these categories. Instead, the need for elite and technical education institutions without also creating tools and ensuring better access to education at the primary levels would not be meaningless, but it will not affect the parts of the population that already struggle to gain access to such opportunities.

2.9 The Beneficiaries of Caste Discrimination

Amartya Sen, a renowned Indian economist, views freedom as the principal means of development (1999). There are various types of freedom that must be acknowledged to understand the connections that link freedom of different kinds with each other. There are five

types of freedom he specifically mentions, political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Each of these rights and opportunities helps to advance the capability of a person. The forms of 'unfreedom' Sen further refers to are a variety of things which include but are not limited to: limited access to healthcare, famine, undernutrition, limited access to sanitation, premature mortality, functional education, gainful employment, or economic and social security (Sen, 1999). Sen has spent much of his career developing and promoting his 'capabilities' approach, addressing the reasons for poverty and what countries can do to combat and lift people out of poverty.

As an Indian economist, Sen has also spent a significant amount of his career reflecting on India's failures addressing poverty, especially after independence. He ultimately defines poverty as "a matter of capability deprivation" where the capability of a person refers to "the alternative combinations of functionings from which a person can choose," (Dreze and Sen, 1995). Amartya Sen's work has exposed many of the shortcomings in Indian society and politics that have led to high levels of poverty. He provides the framework needed to properly address poverty and how to achieve economic development and how that is freedom. Interestingly enough, he fails to expand on caste identities and how caste-based discrimination has shaped Indian society and its continuous enabling of poverty and discrimination among Dalits in particular. While Sen has done exceptional work by developing the 'capabilities' approach, shining light on gender parity, uncovering the 1943 Bengali Famine, it is critical to note that he too has benefited from a system built on discrimination and exclusion of Dalits. The higher-education institutions that were built as a result of trickle-down policy to have Indians become intellectually competitive on a global front surely benefited Sen.

Nehru and other prominent members of Indian society had the privilege of viewing caste as a way for social groups to be more efficient because they reaped the benefits of the system. Dalits still struggle to become high-profile political leaders and business moguls, placing far greater advantage on the higher-caste members of society. Jodhka reflects that “caste considerations also tend to structure political parties, their leaderships, and programmes,” (Jodhka, 2015). About twenty years after independence, there was a rise in social science studies on the ties between caste and democratic politics, yet these studies were drawn from high-caste communities and their own experience within the political sphere. This serves as another indication that those with the ability to mainly hold positions in such places can write their own narrative, leaving out low-caste and Dalit individuals voices and experiences.

Regardless of constitutional rights and the abolition of the practice of untouchability, the social stigma surrounding Dalits continued to perpetuate in various communities. Although different government programs were implemented to assist in the upliftment of Dalit development and mobilization, Dalits had been forced to live in areas away from main villages in rural India, use different facilities, and oftentimes these areas were not equipped with schools, unlike the main villages, (Nancharaiyah, 2000). Changes to the government do not mean there will be changes in social structure, especially not immediately. If we have ruled that the formation of Dalit groups have come from the practice of untouchability and was practiced for centuries, becoming ingrained into Indian and Hindu society, a new constitution that expects better practices and the elimination of the caste system is simply the start.

There were certainly measures taken in order to uplift depressed and marginalized classes given the priority for poverty alleviation in order to achieve a stronger, more industrialized,

nation. While certain data points show there was improvement in the conditions of Dalits, the policy design was flawed given its steady focus on the development of the heavy industry and high growth rates which simultaneously excluded Dalits from developing. Certain anti-poverty regimes also failed and were ineffective due to poor execution and consideration of actual needs. If one of the main targets of policy was to alleviate poverty, addressing one of the main reasons for persistent poverty would be looking at which groups are struggling the most and addressing their direct needs and finding ways to economically mobilize them. Simply put, you are only as strong as your weakest link. Having the state focus on the development of elite institutions only furthered the development of upper caste and already elite groups, widening the gap between the rich and the poor—the upper caste and the Dalit.

Chapter 3

Post-Liberalization Era and the Mandal Commission (1991 - 2011)

3.1 The Abandonment of Nehruvian Socialism

Immediately following India's independence from the British, economic structures needed to quickly recover from slow and stagnated growth rates, the Cold War, and struggling citizens all around. India adopted a version of the Harrod-Domar model, prioritizing economic growth and industrialization in order to address the issues burdening the newly free nation. This model, as was coined, Nehruvian socialism, was meant to be used as a tool to empower Indians, the heavy amounts of government intervention used as a way to modernize and industrialize the nation after being left impoverished by colonial rule, it failed to uplift all Indians. Having taken note from the USSR, India's first prime minister, Nehru, found this mixed-economy to be best suited to end "poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity". He created the 'License Raj' and had the Planning Commission who centrally administered the Indian economy and used Five Year Plans to formulate specific plans to up the standard of living. Nehruvian socialism called for heavy regulation on industry and had high hopes for economic growth. The central pillar of the policy being import substitution industrialization, which believes the country must solely focus on internal markets for development. After four decades of Nehruvian socialism, the tides began to change and such policy was holding India back from achieving its full potential. During the era, there were often times of a troubled and weak economy and the

conditions of Dalits were not much improved. While there was surely some attention paid to Dalit rights, given the emergence of Dalit activism and the constant push for Dalit freedom, social and economic, from B.R. Ambedkar, the economic policy chosen for India was poorly targeted and failed to address the systems of inequality and discrimination that perpetuated issues of poverty in the nation. By failing to acknowledge the atrocious acts of discrimination inflicted upon Dalits through the practice of social exclusion, it is inevitable that India had not achieved the progress and development the founding figures hoped for, it became necessary to consider expansive economic reforms.

India faced challenges on a general front: there was a rapid increase in population, mass migration to urban areas in search of occupation opportunity, and economic distress due to limits on licensing regulations and international trade and investment. Literacy rates had not seen a significant increase, especially compared to its East Asian neighbors and Dalit participation in India's economic growth rate had been slower than other developing nations since the time of independence in the 20th century. Characterized by uncertain patterns of growth in India, minimal improvements in rates of capital and labor productivity can be attributed to low investments in human capital (Tomlinson, 1993). This is not to say there was no progress in the post-independent period, yet economic historians often struggle to explain sluggish growth rates and low human capital development. Historians would be able to explain it better if they took into account the social context of Indian society and incorporating social exclusion and the caste hierarchy, deciphering improvements in economic conditions and mobility remain incomplete.

The era of Nehruvian socialism and the 'License Raj' seemed like it needed to be left behind as it had not accomplished all that it intended to. Instead, there was low growth due to

diminishing returns to capital, low employment growth, the failure to develop the agricultural sector, low productive investment since the state had allocated savings into the wrong places, low technological progress, and extremely low investments in human capital. Transitioning from the British Raj to the License Raj, high levels of corruption riddled the system and allowed rent-seeking activities to overtake the economy. When taking into account the fact that more often than not, low-caste and Dalits remained in the rigid bounds of their *jati*, regardless of the abolition of untouchability, they were forced to have occupations in low-paying sectors, especially agricultural labor where government investments were falling (Tomlinson, 1993). Even though the bulk of the Indian population was employed in agriculture throughout the late nineteenth century, the strong focus on industrialization and modernization led to the weakened prioritization of the agricultural sector and agricultural laborers, disproportionately benefitting high-caste members of society. Given that Dalits constitute about 50.7 percent of farm laborers, such factors disproportionately affected Dalits, hurting their ability to become more successful as government spending became allocated towards other heavier industries, which are often occupied by high-caste workers (Thorat and Newman, 2010).

A culmination of all these factors led to an economic crisis, pushing Indian policymakers to reconsider the course of economic policy action and leave Nehruvian socialism behind to enter a period of economic liberalization. Nehru became the architect of India's economic policy for the four decades after India's independence and his policies and goals were largely shaped by his socio-economic and caste privilege. His push for a secular government meant the dismissal of caste due to his position and privilege, and many of the programs finally implemented for the social and economic mobilization of Dalits were largely unsuccessful. The push for more Dalit

representation in government was an uphill battle for Dalit advocates, the population was rapidly increasing, and the state was struggling to recover and develop various actors in the economy that were hurt from colonization, which ultimately led to the state deciding it was time for economic reforms and a transition into economic liberalization.

Modern day patterns of inequality are often intertwined with historical and older systems of social exclusion and stratification. Modern constitutions outlaw oppressive forms of social exclusion against groups at the bottom of stratification and such groups have been granted rights of equal citizenship, seen in the case of India in respect to its caste system. The abolition of untouchability and gains of constitutionalized rights have lead many to believe that discrimination is a phenomenon of the past and discriminatory behaviors are absent in modern day contexts. Regardless of constitutional safeguards and the granting of equal rights, inequality amongst stigmatized groups remain rampant and can be observed in various market structures. Advocates for such groups must face the battle of convincing other members of society that discrimination has persisted in old and new ways, and can explain the presence of inequality in modern society.

Thorat and Newman are of the few pioneers of Dalit studies who have shone light on how the social exclusion of Dalits have produced discriminatory practices in the modern day market. Their book *Blocked By Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India* (2010) vividly unpacks how Dalit discrimination has persisted today and how the nature of discrimination has evolved alongside economic reforms in India and Dalit-specific mobilization policies. Given that their book conducted one of the most detailed Dalit-specific studies in the post-liberalized era, this chapter will largely use their qualitative and quantitative data to examine how liberalization and

the Mandal Commission of 1990's have impacted the social and economic mobilization of Dalits.

3.2 Drastic New Reservation Policy: The Mandal Commission

Not only were economic reforms for liberalization taking place in the post-liberalization period, but India began to witness new trends within caste politics, finding the introduction of separate quotas for Scheduled and Other Backward Castes in the same period. B.P. Mandal, an Indian parliamentarian, headed the program by considering various factors that could address caste discrimination and went on to create the Mandal Commission. It was found that such castes made up about half of India's population and therefore reservation policy would be increased to support OBC and SC communities. The Mandal Commission, also known as the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Commission (SEBC) was established as a more significant reservation policy across all states that would allow for more Dalits in the government sector jobs and schools. The Mandal Commission took nearly a decade to formally implement as it was met with vehement protests and criticism across the nation, especially amongst students. These violent protests sprawled across most of North India, and many opposed in general, claiming that reserving seats would be unfair and would be giving special privileges on the basis of caste, regardless of the social and economic exclusion Dalits had faced for centuries.

The Commission recognized that 'backward classes' have a low social position in the "traditional hierarchy of Hindu society", there was a 'lack of general educational advancement among the major section of a caste/community', there was "inadequate or no representation in the Government service", and there was "inadequate representation in the field of trade,

commerce, and industry,” (Mandal Commission, 1980). The recommendations from the Commission meant to uplift Dalits in a wide-ranging and expansive manner, after government realization that the previous regime had not uplifted Dalits and caste had to be considered in order to address social and economic mobility of lower classes. Decades after the Constitution of India had been published and abolished the practice of untouchability, it became clear that without further action to address and reform society, such a piece of the constitution would simply remain as a piece of the constitution, without action in society. The Mandal Commission gave political legitimacy to caste in the modern day context, something that had lacked in the immediate post-independent period. Without the institution of caste participating in politics, inequities and blatant discrimination cannot be addressed, which ultimately causes further inefficiencies in the nation.

During the post-independence era until the 1990s, caste had become increasingly invisible in the political sphere, making it difficult for outlays and development programs to take hold for Dalits in particular. Given the push for a secular state and caste’s close and historic ties to Hindu religion, Nehru’s government found it adequate to allocate outlays and various programs but largely failed to take into account the dynamics of social exclusion inherent in economic systems which ultimately lead to inefficiency. Even though there were multiple reforms put in place to reimagine the Indian economy and country post-colonization, not accounting for how caste discrimination plays an active role in the strength of the country ultimately led to weak systems and low levels of human development. While there were certainly programs that tried to target the development of low-caste Indians, it was found that many programs resulted in the benefit of middle-level castes, instead.

The “formulations on the subject of caste and democracy are mostly based on the experience of the middle-level caste-groups,” and these upper-caste members benefit from democratic politics given their position above the ‘line of pollution’ as cultivators and landowners (Jodhka, 2015). Oftentimes, development processes from the Nehruvian era that benefitted middle and upper-caste people meant a stronger quell for Dalits to handle until Indian society began to experience shifts during the liberalization era. The Mandal Commission would change that by providing 22.5 percent of public university seats, even those at the most elite and competitive institutions, as well as implement quotas in Parliament and public sector occupations.

The Mandal Commission was a way to expand the reservation and quota system for Dalits in public universities and government jobs, but not in the private sector. With these positions reserved strictly for Dalits and OBC, it was meant to redress caste discrimination, bolster marginalized groups, and allow them to enter spaces and positions that were typically not held by such groups. Reservations were made in hopes of righting wrongs by mobilizing Dalits to assume professional positions and become university educated. Thorat and Newman (2010), although just barely, acknowledge how the majority of Dalits remain in poverty or close to poverty and struggle with having high literacy rates, high levels of malnutrition (much higher than the rest of the population) and these factors prohibit them from benefiting from such legislative intervention on a sweeping scale. The authors of *Blocked by Caste* (2010) write, “These opportunities are vital to the upward mobility of the Dalit population. Even though only a small proportion ever gets this far, it is a right that is fiercely protected.” After centuries of discrimination, the legislation was needed for Dalit rights. It is necessary for the government to

acknowledge the disadvantage Dalits face in modern society and that caste is not an antiquated idea, but its role and persistence in the modern day economy.

On the basis of Sen's "capabilities approach" to development, high-levels of economic inequality can undermine a society's ability to promote "valued capabilities" (Sen, 1995). Sen theorizes that inequality is often a source of social tension and violence between social groups. When the state has the ability to expand social opportunities to its constituents, political pressure from privileged groups can undermine them and protect their own interests. In the context of Dalit rights and reservations, Ambedkar had advocated for Dalit visibility in the state to ensure the actual needs of Dalits were being met. Should the needs of Dalits are met that can encourage higher levels of development and eventually lower levels of inequality, there can be the facilitation of cooperative action and "pursuit of collective goals," (Sen, 1995).

Caste had no place in India's path to modernity, holding the newly independent country back from the levels of development India had hoped to achieve—the levels high-growth and high-income countries. Assuming a secular model to address the struggles of India's position in the global economy was becoming recognized as inefficient as the country faced a balance of payments crisis, high levels of poverty, and low levels of development in the 1980s and 1990s. Having the Mandal Commission brought forth to politics allowed the government to focus on Dalit development in a way that had not been addressed in the previous years. Although the policy seems somewhat sudden in the course of India's development and coincides nearly perfectly with India's choice to liberalize the economy, the Mandal Commission was debated and highly contested for a decade. Beginning in the 1980s, the policy was proposed by the Janata

Party to identify “backwards” classes in India and create spaces for them in higher education and government occupations, leading to their upward mobility.

Sen’s *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (1995) reflected largely on the social and economic inequalities that held India back from achieving high levels of development and even addressed how social hierarchies can lead to further violence and inequality. Sen explores the various measures taken to reduce economic inequalities in India—without explicitly mentioning how caste and social exclusion have played a role in these market dynamics—such as: legal controls on sharecropping, minimum-wage provisions, placing restrictions on the scale of private enterprises, and rent-control legislation. As discussed prior, these economic interventions are theoretically sound, but have severe limitations as the,

“roots of economic inequality... lie not in the market exchange per se, but market exchange based on unequal ownership. Economic or legislative measures that interfere with market exchange without altering the distribution of resources, and without creating an alternative—and more equitable—allocation mechanism can be quite ineffective and counterproductive” (Sen, 1995).

Even with reservations in place for Dalits, it is found that employer discrimination continues to prevent low-caste and Dalit applicants from assessing any but low-level jobs (Thorat and Newman, 2010). If the belief of caste discrimination belonging solely in the past persists, actively addressing these issues in the labor market turns into an uphill battle for Dalit advocates, which it has. Hiring based on qualifications irrespective of caste places Dalits in a position where they are still discriminated against and only given low-paying occupations, similar to how in the previous Nehruvian era, Dalits were reaching higher levels of employment but it was often found that they were employed in low-pay and low-status jobs that were parallel to jati-specific occupations.

3.3 The Efficacy of the Mandal Commission

Education is one of the most important requirements for achieving economic, political, and social development and one of the most effective tools Dalits can use to meet some of the challenges Dalits face. Without furthering education attainment and access to education, reservation policies are meaningless since Dalits would not be able to reach the stage in one's educational journey to receive the reservation benefits. Historically, it has been evident that the Dalit community has been excluded from educational processes for centuries, furthering vast inequalities in the education system. Available data shows literacy levels amongst Dalits have improved from 10.27 percent in 1961 to 54.7 percent in 2001, while the rest of the population saw literacy rates of 68.38 percent in 2001 (Mandal, 2014). Additionally, available data finds that Dalit enrollment in education have seen a substantial increase in all stages. While both of these show a significant improvement in Dalits and their relationship to education, enrollment does not reflect the amount of education achievement. Even with state assistance and the increased enrollment and literacy rates, it was found that the dropout rate is still high among Dalits, especially in primary and secondary stages of education.

In order to evaluate the efficacy of the Mandal Commission, we can observe the rate of return to education by caste. Thorat and Newman conducted one of the first studies on the rate of return to education by caste, specifically following the economic liberalization in the 1990s. It was found that transitional economies that were imposing labor market reforms typically see higher returns on education when there are rises in education levels. While no study has been previously conducted using nationally representative samples on the rate of return to education

by caste, Thorat and Newman's study used one in order to examine whether there were actually higher returns to education with the rise in the potential education enrollment with new reservation policies.

Average Private Rate of Returns to Education by Caste (in percent)

Education Level	1983		1993-4		1999-2000			
	NSC	SC	NSC	SC	NSC	SC	OBC	
Primary	4.21	4.48	3.26	1.39	3.1	1.92	3.55	
Middle	5.05	6.43	3.54	3.19	2.56	4.31	3.83	
Secondary	16.95	16.28	9.86	4.77	11.26	8.16	8.22	
Higher Secondary		N A	N A	5.21	12.92	6.46	8.8	5.88
Graduate Professional	9.61	7.47	9.67	7.23	12.62	9.32	11.61	
Graduate General	8.08	5.98	7.87	4.65	9.6	5.3	8.21	
Professional Degree compared to a general degree	12.66	10.44	12.37	11.1	17.15	15.34	16.7	
Notes:	NA: Not Available							
	SC: Scheduled Caste							
	NSC: Non-Scheduled Caste							
Source: Thorat and Newman (2010)								

The educational returns compared across castes found that the returns for Dalits were considerably lower than that of high-caste workers. Various studies have found that “the

premium to skill appears to be increasing over time due to liberalization,” leading to increasing levels of wage inequality (Thorat and Newman, 2010). It was found that the increasing levels of returns to education occur for those who are more educated during times of rapid economic change, like during India’s Green Revolution. In addition it was found that after labor market reforms in the 1990s, there were certainly increasing rates of returns to education but they were mostly limited to high-caste groups and Dalits continued to receive fewer returns to their education.

The majority of Dalits remain in poverty or close to poverty; they have struggled with having high literacy rates, and continue to have levels of malnutrition much higher than the rest of the population which all impact the ability to attend and complete their education. With Dalits having more difficulty accessing school due to lack of resources, lack of schools close to home, and discriminatory practices in the classroom, having similar returns to education becomes far more difficult. Even with reservation policy in place, Dalits face far more barriers to accessing education in the same way high-caste Indians are able to access. Rates of return to education are far lower compared to that of higher caste workers, even at the primary level in 1999-2000, upper caste workers were receiving a 3.10% return to their primary education in comparison to the 1.92% return for Dalits. The gap becomes even wider at higher levels of education as seen with a graduate degree where upper castes are receiving 9.60% back on their education in comparison to Dalits receiving 5.30% back.

By implementing reservations for Dalits in higher education and government positions, the government is certainly expanding opportunities for Dalits, but the benefits of such a policy are difficult to reap when access to basic necessities remains a large struggle for many Dalits,

constantly. In the post-liberalization era in both urban and rural sectors, Dalits are found to be far less employed than that of higher caste groups. Even with a fall in poverty from 1993 to 2004, there remains considerably high rates of poverty amongst Dalit in comparison to non-Dalit individuals (Thorat and Newman, 2010). Dalit advocates claim that low-caste applicants are prevented from accessing anything but low level jobs in the labor market because of employer discrimination, especially in the private sector. The commercialization of education has transformed education into an enterprise for profits. In modern India, medical, engineering, and technological universities are mainly privately owned and find that “passport for entrance of these institutions is a large amount of money,” (Mandal, 2014). This creates a system that excludes Dalits from accessing these institutions. If reservation policy does not apply to private institutions, Dalits become further excluded from these private higher education spaces as well if wealth is a criteria for admission. It is due to these reasons that it is still rare to find Dalits in elite and prestigious medical, engineering, and technological institutions across India.

Even though the Mandal Commission was incredibly monumental for Dalit rights and mobilization, signaling a push in the direction towards more equality, the reservation policy has serious contention around it and it brought forth discriminatory language and rhetoric to the surface. According to certain employers, having reservation policy means to them, “Incapable people are pushed in and, ultimately [they] all lose,” (Thorat and Newman, 2010). Rather than seeing reservation policy as a means to pull Dalits up from centuries of discrimination that led to disadvantage and finally giving Dalits an opportunity to have a seat at the table, and somehow this reinforcing ‘casteism’ in the modern context. Some worried that reservation policy would

see it as something underserving, if Dalits did not have such a policy, the Dalit employee may have never assumed the position.

Education and the development of skill are valued as the route to mobilization and the release from caste-based occupational traps, but the shackles of classroom segregation and low levels of expectations thwart Dalit ambition. This in turns furthers their ability to earn, create the cultural capital necessary to form networks like upper-caste candidates can, and “experience being persistently identified with their caste background and in consequence have an understable preference for scarce public sector jobs,” (Mosse, 2018). The expansion of reservation policy, despite being met with intense protests around the country, was quite important in bringing the conversation about Dalits to the forefront of the country. This was also met with a rise in Dalit rights movements to address the violence and uproar that occurred when choosing to expand Dalit reservation. The mobility of Dalits likely would have been much better should the policy been better targeted and “implemented as intended” (Halder, 2019). Expanding reservation policy did not eliminate employer discrimination in the labor market and most importantly, many Dalits were unable to reach the point where they could take advantage of reservation policy. While the conditions of few had improved, Dalits remain unable to achieve the levels of education and enter the spaces that were supposedly ‘reserved’ for them through reservation policy due to the barriers imposed through social stratification.

3.4 Economic Liberalization and Its Effects

In India’s 2001 Census, it was found that 167 million Dalits were landless or near landless; employed in agricultural production or in the lowest-paid types of manual labor and

constituting about 16.2% of the national population (Thorat and Newman, 2010). While Dalits had equal rights to property and employment, restrictions that existed in the past seem to have retained their form and prevail within market practices. The basic idea behind economic reforms that took place in the 1990s in India were that private provision is more efficient than public provision, and increased competition would create the pressure to lower costs and improve quality. Economic liberalization also meant the creation of greater purchasing power and enabling people to purchase needs in a way that is not through public provision. Yet, there are extreme limitations to such conceptions. There arises the “issue of distribution... since purchasing power and wealth are unequally distributed,” (Dreze and Sen, 2013) and leave the country’s poor behind. With the adoption of liberalization and privatization, the state gave up many of its responsibilities and surrendered them to private agencies.

During the Nehruvian era, the planned economy created greater opportunities for employment in the public sector. The reservation that had been made for Scheduled Castes and Tribes encouraged those who had the ability to pursue these opportunities to be employed by the state, yet mostly at the lowest class level, class IV (Jodhka, 2015). The Indian economy since liberalization has been opening itself up to international competition and foreign investment, the state has been getting smaller while the private sector has been rapidly expanding. By the early to mid 2000’s, India emerged as the third largest economy in the world, just behind the United States and China (Thorat and Newman, 2010). Despite such rapid growth and economic success on a large scale, whether or not the nation’s poor have benefitted from these national successes remains in question. Take education development efforts for example: the commercialization of education due to globalization has made it such that education systems in both rural and urban

settings have been subverted almost completely. “Since majority of the reach upper castes send their wards to the private/convent schools, government schools have been reduced into dysfunctional centres of learning for the marginalized sections of society,” (Mandal, 2014). These private schools are also inaccessible to Dalit children given the high costs of private education and in addition, these schools are also typically in urban areas, which is inaccessible to the larger part of Dalit children.

Even with economic reforms, the onset of new constitutional safeguards, and the Mandal Commission, the context of discrimination against Dalits must be taken into account when considering the effects of reforms since economic growth rates cannot depict the full story of Dalit mobilization and development. Should the customary practices and customs of the caste system that rule economic organization persist, they would involve denial Dalit rights to property, education, and employment. This would persist in the labor market, agricultural market, and consumption market—which are all pertinent to keep in mind when evaluating whether discrimination persists in similar ways it had previously. Liberalization policy reduced the number of job opportunities for marginalized sections, especially Dalits, in government services. This was met with the abolition of nearly 2,000,000 public sector occupations across the country through various forms of disinvestment and privatization. With further privatization, reservation no longer applied and largely reduced the number of jobs Dalits would have access to.

Shifting into an era when Dalit advocacy began to rise within political and social contexts, it became more common to denounce ‘casteist’ practices—indicating many were taking a leap towards more equitable thinking and practices. Hiring practices were changing and

therefore the nature of labor market discrimination towards Dalits was also changing. While the implementation of greater reservations as a result of the Mandal Commission seemed to create a more positive effect on the perception of Dalits, certainly moving away from the idea of pollution and the practice of untouchability, discriminatory practices within various markets were not disappearing so quickly. In fact, it was found that the gap in access to education between Dalits and upper-castes widened in the post-liberalization era and the caste-based disparity in earnings was 15 percent (Mosse, 2018). The returns the state hoped to achieve with economic liberalization came with a multitude of costs, disproportionately affecting the most marginalized and already struggling portions of the population.

Attitudes in hiring practices seemed to revolve around the more modern 'caste blind' approach where there was stronger focus on merit rather than caste. Hiring "without respect to 'caste, creed, and color'" became more the common practice in the labor market, but such attitudes are highly unequal in respects to Dalits. The production of merit is highly unequal and therefore, linking a changed and modern worldview to merit, and "merit for cultural capital" (Thorat and Newman, 2010) eliminates Dalits from the competition in hiring. Merit-based hiring becomes indirectly discriminatory against the basis of caste since Dalits are at a disadvantage to begin with. The unfortunate truth is, hiring solely based on merit can only take place if every applicant is on a level playing field, and in the case of the early 2000's, Dalits were only receiving higher amounts of reservation and advocacy for a decade since liberalization. The systematic disadvantages that being an 'ex-untouchable' imposes on a Dalit are longstanding and deep-rooted. Access to equal opportunities as higher-caste members of society is extremely limited if millions remain landless, with low levels of literacy due to limited access to schooling,

and lesser access to good public health systems. Labor market discrimination will persist, even if it is economically irrational and inefficient since Dalits have far less access to equal opportunities for general welfare.

Wealth, Income, and Consumption Mean Values

	SC	ST	OBC	Brahmin	Non-Brahmin	
Annual Income of Household (in Rs.)	89356	73216	104099	167013	164633	
Per Capita Annual Income (in Rs.)	19032	16401	21546	35303	36060	
Annual Consumption of HH (in Rs.)	87985	72,732	108722	146037	143497	
Per Capita Annual Consumption (in Rs.)	18740.0	15860	22502.0	30869.0	31430.0	
Highest Adult Education		6.7	5.9	7.8	11.5	10.3
Highest Male Education	6.3	5.6	7.5	11.3	9.9	
Highest Female Education	3.9	3.3	5.0	8.6	7.8	
Source: Bharti (2018); IHDS (2011)						

In the table above from 2011, it is exhibited that Scheduled Castes continue to lag significantly behind income, consumption, and education levels than higher caste members of society (Brahmin and non-Brahmin). It is evident that Brahmins remain at the top of the list overall in terms of wealth, income, consumption, and education levels.

Caste-Wise Occupational Distribution of Worker in Sample Villages, 2003-4

	SC	ST	OBC	HC	All
Non-working member	58.5	70	54.6	66	60.8
Non-farm labor	14	9.5	19.2	0.6	10.6
Agricultural labor	3.94	42.9	31.2	25	30.1
Cultivator	15.5	19	20.7	49.2	31.4
Self-employed in non-farm sector	9.3	23.8	16.8	7.9	12.3
Temporary salaried in private sector	7.8	0	0.9	6.1	3.9
Permanent salaried in private sector	4.7	0	1.3	1	1.6
Temporary salaried in co-operative sector	0.5	0	0.2	0.8	0.5
Permanent salaried in co-operative sector	0.5	0	0	1.4	0.6
Source: Thorat and Newman 2010	*Table has been modified but not changed				

To examine for patterns of labor market discrimination between Dalits and high-castes in the liberalized period, Thorat and Newman (2010) looked for the number of days employed in an agricultural (casual labor) year under the assumption that the skill required for manual wage labor engaged in agriculture is available to both Dalits and high-castes. It was found that Dalits were employed for 100 days on average whereas high-caste laborers were employed for 154 days on average, suggesting discriminatory behavior in the labor market in favor of high-caste workers. It is evident that there are preferences for high-caste labor given the significant difference in days employed in a year. Additionally, the next table examines the reasons for employer preference for their own [low] caste or a high-caste person.

Reasons for Employer Preference for Own Caste and/or HC Persons

Reasons	Number	Percentage
Caste sympathy	18	47.37
Caste laborers are hard working	1	2.63
Caste laborers are loyal	17	44.74
Unemployment among them is high	2	5.26
Other reasons	0	100
Total Respondents	38	100
Source: Thorat and Newman (2010)		

With Thorat and Newman (2010) using qualitative methods rather than quantitative, they hoped to grasp the more intimate story of whether or not discrimination was still being used in the post-liberalized era by surveying 100 Dalit (Scheduled Caste) respondents. 38 of the respondents mentioned specific reasons, outlined in the table. Of the 100 respondents, about one-third responded claiming preference by high-caste employers for people of their own caste. In the question in regards to preference for own-caste wage labor by high-castes, 47 percent responded with affinity to their own caste and 45 percent reported loyalty to their own-caste. In total, this equates to 92 percent of Dalits reporting caste preference being a factor in discrimination by high-castes against Dalits wage laborers when hiring.

3.5 The Changing Tides of Dalits in India

As the talk of caste continues to remain an unmentionable topic in India, there are now legal implications to caste discrimination as well as being seen as socially retrograde. Sen and Dreze's *An Uncertain Glory* (2013) even mentions how caste inequality is "crucially dependent

on the overlap of social stratification and economic inequality,” and somewhat elaborates on how low-caste and Dalit individuals continue to have economic and social disadvantages, even within the modern context of equal rights and reservation opportunities. Social stratification and employment opportunity in the modern context of hiring Dalits to a concept called, ‘homosocial reproduction’ (Thorat and Newman, 2015; Kanter 1977) where people who hold positions of privilege within large organizations develop the sense of a certain kind of person who will be most fit for their roles, which lead them to favor potential recruits who are most socially similar to themselves—excluding groups who are seen to not fit such roles. While the practice of untouchability has diminished over the years due to social reform movements, political resistance from groups who are discriminated upon, and constitutional safeguards, caste prejudices can persist through identifying factors such as surnames, which do not fall under constitutional safeguards.

Recent studies continue to show the continued dominance of upper castes and the large absence of Dalits in “media houses, corporate boards, judicial institutions, and even cricket and polo teams (Dreze and Sen, 2013). With the state taking a smaller role in the economy arose the opportunity for the state to play a more active role in addressing social and economic inequalities, yet it is still found that upper castes continue to have overwhelming control over many institutions, with Dalits barely represented. High-paying and highly respected occupations like corporate boards in India continue to find their 90% of their members to be high-caste—45 percent to be Brahmins. 3.5 percent of seats are held by Dalits, even though Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes make up nearly a quarter of the Indian population now (Dreze and Sen, 2013).

With the new set of challenges the Cold War presented, India's abandonment of the planned economy which had led to a balance of payments crisis shifted India into a liberalized economy in the 1990s. Economic reforms ensued and under the new regime, the state began to contract its involvement with the economy and private enterprises were allowed into the economy in a way that was absent in the pre-1990 economy. Private entities expanded and interacted with areas of the economy the public sector that was unheard of. With a smaller role of the state in the economy, there was room for the government to put more consideration on the conditions of labor welfare and social security, which were previously neglected. In 2014, Chetan Agrawal found the effects of liberalization on the labor force and ruled that there was a clear and drastic change in the attitudes and conditions of the workforce (Agrawal, 2014). Even though the government had the ability to pay more regard to the sectors of society that had been previously neglected, "disappointment was expressed" (Agrawal, 2014) in terms of improvements to labor welfare, social security, and employment growth, and human resource development. While there were improvements to wages, GDP growth, and productivity, many sections of the economy lagged behind and failed to meet many of the expectations immediately.

At the start of liberalization, employment was expected to improve as private sector opportunities opened, but with the public sector removing itself from multiple areas, employment opportunities contracted. New technologies that were introduced did not necessarily lead to job creation, and many felt the internal processes of globalization were not suitable for increased levels of employment. Given that unorganized or informal labor (labor that is not regulated by the government and falls outside of their purview) accounts for nearly 90% of India's employment. With the wave of new economic policy and reform, special attention could alleviate

the burdens the economic systems placed on Dalits, but with increased privatization and creation of competition, there is unequal distribution and lower castes often do not reap the benefits of such reforms.

Rapid privatization was met with the shrinking of employment opportunities in the government under the quota system that had been in place previously for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. While reservations in public universities and government jobs were expanding, the size of such opportunities were simultaneously shrinking. While business was expanding nationwide with the introduction of non-state and foreign actors, reservation policy had been crucial to the economic and social development of Dalits. In response, Dalit activists proposed that reservation policy be extended to the private sector, which was met with anger and protests throughout the 1980s and 1990s, even continued into the mid-2000s when reservations were supposed to expand further.

The quest to improve the economic and social mobility of Dalits remains a key concern even three decades after the economic reforms of 1991. The Mandal Commission was crucial in ensuring and inviting Dalits into spaces that typically excluded them, but admission into these spaces were still dependent on the attainment of primary and secondary education. With the introduction of privatization and corporatization during the liberalized period, the emergence of costly private institutions and removal of public sector occupations further excluded Dalit access. Even though the intentions of the Mandal Commission were to expand access to Dalits across higher education and public sector jobs, they were still faced with multiple barriers to entry that were historically instilled through discriminatory practices. While certain conditions of Dalits have improved overtime along with the gains of constitutional rights, the practice of

discrimination has persisted and only molded itself to changing times. Through these findings, we can claim that India remains an extremely immobile society.

The continuous refusal to place Dalit development and mobility at the forefront of anti-poverty and development policy has allowed discrimination to mold to current economic and social structures, further excluding Dalit development. Fortunately, with the reservation policy and Dalit advocacy looming over the political, academic, and economic spheres in India, Dalit rights are have become a greater part of the national conversation in recent months. Unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, the backlash from vested interests has also mounted. India remains an extremely immobile society where the Dalit struggle largely remains as it evolves with modern times.

Conclusion

Caste discrimination has persisted as a tool of control over 2,000 years with its roots dating back to ancient Hindu scriptures. The rigid bounds of the caste system has been the determinant of economic opportunity and position since then as it categorizes people at birth and defines their place in society. Outside of the four main castes who are considered to be 'pure' on a hierarchical basis, Dalits fall outside the categories and are considered to be 'polluted'. In more recent times, "Dalits" became newly identified as former "untouchables", meaning "broken". "After the practice of untouchability for centuries and the codification of the caste system into India's census under the British Raj (along with their granting of senior and administrative occupations to upper-caste Indians), the system was abolished in 1950. Regardless of the abolition of caste and the practice of untouchability, the system persists as it dominates social organization in India. Dalits continue to face exclusion and segregation leading to persistently high levels of poverty, low levels of educational attainment, and greater disparities between them and high-caste individuals.

Some have argued that caste continues to fragment Indian society and has prevented it from atomizing like other Western and East Asian powers did in the 20th century. Many others have argued the opposite, that caste hierarchies are archaic and irrelevant to modern consideration, rendering it antiquated due to the amount of modernization and industrialization achieved. Prominent Indian figures that determined the path of development a newly free India would take argued the latter—in fact, many did not even feel the need to consider caste in their politics. Figures like Gandhi once admired the caste system and failed to ever completely

denounce it, and India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, never truly spoke on caste and how its removal could be significantly beneficial to the betterment of India's issues of poverty and inequality. Figures like Gandhi have become household symbols for peace, while B.R. Ambedkar, the father of the India's constitution who fought relentlessly against discrimination towards Dalits, has not. The lack of Dalit inclusion into economic policy along with the mistargeted and poorly implemented policy when it occurred, allowed discrimination to persist and allow it to evolve within markets overtime.

Constitutional rights do not ensure the equal treatment of marginalized groups and economic reform policy cannot be effective if not targeted properly. Untouchability was abandoned in 1950 according to the Constitution of India, but it was found that 27 percent of 42,000 nationally representative households continued to practice untouchability in private spaces (Mosse, 2018). During the period of Nehruvian socialism, one would hope there would be improvements in the conditions of Dalits if anti-poverty regimes were at the forefront of Nehru's campaign, but efforts to redistribute land and provide reservations largely failed as upper-caste landowners and statesmen continued to discriminate against Dalits by disregarding what was constitution and expected through economic policy. Dalits now continue to own the least land, have the least access to education, and have the worst of occupations. In the post-liberalization era, acts of violence against Dalit continues to riddle national headlines while the rise in Dalit activism begs for further protections. Reservation policy unsuccessfully addresses much of actual Dalit needs which are better access to educational and health resources which encourage their ambition and ability to mobilize for more fruitful futures. While reservation policy does bring Dalit rights to the national conversation, it only can benefit the few who are able to make it to

higher levels of education and occupation. Reservation policy has been one of the greatest tactics to mitigate poverty and inequality amongst Dalits, but it has been proven Dalits continue to face great limitations to occupational mobility.

Not only can casteism be observed through market conditions and various examinations of development, but various discrete modes of identification allows for the continued use of the caste system, but the specific identification of Dalits. Although oftentimes unspoken, one's caste is still identifiable through factors such as surname, various practices within Hinduism, and the determination of whether or not one attends university or holds a specific occupation due to reservation. While I have not experienced life in India, I can attest as an Indian-American that the immediate quizzing of my surname and father's occupation occurs quite often, leading to the instant feeling of discomfort. The discussion of one's caste based on surname and subtle and even hard-to-catch scorn for lower castes remains a common practice within my Indian-American circles, which only gives me the slightest glimpse of how caste remains woven into our society on a global scale.

Taking into account the historical and social context of Dalits in India is crucial to understanding the greater story of their current position in society. Many economists have found that caste discrimination plays a major role in economic development, but too few truly emphasize the distinct importance of incorporating caste into economic policy. Even though Dalits remain one of the most marginalized groups and caste is a prime determinant of opportunity, mobility, and freedom, global conversations fail to incorporate casteism as a relevant issue that persists in the modern day. Due to restrictions on public data sets as well as the legal restrictions on acquiring caste identity, it is difficult to properly comment on and

analyze the economic mobilization across generations which is why various data sources needed to be utilized. Should this study continue, it would find and explore more explicit data regarding

The topic of caste, especially the maltreatment of Dalits, remains largely unmentionable and untouched by policy. The crisis of exclusion Dalits face not only begs for policy innovation, but global attention in order to finally address caste as a relevant and relational issue, not as a static and archaic problem. It begs for economists and politicians to finally speak out about caste discrimination and consider Dalit development within economic policy if poverty levels, landlessness, and educational levels truly want to be addressed. Dalit activism and inclusion must exist at all levels of society, but especially in representation in policymaking positions. Ambedkar's recommendations were largely abandoned in the post-independent era where he spoke to how Dalit representation in politics and political power could further the goal of annihilating caste. Economic development policies without the inclusion of each member of society and the prioritization of the most marginalized cannot result in true economic development. Dalit political representation and Dalit focused development within policymaking could help better implement development schemes and reforms, or else they will continue to be excluded from the conversation.

The silence on caste is complicit. Not speaking up on the injustices Dalits face makes one complicit. We are not in a post-caste world and caste has only evolved with time, along with its exploitative and discriminatory nature. The widening levels of inequality and the persistent atrocities Dalits face in the modern day whether it be through market or non-market practices must be addressed on both a national and global scale. In order to do so, morality must be central to our discussions of the economy. Policy without morality has been unable to tackle the

necessary repairs and reforms. While caste continues to affect India and the Indian diaspora, affecting nearly one fifth of the population, it has yet to become a part of global policy discussion. Without the consideration of Dalits on a global scale, it will remain difficult to use economic policy like land reform and reservations to target Dalit development. Caste has been both weakened and resuscitated by modern economic forces allowing for discrimination towards Dalits to persist into the 21st century. It is the responsibility of policymakers, nationwide and globally, to incorporate Dalits and caste into development policy, as true development cannot be achieved without the prioritization and incorporation of the most marginalized members of society.

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