

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1: Introduction

Indian social structure exhibits disparities in castes, differences in class, untouchability, disdain and the like. The questions that lie before us are; where are the roots of such disparities? Why an upper caste Brahmin bears hatred for a Dalit? Cannot there be any mutual understanding amongst the upper castes and the lower castes? Does caste and caste system stand above the laws of land? In his book *Manu Smriti*, Sir William Jones (1794) stated that because of that ideology millions of Indian were ruled by a few Britishers.¹ They took the advantage of the divided Indian society on the lines of castes, and used the caste system to benefit them. However, this did not have affect on the Indians; as they were engrossed in classifying superior and inferior beings in the lines of castes. To explain these questions, it is essential to understand the social structure of the Indian society.

The Indian social system is stratified on the basis of caste, and the Indian social hierarchical system stands as: *the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas* and *the Shudras*, in descending order. In Purush Sukht's 10th Mandala, 12th Hymn Trigdev has mentioned:

Brahmotasya Muhmaasid Baahu Rajnya Krith I

Uroo Tasya Yad Vaishya Padbhaya Shudro Ajayat ll²

This means Brahmins generated from God's face, Rajanyas from his hands, Vaishyas from his thighs and *Shudras* from his legs.

¹ Sharma, Ramsharan. (1992). *Sharma, Shudron Ka Vikaas*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Publication. Pp. 9. Also See. *Institutes of Hindu Law*, Role, Page XIX.

² Trigdev. *10th Mandala, Purush Sukt*. 12th Hymn

In the 11th hymn of the same book he states, “When God made human beings how many parts did he divide them into? What was his face, his hands, his thighs and lastly, his legs?”³

Dr. Ambedkar in his arguments states that, “If there were really four stages in the society, then the Varna system principles would have been easier but it is far more complicated. The four different stages of the society have changed their principles which have set their way of life. It has categorized the system. This is illogical and punitive. In the four Varna systems, Shudras were placed in the lowest position so that they cannot raise their voice against any injustice, which is completely unfair. In reality, when Dalits were not given place in the fifth stage, Shudras were treated the worst.”⁴

There are some stereotyped Hindu people who consider the caste system to be of highest order. They willingly ignore the fact that generations after generations, Dalits or Shudras were mistreated, ignored from their rights. For these stereotypes, “Nationalism” is a myth. For them, caste system is more important than the upliftment of the society.

According to Vedas and other religious text books, Brahmins are respected more than other people because these people create belief and faith among the people. All these religious texts were created by Brahmins to make people around them believe that they are superior to everybody. Dr Ambedkar gave his opinion on these religious books and stated that “These books which were called holy are full of repulsiveness of the society. It just gives birth to the feeling of inferiority among people, which is why there was always a clash between two different Brahmins. No one found this weird during that time. If someone realized that he was

³ Ibid. 11th Hymn

⁴ Ambedkar, Dr. Bhimrao. (1998). *Sampurna Wadmay*. 13th Part. Welfare Department, Indian Government: Dr Ambedkar Enterprises.

not a Brahmin and also that he was untouchable, then my indifference towards these holy texts won't be any less."⁵

The caste system brought forward by Purush Sukt was promoted by believers, committees. They have contributed a lot in keeping this system alive. This system is considered almost equivalent to God, which is termed as exemplary condition, so that people follow it. The holy book, *Aapatstamb* states that, "*There are four castes-Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Among these, the first mentioned is better than the other.*"⁶ *Except Shudras and other lower castes, everyone has the right to perform yajnas, wear the holy thread, or recitation of the Veda.*"⁷

The same has been repeated in *Vashisht Holy Text*, "*Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras are the four different castes of the society. Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya are born two times, first from their mother's womb and then by adopting the Yagyopavit.*"⁸

Manu in Purush Sukt put forth certain principles stating that the principles are equivalent to God. He stated, "*For creation, God used his face for Brahmins, hands for Kshatriyas, thighs for Vaishyas and legs for Shudras.*"⁹ It also stated, "*Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are born twice, whereas, Shudras are born only once.*"¹⁰ He also said, "*Vedas are the only basis.*"¹¹

Since the four caste system was developed, there were other two developments as well. First, below the *Shudras*, a new class was introduced called *Asprishya* or *Atyanj*. Second, *Shudras* were distinguished from the other three castes. Because of this development several new

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Aapatstamb Dharmasutra-Question* . Table 1, Segment 1, Part 4-5.

⁷ *Aapatstamb Dharmasutra-Question 1*, Table 1, Segment 1, Part 6.

⁸ *Vashisht Dharmasutra*.

⁹ Manu. *Chapter 1*. Shloka 31.

¹⁰ Manu. *Chapter 10*, Shloka 4.

¹¹ Manu. *Chapter 2*, Shloka 6.

words came into being, *sawarn-awarn* and *dwij-adwij*. *Sawarn* meant Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and *Shudras*. *Awarn* meant Untouchables, *Atyanjs*, were impure or illegitimate signifying casteless people. One question that arises here is these illegitimate people who do not belong to any caste, are they not Hindus? It is as if these people are outer castes but are still kept intact due to various reasons. Balmiki community had to face the same problem which will be discussed in the upcoming parts.

In Madhya Pradesh, '*Balayi*', a Dalit community were mistreated by the Hindu community. Dr Ambedkar discusses about this based on a report by Times of India that in Kaneriya, Bichauli-Hafsi, Bichauli Village and other parts of Indore, the upper caste Hindus which constituted Rajputs, Brahmans, Patel, Patwaris mistreated the *Balayis* in their villages and stated that if they want to stay with them, they will have to follow certain rules, which included:-

1. *Balayis* won't wear turbans made of golden threads.
2. Their dhotis won't have fashionable finishing.
3. They will inform the relatives of people about the deaths in the family of upper castes, irrespective of how far they live.
4. They will have to play instruments in the weddings of Hindus.
5. *Balayi* women won't wear golden ornaments. Also, they won't wear fashionable clothes.
6. *Balayi* females ought to help Hindu females in their chores.
7. *Balayis* would have to work for Hindus without asking for remuneration. Whatever Hindus pay, they will have to accept it.
8. If they don't agree to these conditions, they might leave the village.

Balayis refused to accept these conditions and Hindus took a strong step against them. *Balayis* were denied their basic rights. They were refused water from the village well. They weren't allowed to let their animals graze in the fields. *Balayis* were completely excluded.¹²

In the book, '*A Book of Jentu Lodge*' (1776) which was written during the starting of Indian Society it was mentioned that one can do business in India and control Bengal's government only when the country accepts all the flaws and tries to correct it, because it isn't against the cause and winner of the law.¹³

God has differentiated the Hindu society from varying parts. All these different castes have their own identities. This is the command of God for them to be different from each other. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and *Shudras* can never be brothers. There is no question of *Shudras* or *Atyanjis* being related to any upper caste, no feeling of friendship can develop among them. This mutual feeling of kindness leads to the development of society and the system resists this feeling. This is the reason why Manusmriti advises to maintain the differences. It states, '*After birth, Brahmin fathers on the 8th year of their sons, Kshatriya fathers on the 11th year and Vaishyas on the 12th year, announce their sons as their successors.*'¹⁴

Based on their caste, students would wear clothes. They could be either of Krishnasar deer, dappled deer or of goat's skin and inner garments would be made of hemp or wool.¹⁵ 'The sacred thread of Brahmins should be made of cotton, that of Kshatriyas should be of hemp

¹² Dr Ambedkar *Jati Pratha Unmulan*. Times of India. 4th January, 1928.

¹³ Sharma, Ramsharan. (1778). *History of Shudras: Introduction*. Pp. 9.

¹⁴ Manu. Chapter 2, Shloka 36.

¹⁵ Manu. Chapter 2, Shloka 41.

and that of Vaishyas should be of wool. All these threads should be linked in three parts in its upper section'.¹⁶

Above mentioned rules were meant for students. But this difference was the introduction of Hindu trend, which instigates a feeling of discrimination in the society. This feeling of separation in Hinduism was comprehensive and wanton which made the caste system even more strong. Castes were further divided into sub-castes. Brahmins have 1886 sections. Punjab has 469 sections of Brahmins itself. Describing this sectionalisation of the species Dr. Ambedkar states that these castes and their sections have differences in standards, business. There are changes due to social conditions, pollution, rights of the upper castes. People also change their castes. All these changes lead to dispersal of the society.¹⁷

Blunt says that it is necessary to understand the fact that kitchen is the main module of food and drinks, and anyone can be the caterer. This symbolises that the upper caste Hindu can eat food from every caste's house but the caterer will be of one specific caste. This is why most of the cooks are Brahmins. It is only a proper Hindu who can differentiate between the food made of water and food made of ghee. This is so because it is believed that ghee is made of all pure substances and hence there is no question of impurity. Due to this social recognition, food made of water is considered to be less convenient than that of food from ghee. Food made of ghee is given more preference because of the conservative mentality. Hence, these conservative people limit their boundaries.¹⁸

According to Dr Ambedkar, the nutrition of Indian society's orientation is based on three principles. The first being, step by step differentiation. This difference is the main principle apart from all controversies. The four caste system was not made on the levelled floor which

¹⁶ Manu, Chapter 2, Shloka 44.

¹⁷ Ambedkar. *Sampurn Wadmay*. Part 6. Important principles of Hindu Society Orientation. Pp. 131.

¹⁸ Blunt- The Caste System of Northern India. Pp. 89-90.

remains same even after being different. This is like a step wise floor, where not only the caste but their behaviours too are different and one considers itself to be above another.¹⁹

Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, *Shudra* and *Asprishya*. The difference between them is not only conventional; it is also because of how the view of Hinduism, spirituality, morality and legislative orientation works. In every sphere of life, this difference is prevalent and the main principle behind everything is that *Shudras* and *Asprishyas* are lower castes and untouchables.

Shudras are kept in the fourth position but Dr. Ambedkar believed that *Shudras* were Kshatriyas. In his argument he put forward these statements:

1. *Shudras* belonged to the tribes of Aaryans.
2. *Shudras* didn't have any class. They belonged to the Kshatriya class during the time of Aaryans.
3. There was a time when Aaryan tribe gave importance to only Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.
4. There was a constant struggle between *Shudra* kings and Brahmins. As a result, Brahmins used to face a lot of insult from the part of *Shudra* Kings.
5. Annoyed of the mistreatment by the *Shudra* Kings, Brahmins stopped paying respect to them and denied them calling the King.
6. Since these *Shudras* lost their position of being considered a Kshatriya, they were mocked by people. Hence, they were placed below the Vaishyas and were counted in the fourth class.²⁰

¹⁹ Dr Ambedkar- *Sampurn Wadmay*, Section 6, Pp. 136.

²⁰ Ambedkar. *Sampurn Wadmay*. Section 13. Pp. 165.

Disagreeing to the above mentioned conclusions of Dr. Ambedkar, Ramsharan Sharma says that the only composition about the *Shudras* is by Dr Ambedkar, which is limited to the emergence of *Shudras*. The writer had gathered all the necessary information from translations. Apart from that, the worst fact is that these compositions makes one realize that all his efforts were to prove that *Shudras* belonged to the upper caste. This mentality is an indication that has recently developed within the educated people of the backward society. ‘*Shanti Parv*’, a section in Mahabharata, stated about a portion where *Paijvan*, a *Shudra* conducted a Yajna from which it was confirmed that *Shudras* were actually Kshatriyas.²¹

But according to Routh, ‘Sudras did not belong to the Aryan Clan.’²² According to Trigdev, Asthavedas showed that Indra won over ten gods. It is said that Indra forced all the ten ignoble Gods to live as servants under him in caves, “*Yenema Vishwa Kritani, yo Daas Varnamdhar Grihaak.*”²³ “*Yatha vans naiti das marya.*” (According to Vishwaiyanta, it is the responsibility of the one to make them dependent).²⁴ *Das Vesham Chav.* (It is requested to him to destroy these evil servants)²⁵. Therefore, in Sayan’s comment’s steps to destroy these evils are mentioned.

Trigdev in his praises has continuously requested Indra to demolish the servant class.²⁶ The destruction of these servant classes has been mentioned in the Vedas. It is said that by killing these servant classes, Indra protected Aryans, *Hatvi Dasyun Arya Varna Mavat.*²⁷ This symbolises that Dasyuns and servant class weren’t the same.

²¹ Sharma, Ramsharan . *History of Shudras*. Pp. 31.

²² Routh, R. *Brahmad Di Brahmanen*.

²³ Trigdev II, 12.4.

²⁴ Trigdev V, 34.6.

²⁵ Tridev II, 13.8.

²⁶ Trigdev II, 11.4, 25.2, X, 1.48, 2.

²⁷ Tridev III, 34.9.

Rules were created by Manu related to slavery. He puts a prime focus on the life of Shudras but this only focuses on the lives of Brahmans and Shudras. Manu says that whether a Shudra is bought or not he ought to serve the Brahman class and be his slave because that is his ultimate destiny, ‘*Shudrantu Karyed Dasya Kritamkrit mev wa Dasyayev hi Sritose Brahmasya Swayambhuva.*’²⁸ ‘*Na swamina ni srishtitopi Shudra dasya dwi muchtaye, nisgranj hit tasya kastasmaat tampohate*’, this meant that Shudras can never withdraw from serving the Brahmins because they are born with this job of serving the Brahmin class.²⁹

In Manusmriti, four stories are mentioned. In Naradsmriti there are five sections. IN Hindu culture, slavery for Shudras is statutory. According to Naradsmriti, If caste system is reserved, there is no space for reservation for lower caste, except for the fact that when a man disrespects his responsibilities because of his caste, slavery becomes equivalent to a consort.³⁰ According to Yagyavalkya in the ranks of society, slaves are in declining order and not in developing order.’³¹

From the above mentioned examples the conclusions indicates towards the roots caste system. There are a Brahmin can never be a servant to a *Shudra* or *Asprishya*. On the other hand other classes can never be served by Brahmans. A Brahmin can serve another Brahmin but he can never serve other classes.

Rules have been made to make slaves the most inferior. It is said in Gautam Sutra That Should the slaves are bound to use the thrown away belongings of upper caste. (Jirna nyupaarchatrawaas Kuchini).³² Earlier it was said that defiled foods of upper caste must be

²⁸ Manusmriti VIII, 413.

²⁹ Manusmriti VIII, 414.

³⁰ Narad Smriti, 5.39.

³¹ Yagyavalkya Smriti, 16.183(2).

³² Gautam Sutra-X, 58.

kept for shudras.³³ Even in Aapatstamb, it is also mentioned that students must kept their defiled Foods near the servants of their teachers, symbolising the fact that Shudras where given defiled foods.

In his book ‘The History of India’, James Mill describing the caste system reaches to the conclusion that in Hindu culture, the destruction of caste on the basis of their ranking is the most compared to others. He also said that this outrage still prevails in the Hindu society.³⁴

Hence, it is pretty much essential to discuss the conducts for a proper social life. This will eventually help in understanding the caste divided society.

Given the context, the present study focuses on one such untouchable community of Indian society, the Balmikis. The Balmiki community (also known as Bhangi³⁵) of the Darjeeling Hills had migrated from the various regions of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, etc.³⁶ Balmikis are very firm and rigid in their general behaviour. They are very rigid towards the caste they were born into and believe in marrying the people within the same caste (endogamy). They were also restricted in their occupation of their choice as well as in keeping contact with members of the opposite caste. They were identified by their caste in the society.³⁷ The Balmikis believed in the two main ideals of Hindu belief, Samsara or reincarnation and Karma signifying action or deed. They believed that if the people of their

³³ Gautam Sutra-X, 59.

³⁴ James Mill, *The History of India*, Page-166.

³⁵ Bhangi”, is another widely used Hindi term to denote the ‘Balmiki’ meaning ‘one addicted to drinking bhang’ (a drink made from marijuana leaves). See, Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). “*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*” in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Bhangi, Scavenger In Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community.* New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd.

³⁶ C.f. Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). Ibid. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). Ibid.

³⁷ Shyاملal. (1992). *The Bhangi: A Sweeper Caste, Its Socio-Economic Portraits: With Special Reference to Jodhpur City.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan. C.f Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). “*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*” in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Bhangi, Scavenger In Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community.* New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd.

caste are true to their caste, i.e., followed all the rules and regulations, they would achieve salvation and would be born into a higher class family in their next birth. It is because of such beliefs that Balmikis abide by the rules and regulations of their community and do not disobey them. Also, they do not rebel to rise above their caste and develop any relation with the other communities.³⁸

The caste system is very rigid and one of the causes for protests within the country. Nowadays, the foremost endeavour of the government is to remove the existing obstacles of caste system within different communities. However, during the British rule in India, the caste system was almost crushed down.³⁹ There was no compulsion for the son to follow the footsteps of his father and the people of the lower caste ranked in the higher positions as well. From time to time, efforts are being made to curb down the practise of caste system. This became more prevalent ever since the rise of Buddhism, which strictly criticised the practise of bondage of people or a whole community due to the abhorrent practise of the caste system.⁴⁰ Since the past few years, efforts are being made to abolish and eradicate the unjust practise of social and economic untouchability and caste system which is prevalent in India, through educational and social reforms.⁴¹

However, even though many efforts were undertaken by the government to curb the menace of casteism in India, the Balmikis still remain one of the oppressed communities⁴² and are

³⁸ Sachidananda. (2002). *People At The Bottom: A Portrait Of The Scavengers*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

³⁹ Mathew Atmore Sherring, *Hindu Tribes And Castes as Represented in Benaras*. 3vols. Calcutta: 1872-1881. *The Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency*. London:1909.

⁴⁰ Jaideva, Paramanshi. (2002). *Dalits In Early Buddhism*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications. Also see, Ambedkar, Dr. B.R. "Buddhism and Communism", National Seminar on *Marx, Ambedkar and Polarization of Oppressed and Exploited Classes in India*. New Delhi: Sanjivayya Institute of Socio-Economic Studies, 1991. Also see, Ambedkar, Dr. B.R. (1957). *The Buddha And His Dhamma*. Bombay: Siddharth College Publications.

⁴¹ Rajawat, Mamta. (2006). *Dalits: Role of Education*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd. Also see, Wilfred, Felix. (2000). *Dalit Empowerment*. Bangalore: NBCLC.

⁴² Ambaikaar, B.M. "Contribution of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to Evolution of Jural Postulates in India: in K.N. Kadam (Ed.). (1993). *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Emancipator of the Oppressed*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan

placed at the bottom of hierarchical order of the caste system. In order to earn wages and livelihood, they were assigned jobs like skinning of animals and cleaning the skin, sweeping and cleaning of public toilets along with manual scavenging. What people refuse to accept that Bhangis are just contributing to the society by doing all the filthy work and helping the civic system survive, the harsh conditions. However, their efforts are not being appreciated by the people as well as the government. Instead of treating them with dignity and honour, the society treats them as inferiors and polluting. The Balmiki community appears in headlines only when the higher class of the Hindu caste system attacks them. Whereas, rest of the time, their existence is not taken into consideration and their voices go unheard as if they are invisible.⁴³

With the advancement of time, the conditions of the Balmiki community are changing and advancing too. The children of the community are being admitted to schools because the people of this community wish for their children to be educated too and hence, the community now has a number of college going students too. But when it comes to negligence and hardships, the practise is still continuing and hateful. Yet the community is hopeful towards the fact that the growing education and awareness among the people would help in demolishing the practise and also bring changes in their life.⁴⁴

⁴³ C.f. Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). "*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*" in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal*. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Bhangi, Scavenger In Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community*. New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd. Also see, Gurung, Madan Kr., & Bhutia, Passang. (Ed.). (2000). *Souvenir: Darjeeling Municipality 1850-2000*. Darjeeling: Darjeeling Municipality. pp. 87-90.

⁴⁴ C.f. Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). "*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*" in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal*. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications.

1.2: Statement of the Problem

The ‘*Balmiki*’, a Dalit community numbering 6,300⁴⁵ is one of the socially stigmatized groups in Darjeeling district⁴⁶ and totaling 529,000⁴⁷ in the state of West Bengal. They were first brought by the Britishers from the city of Alwar⁴⁸ (Rajasthan) to get rid of human manure and to maintain sanitary of the town of Darjeeling. Thus the migration of the *Balmiki* from their native villages to the hill station of Darjeeling overlaps with the growth of the Municipal body post 1850s.⁴⁹

The history of the *Balmiki* in Darjeeling is as old as the establishment of the Hill station itself. Their migration to the Hills parallels the migration of the *Marwari* business community to the Hills. The *Marwari* as a community have exhibited strong communitarian solidarity geared towards upliftment of their *Samaj*. Naturally the Marwari community in the Hills through its control of resources and politics has been constantly moving towards prosperity with its influence on the decision-making centres. Contrarily the *Balmiki* have been invisible in the socio-political and economic dynamics in Darjeeling. Not a single member of the community

⁴⁵ People-In-India Profile. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/south-asia-districts.php?rog5=IN2801> Accessed: 31.08.2012.

⁴⁶ Currently Kalimpong Sub-division of the old Darjeeling District has emerged as an independent district since 14th February 2017, after splitting from Darjeeling District as the 21st district of West Bengal. It consists of Kalmipong Municipality and three community developments blocks: Kalimpong I, Kalimpong II and Gorubathan. The district has its headquarter at Kalimpong. *Also See* District Census Handbook- Darjiling, Directorate of census Operations, West Bengal. Retrieved 30th March, 2017. *Also See, Carved out of Darjeeling, Kalimpong a District Today*, Times of India. Retrieved 14th February 2017.

⁴⁷ People-In-IndiaProfile. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopleprofile.php?peo3=16399&rog3=IN> Accessed: 31. 08.2012.

⁴⁸ Gurung, Madan Kr. “*Darjeeling Municipality: Then And Now*” in Gurung, Madan Kr., & Bhutia Passang. (Ed.). (2000). Souvenir: *Darjeeling Municipality 1850-2000*. Darjeeling: Darjeeling Municipality. Pp.29.

⁴⁹ Lekhranj Balmiki. (2012). ‘*The Second Wave of Gorkhaland Movement and the Marginalized: A case study of Balmiki Community in their Diaspora*’, paper presented at UGC sponsored National Seminar: Regional Movements: Identity Question And National Integration: Contextualizing India’s Growing Regional Assertions. SAP (DRS Phase-II) University of North Bengal 15th -16th March, 2012.

has been represented as Commissioners or Councillors in the Darjeeling Municipality till date.⁵⁰

The community adheres to the strict norms of the Caste ridden society and has retained the *Chaudhury system* of caste organization even in contemporary times. Being a subaltern community,⁵¹ the *Balmiki* represents a strange case of community yet to come out of the traditional strangle hold.⁵² Moreover, the community suffers from customary crease, such as child marriage, desire of male child, discrimination between male and female, *Ghoongat* for the women, dowry, and restriction on inter caste marriage etc.

A long period of suppression, subordination and exploitation has seriously handicapped the community in terms of its capability and placed them at the peripheries of everyday life of the Hills, diminishing their aspirations and motivations. As migrants, the community shows strong yet fused linkages to the roots of the community in north-western India. For instance, post 1986 first generation Gorkhaland movement the community has developed the notion of returning back to their 'homeland' (*Desh*) after superannuation from their services. This to an extent has snipped the chances of articulating the community solidarity in an alien territory.

Although the community experiences a sigh of relief with whatever the state politics of positive discrimination entitles them to, yet the resultant capability is a reduced self esteem of the community. The above mentioned internal problems have limited the growth capacity of the community. However, the *Balmiki* community under the auspices of *Balmiki Harijan*

⁵⁰ Gurung, Madan Kr., & Bhutia, Passang. (Ed.). (2000). *Souvenir: Darjeeling Municipality 1850-2000*. Darjeeling: Darjeeling Municipality. pp. 87-90.

⁵¹ Guha, Ranjait. (1989). (Ed.). *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. (Volume I-IX). Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁵² C.f. Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). "*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*" in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal*. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications.

*Sangh*⁵³ is mobilizing the disposition of progress to protect their rights and raise their concerns.

The present study is an attempt to argue in lines of Ambedkar's ideas for the upliftment of the subaltern community which is essential for the smooth functioning of Indian democracy. Paradoxically, this constitutes for profound complicities involving individuals which negligible Ambedkar's connotation because a reflective and pioneering intellectual of democracy, on the one hand, and those who would solidify his being plus representation for Dalit further. As a substitute, this revision search Ambedkar's affability, his continuous invocation of humankind authentic actions, and the political deliberation of liberation, the same as enabling his evaluators of caste, resources, and the Hindu history.⁵⁴ This research thus has tried to investigate the inclusive historical dimensions of Ambedkar's verbalization of Dalit political deliberation.

Inspite of the existence of a bulk of literature on the society and politics in the Hills, the literature is conspicuous by the absence of any study on the *Balmiki* community in the Hills. Therefore, the present research enables to study the migration, deprivations and moves towards empowerment of the community in the Hills, seen from the perspective of Ambedkar's idea of economic equality and social justice.

1.3: Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

The notions of equality and justice are the two focal points of political philosophy. Western political tradition from Plato to Post-Modernism via Marx centre on the notions of

⁵³ Balmiki Harijan Sangh was established in 1948.

⁵⁴ Das, Bhagwan (Ed.). (1980). *Untouchable Soldiers: The Mahars and the Mazhbis*. Banglore: Ambedkar Sahitya Prakashan. Also see, Das, Bhagwan. "Ambedkar's Journey to Mass Conversion", in Devendra Swaroop (Ed.). (1986). *Politics of Conversion*: Delhi.

exploitation men by men, necessity of liberty and equality, establishment of human dignity and social justice. However, the oriental philosophical theory has not been able to negotiate a comprehensive and acceptable framework of social justice, in the spectrum of oriental cultural tradition.

In India, the political philosophy of Baba Sahib Bhimrao Ambedkar possibly facilitate new world in renegotiating the predicament of Western Political Theory in particular and leading spectacular encounter of emotional down trodden masses⁵⁵ in broad-spectrum.⁵⁶

One may be capable of considering Ambedkar's alliance with the magnificent political streams such as noninterventionist, fundamental or conventional throughout his chirographies and speeches.⁵⁷ By the side he differentiates himself with the above three prevailing political traditions.

Ambedkar's thinking is predominantly identified with ethics religion. For him, social anticipate the political. Social integrity is the pivotal in the direction of his political idea. He cannot be fully regarded as fierce individualist nor can he be taken into consideration as conservative communitarian. His understanding democracy conceptualizes the principles of egalitarianism, liberty and fraternity in the true sense of the term.⁵⁸ Although many attempts were made to locate his philosophical disposition, but one may find hardship to identifying him in dominant political traditions. Often it may often lead to misunderstanding and confusion regarding Ambedkarian philosophy doctrine.

⁵⁵ Socially backward castes and class including the untouchables *Harijans*.

⁵⁶ Chalam, K.S. (1993). *Relevance of Ambedkar in India*. Raipur: Rawat Publicatins.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Din, Mata. "Ambedkar: The Architect of Constitution ", in *Ambedkar and Social Justice*, Vol. I, New Delhi: (Director, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1992), (On behalf of Baba Saheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Birth Centenary Celebration Committee, Ministry of Welfare, Government of India). Also see, Dewey, John. (1980). *Democracy and Education*. Carbondale and Edwardville, IL: The Illinois University Press.

Ambedkar's political deliberation requires fresh dimensions of knowledge to comprehend the difficulty of his theory. However, taking Ambedkarian framework of understanding into account, social inequality and societal exploitation on the one hand, and, his ideas on social justice and empowerment via positive discrimination is apt to provide us a framework to analyze the lived experience of the weaker sections of society and their aspirations for development and empowerment on the other.⁵⁹

There is no gainsaying the fact that, Ambedkar, championed the cause of the down trodden.⁶⁰ But to imprison him simply as a dalit leader would do immense prejudice to him as well as to his thoughts. To my mind on his own right, he himself was a revolution. He was the most accomplished political leader, genuine seer, great social reformer and true philosopher among all his contemporaries.

Since, our endeavor is to bring into light the socio-economic, and historico- political position of subalterns; it is evident that without the detailed discussion on the understanding and thoughts of this outstanding scholar like Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, no dalit discourse in India could even be touched upon.

While analyzing Ambedkar's thoughts and the assumption on the Caste System, we will have to specify in the direction of the arguments or the contention so as to his work dealt with. Earlier codifying his theory of origin, method and advancement of castes in Indian context, Ambedkar vehemently criticized and resolutely superfluous an enumerable prevailing theory

⁵⁹ Bhagwan, Das. (Ed.). (1973). *Thus Spoke Ambedkar* (Volume I-V). Bangalore: Ambedkar Sahitya Prakashan.

⁶⁰ Kadam, K.N. (1991). *Dr. Ambedkar and the Significance of His Movement*. London: Sangam Books. Also see. Keer, Dhananjay. (1954). *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

on the subject. For him Caste in the singular number is an unreality.⁶¹ Likewise, much reduction in the civic look at the everyday breaking down of the spirit that countless *Balmikis* in this country regularly experience.⁶² The regular and everyday disgrace of the human force with the aim of coming in a thousand ways.

Making the Dalits children sit alone at the midday meals, to the discouragement of the Dalits and further nominated representatives.⁶³ These practices indicate absurd encroachment of civil liberties and prestige of individuals further sidelined.⁶⁴ Instead of stressing these concerns at the media and the elite society, the offender progressively concludes that they are sufferers rather than comparatively oppressors.

In this direction Ambedkar puts up a struggle that individuals inner voice means conscience that emerges as heard voice at every misguided, no matter who is the suffers and who motivates these sufferings for the down trodden, and this explains that individuals, whether he suffers that peculiar wrong or not, is inclined to adhere him in arranging to get him reassured in India, captivating up the grounds of the Scheduled Castes and combating, since at hand public conscience is absent. Aforementioned context seeks to pursue Ambedkars' contention as an initial position to inspect the 'absence of public conscience' particularly amongst the Hindus.⁶⁵

An early activist, Gopal Baba Walangkar, worked to liberate the untouchables of India, against their historic socio –economic coercion, as such considered to be the pioneer of the

⁶¹ Aloysius, G. (1998). *Nationalism without a Nation in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁶² Valmiki, Omprakesh. (2003). *Joothan: A Dalits Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁶³ Pal, R.M. and Bhargava, G.S. (Ed.). (1999). *Human Rights of Dalits Societal Violation*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

⁶⁴ Valmiki, Omprakesh. (2003). *Joothan: A Dalits Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁶⁵ Chalam, K. S. (2008). *Modernization And Dalit Education: Ambedkars Vision*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

movement. He has been a relative of both Jyotiroa phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. In the voice of protest, claiming social status and dignity for the untouchables. For some Ambedkar became a God, for some a Boddhisattva and for some he was a brilliant cricketer, for some he was a great lawyer, and for many others, he was architect of the Constitution of the newly independent India.

If we look after him in terms of literature, Ambedkar's writings adhering to the social movements, he initiated to launch, were of immense importance thereby the untouchables enabling them to raise their voices in protest in number of occasions. Ambedkar himself was a great orator and literary person, his first newspaper entitled 'Muknayak' (the voice of the dumb) began its journey in 1920 and carried under its name an 'Abanga' by Sant Tukaram (a Bhakti saint), in which the poet sent a reminder to the people that the shy, the dumb and the bashful were hardly noticed.⁶⁶

India got her independence on 15th August, 1947. Yet, by 1950, Babasaheb Ambedkar realized in his heart of hearts that Brahminical religion could never ever eradicate the conception of custom pollution and caste ladder commencing the mindset of its upper castes. He therefore went back to an idea he had dwelt upon almost a decade earlier – even if it was destined for him to be born a Hindu, he would not die a Hindu – together with an estimated three million Mahars, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in the year 1956. It was not only a rejection of untouchability per se, but an entire belief system was systematically erased which combined the belief in Gods, myths, reincarnation, pollution and caste. Buddhism was considered to be an extra realistic and human religious conviction, which promised equality to its followers. Therefore, he went back to an idea which he cherished upon almost a decade earlier “*even if it was destined for him to be born a Hindu, he would not die a Hindu*”

⁶⁶ Eleanor Zelliott *From Untouchable to Dalit – Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* Manohar, New Delhi, (2005), pp. 11

With the conversion of Dalits into Buddhism, they also gave impetus to a Buddhist counter-culture which had flourished in the Maharashtra province rapidly in the beginning of 20th centuries, in places like Amravati, Ajanta and Ellora, after the primary centres of Buddhism had shifted outside the country – to Sri Lanka, China, Japan and Southeast Asia. In the words of Baburao Bagul⁶⁷, Dalit writing begins with the Dalit conversion of 1956; these events formed the necessary backdrop for Dalit literature.

1.4: Brief Overview of Literature

Dalit literature dates back to the time of history. Despite being so rich and old, it was never encouraged or considered because the caste system was prevalent in the literary production field too. Dalits began to identify themselves and emerge as political powers due to the influence of literature. The nature of Dalit writings are being spread across the various regions of the country. The problems Dalits have to face have been a matter of concern over the course of history. It calls for actions to be taken. It has been existing since years but the level of oppression is increasing day by day. Social reformer, Dalits as well as non-Dalits have been trying since many years to eradicate the abhorrent practice of untouchability from the society.

Sociologists and anthropologists have been carrying out the study of Dalit literature with whatever left materials they have. It is old and rich but the materials are missing, hence the study often remains incomplete. Though Dalit literature has an important field in the society, it has not been considered a part of the Indian historiography. The Dalit literature offers for an insight regarding the identity and relation of the Dalits with the several contemporary movements. There is a lack regarding the historical and written documents about Dalit literature. Most of the historical works have showed about the rise in realization of the Dalits

⁶⁷ A prominent Dalit fiction writer

during the 'Her Majestic' episode. There are several works of Indian history which gives details about Dalits of specific region or their existence in the whole country and also their ancestry. There are many studies based on the historic movement of Dalits too, which is analytical and significant. The belief that the shadow of Dalits would spoil the individual is still prevalent and painful for them. They are considered as outcasts. The need for the recognition of Scheduled Castes/Tribes on a social level still calls for an acceptance, meaning they should be considered equal to the other communities in the democracy.

Due to the miserable condition of Dalits, they have always been a subject of study by various social historians and anthropologists ever since the beginning of the late 19th century, though at that time they were available in pieces and did not have much material. The literatures about Dalits were a result of the missionaries' travel records and personal accounts⁶⁸. They were also based on official paper, district Gazzetteers as well census reports and various kind of reports which provided an insight to their being and the conditions they lived in. Some of the writers who wrote about the background, occupation, habits and practises of the Dalits include **Risley (1891, 1902)**⁶⁹ **Crooke (1903)**⁷⁰, **Enthoven (1920)**⁷¹ **Sherring (1872, 1909)**⁷², **Thurston (1909)**⁷³, **Rose (1919)**⁷⁴, **Russell (1916)**⁷⁵ and **Iyer (1912)**⁷⁶. Their writings also provided information regarding the regions they resided in late 19th and early 20th century.

⁶⁸ Perhaps first in its kind was of Abbe J.A. Dubois, a French Missionary's experiences of early decades of 19th century of Indian people, society and culture. In Chapter five of his work contains one of the earliest documented description of Dalits. This was originally written in 1815, (translated by Henry K. Beauchamps). See Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies. London: 1953.

⁶⁹ Herbert Hope Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 4 vols., (Calcutta:1891), also see his, The Peoples of India,(Calcutta:1909).

⁷⁰ William Crooke, "Chamars" in Census of India, vol. 1, India: Ethnographic Appendices, Edited by H.H. Risley, (Calcutta:1903), pp. 167-175 and also see his, The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh 4 vols., (Calcutta:1906).

⁷¹ Reginald Edward Enthoven, The Tribes and Castes of Bombay, 3 vols., (Bombay:1920).

⁷² Mathew Atmore Sherring, Hindu Tribes and Castes as Represented in Benaras, 3 vols., (Calcutta:1872-1881); The Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency,(London:1909).

⁷³ Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, 7 vols., (Madras:1909).

⁷⁴ Horace Arthur Rose, A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier of Provinces, 3 vols., (London:1911-1919).

During the colonial period, most of the Indian authorities were related to the operations carried out for census reports. The life conditions of the Dalits can be well understood by these census reports presented by various governmental organizations. Based on these census reports, we also get information regarding the customs, practises and organization of various communities. The census report of 1931 talks about the backward classes in a tabulated form, which put forth the emergence of studies of Dalits during the colonial period. It was during the post-Colonial period, that studies regarding the problems and miseries of Dalits emerged. Most of the studies dealt with the problems of their social structure, their socio-economic conditions and the influence that the development strategies had on their upliftment. **Briggs (1920)**⁷⁷ was among the earliest to give a systematic study regarding the Dalit caste. He provided information regarding the socio-economic and religious life of the Chamars of United Provinces. He also focused on the private and domestic arenas of their life. Apart from Briggs, **William Hunt (1924)**⁷⁸ also wrote about the Dalit caste. William Hunt in his book mentioned about the untouchables in India during the early decade of this century. **Issacs (1976)**⁷⁹, **Desai (1976)**⁸⁰ and **Lakshmana (1973, 1977)**⁸¹ also dealt with the studies regarding the problem in the social structure of the Dalits.

Some people came up to solve the problems of Dalits and bring about a social change. Some limited it to the village areas while some took it even on the urban level. Some even put forth the Dalit society in the hierarchy for their own motives and also due to the influence of modern forces such as constitutional, legal, political, industrialization and also urbanization.

Some studies have even depicted the occupational, customary practises and behaviours and

⁷⁵ Robert Vane Russel, *The Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India*, 4 vol., (London: 1916).

⁷⁶ L. Anantha Krishana Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes*, 2 vol., (Madras: 1909-12).

⁷⁷ George Weston Briggs, *The Chamars*. (London:1920).

⁷⁸ William Hunt, *Indian's Outcastes: A New Era*. (London: 1924).

⁷⁹ Harold R. Issacs, *India's Ex- Untouchables*. (Bombay: 1976).

⁸⁰ I.P. Desai, *Untouchables in Rural Gujarat*. (Bombay: 1976).

⁸¹ Chintamani Lakshmana, *Caste-Dynamics in Village India*, (Bombay: 1973), also see *Harijan and the Social Discrimination*. (Hyderabad: 1977).

the aspirations among the Dalit society. People who contributed to the studies for the social change in the Dalit community are **Epstein (1962)**⁸², **Beteille (1965)**⁸³, **Alexander (1968)**⁸⁴, **Lynch (1969)**⁸⁵ and **Zelliot (1970)**⁸⁶.

The edited volume of **Michael Mahar's** 'The Untouchables in Contemporary India'⁸⁷ is one of the best article collections regarding the Dalits. Though the title says that it deals with the problems of the untouchables of the contemporary period, but the book deals with the problems right from the time of Ambedkar and Gandhi. A brief view about the methods adopted by the leaders to bring about a social change in the conditions of the Dalits has been portrayed by **Eleanor Zelliot**⁸⁸. **Lelah Dushin** assessed the role that public welfare departments had for the development of the backward classes but the results showed that there was no such development in their condition.⁸⁹ It is clearly justified by the factor that the images of them being partly dependent and also suspected that they had the grounds of special privileges.

There are a number of strata in the Indian society which portrays the feeling of inequality among the different classes of the society. Dalits and the tribal classes belonged to the lowest strata of the society. It was because of the caste system, that the Dalits were segregated from the society. Also, due to this, even their basic human rights were denied by the society and sometimes even their existence. The caste system has created the unequal opportunities based

⁸² G. Scarlett Epstein, *Economic Development and Social Change in South India*. (Manchester:1962).

⁸³ Andre Beteille, 'The Future of the Backward Classes: The competing demands of Status and Power' in Philip Mason, (ed.), *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity*. (London: 1965).pp 83-120.

⁸⁴ K.C. Alexander, 'Changing Status of Pulaya Harijans of Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. III, July, 1968, pp. 1071-74.

⁸⁵ Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*. (New York:1969).

⁸⁶ Zelliot, Eleanor. (1970). *Learning the Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra*. In Rajni Kothari (Ed.). *Caste in Indian Politics*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan. Pp. 29-69.

⁸⁷ Mahar, J. Michael. (Ed.). (1972): *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*. Arizona: Tuseson.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Pp. 69-95.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.165-226.

on their order which is prevalent even today. Despite being a democratic government, the caste system has yet not eradicated and is a cause for the suffering of the lower classes. The worst of all is that with time, the lower classes are denied their rights and being more oppressed, whereas the upper classes of the society are enjoying more and more benefits. It has been five decades since efforts were made to change their economic and social conditions but still, there are no changes, their conditions are degrading.⁹⁰ In the hierarchical category, the Dalits are placed in the lowest strata and are continuously being oppressed, just to make sure that they cannot move to the higher position. Hence, according to the “Varna” system, all the power and privileges were bestowed on the upper caste and they had all the wealth and resources. As the upper classes had all the power, privileges and resources, they used the resources and considered themselves as the ultimate power.⁹¹ Every sphere of life, education, authority, status, privilege and others were controlled by these upper castes.⁹² On one hand, the upper castes enjoyed so many rights whereas on the other, the lower class and the Dalits were denied even their basic rights and were considered complete outcastes. They were deprived and denied from all economic, social, political and cultural spheres of life.⁹³

The ranks in which the castes were placed were based upon their education, occupation, social position, economic conditions and other such variables defined their position in the society.⁹⁴ The socio-economic condition of the backward classes affected factors like accessibility, availability and various factors available within the society. Several attempts are being made since the ages to determine their ranks within the society based on their socio-

⁹⁰ Mungekar, B.L. (1999). *State, Market and the Dalits: Analytics of the New Economic Policy*, in S.M. Michael (Ed.). *Dalits in Modern India: Culture and Vision*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. Pp.287-302.

⁹¹ Louis, Prakash. (2003). *The political sociology of Dalit Assertion*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House. Pp. 53.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. Pp. 54.

⁹⁴ Tiwari, S.C., Kumar Aditya, Kumar Ambrish. *In Development & standardization of a scale to measure socio-economic status in urban & rural communities India*. Indian Journal of Medical Research, 122, October 2005, Pp 309-314.

economic conditions. The psychologists were among the earliest to have attempted to determine the social class of the individuals.

Cattell mentioned about rating of prestige, intelligence quotient, income, occupation, and educational term as the five most essential factors which determined the primary social status of an individual, in his work *The Concept of Social Status*⁹⁵. He also explained of these factors being inter-correlated to 25 different occupations. Based on Indian studies, the earliest classification based on occupation was done by the British Registrar General. Next came **Prasad (1961)**, who classified the status on the basis of the monthly income of an individual in his work *Social Classification of Indian families*⁹⁶, which was later on modified in 1968 and has been in use since 1970.

Pareekh (1981) in his work *Manual of Socio-economic Status (Rural)*⁹⁷ dealt with the social status in the state of Assam. He said that the social status in Assam was based up on nine factors. The factors being caste, occupation of family head, education of family head, level of social participation of family head, land holding, housing, farm power, material possessions and the type of family. **Bhadra** also gave a brief study of the characteristics of social structure of Assam based on his theoretical, empirical and historical basis, in his work, “Caste and Class: Social Stratification in Assam”⁹⁸. On the basis of his study, it can be determined that Assam had various castes and Hindu as well as semi-Hindu tribes in their social structure. All these three groups came together and intermingled the three different traditions: Orthodox Hinduism, Vaishnava sectarianism and tribalism. This intermingling led to the modified tradition within Assam and was based on egalitarianism, mobility, flexibility

⁹⁵ Cattell, R.B. *The Concept of Social Status*. Journal of Social Psychology, 15, 1942. Pp. 293-308.

⁹⁶ Prasad, B.B. (1961). *Social Classification of Indian Families*. Journal of Indian Medical Association. Pp.250-251.

⁹⁷ Pareekh, U. (1981). *Manual of Socio-economic Status (rural)*. Delhi: Mansayan.

⁹⁸ Bhadra, K. ranjit. (1991). *Caste And Class: Social Stratification in Assam*. New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation. Pp 1-173.

and rigidity. All these factors have been affected since the past few years due to modernization.

Singh (1995)⁹⁹ in his work *Social Justice and Reservation Policy* said that though Uttar Pradesh formed the core centre for Indian politics, the Scheduled Castes, Tribes and OBCs were completely alienated and treated inferior and as outcastes. The government has implemented reservation of seats for SCs and OBCs to promote their welfare, but the number of these people in the public sectors is very less compared to those of the higher castes. The important aspects of social justice are political and economic development. If the oppressed and the backward classes do not get to voice their opinion and take part in these developments, the social justice on the basis of quality would not be achieved.

Lakshmaiah (1995) in the study *Programme For Scheduled Caste Labourers*¹⁰⁰ also stated that if the group for whom the development is targeted, is getting any benefit and also examined up to how much the programme for development is beneficial. **Michael (1999)** also talked about the changes in the contemporary Indian society in his edited version of *Dalits in Modern India*¹⁰¹. According to him, one of the most important changes in the Indian society was the realisation among the Dalits regarding their own identity. The Dalit Movement discards all the ideas regarding untouchability and impurity and envisions the formation of a new Indian society, where they aren't treated as indifferent and almost equal to the higher castes. It also revolves around the social, economic and political conditions of the Dalit society and how much they are prevalent in the society. **Women: Socio-economic Status and Issues**¹⁰² by **Singh (2000)** highlighted the problems that the SC and ST women scavengers and sweepers had to face in Uttar Pradesh and their economic conditions in the society. He

⁹⁹ Singh, A.K. *Social Justice And Reservation Policy in Uttar Pradesh*. Contemporary Social Work, Lucknow: Vol. XII, April, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ Lakshmaiah, T. & Reddy, S. (1995). *Programmes for Scheduled Caste Labourers*. Jaipur: Printwell.

¹⁰¹ Michael, S.M. (Ed.). (1999). *Dalits In Modern India: Vision And Values*. New Delhi: Sage Publications

¹⁰² Singh, S.K. (2000). *Women: Socio-economic Status and Issues*. Lucknow: New Royal Book Comp.

criticised the poor condition of the female scavengers in the society and their rehabilitation too. **Jogdand's (2000)**¹⁰³ edited version of *New Economic Policy and Dalits* stated that macro-economic policies said that state government must stop interfering in the public sectors. The proofs have also suggested that these factors had a lot of effect on the marginal sectors. The edited volume consisted of papers related to economic reforms brought about for Dalits and also the effect that it had on their economic condition and status.

The Indian Constitution has made provisions to promote the welfare and social justice for the backward and weaker sections of the society. The steps taken by the constitution in favour of the weaker sections are divided in three sections and listed below:

- Development
- Protective
- Positive discrimination

The central government has sponsored the measure taken for their education, economic and cultural upliftment. In 1970-80 The Special Component Plan was adopted in order to promote the welfare and development of the backward classes such as Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and OBCs. In 1979, the Scheduled Caste Finance and Development Corporation (SDFC) were adopted with the aim to promote and encourage the entrepreneurs of the scheduled castes and tribes and help them financially for their economic development. The National Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation was also developed in 1989 with the same aim of promoting self-employment and skill among the people of scheduled castes and tribes so they can start up any business. The National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents, launched in March

¹⁰³ Jogdand, P.G. (Ed.). (2000). *New Economic Policy And Dalits*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications.

1992 also extended the period of its Eleventh Five Year Plan. The National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation have been in action since 24 January, 1997 in order to encourage the economic development and self-employment among the backward classes in order to help them in their technical field. It also offered loans to the students who wished to pursue higher education. These steps were taken by the committees in order to promote the welfare and development of the workers who are deprived and backward classes of the society in order to promote equal importance. Every sphere and studies talks about the steps taken in order to promote the development of the backward classes but there is a difference on the basis of location, time and the results and reports of the various programmes.

Sharma (1995) in his work, *Bhangi, Scavenger in Indian Society: Marginalization, Identity and Politicization of the Community*¹⁰⁴ briefly explained about the socio-economic status of the Bhangis in the society and their efforts of identifying themselves. He also talked about the efforts that Bhangis made for escaping the crisis they had to face in the society. This feeling of being deprived and oppressed has created a wide range of unification and politicization within the country and forms a core of the democracy.

Prasad (2000) also talked about the manual scavengers and sanitation workers in India's capital, Delhi in his work *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community*¹⁰⁵. It can be called a tradition of the higher class Indians to assign the members of the lower class, whom they called as untouchables, for the job of cleaning dry latrines, sewage, disposing garbage, sweeping and all other jobs related to scavenging. This formed the

¹⁰⁴ Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Bhangi, Scavenger in Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community*. New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., Pp.1-268.

¹⁰⁵ Prasad, Vijay. (2000). *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community*. New York: Oxford University Press.

mentality of the hierarchical Indian society. Since 1930s, the people from the community named Valmiki are being assigned as the job of manual scavengers, sweepers in Delhi. This community was named after the composer of the epic Ramayana, Valmiki. Prasad begins his work with the question as of why Valmikis have always been active for the violent protests that were directed towards the minority group such as Sikhs and Muslims. He further asks that why do these Valmikis work for those middle-class and upper-class Hindus who are the significant protectors of the law and order which subjects them to such a degraded position where the Valmikis and other small castes people are subjected to being outcastes and called untouchables. The answer of these questions can be found in the treatment since the past century. In the British colonial period, they were transformed from a group of landless agricultural farmers to a group of people who were made forced labour as sanitation workers. This way they were stigmatized and forged with the leading political workers who controlled the condition of their work. This mentality transformed them into strong Hindus and their religion was organized in a Hinduized manner, and led them to realize their identity. **Prashad** used history to explain about these people who were placed in the lowest strata of the Hindu caste order and were continuously engaging in activities, which were completely opposite to their interests. The historical books have chronological traces regarding the formation of sanitation system in the Delhi municipality and the importance of Valmiki community in the development. Prashad also says that the disposing of scum and waste materials wasn't the main occupation of these people, but was imposed on them by the British. The British made the people of this community, the forced labour with the aim of keeping the city, especially the areas they resided in, clean and hygienic. This became prevalent since ages and a time came when they were unable to quit their job, made bonded labours and strived for an increase in their wages. With this tradition, they became a part of scavenging in the governmental associations and were subjected to public service. If any developments were

proposed in the field of scavenging such as introduction of machineries, they were discarded in exchange of the Dalit labours who were ready to work with hand brooms, metal scoop, carry basket full of scum on their head for very small sum of money as their wages. Prashad brought in front of the people both conventional and historical records (documents of the Colonial and post-Independence period) obtained from the oral interviews of the members of the Valmiki community. He puts focus on the literature of the Colonial British officials, anthropologists, and political scientists and also which gives details about the points observed by the accounts of the various folk tales, stories, proverbs and sayings.

Jaffrelot (2005) also talked about the life of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) in his work *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System*¹⁰⁶ and how he emerged to power as a strong leader in the modern history of India from the untouchable caste. His biography of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar showed him as an eminent figure of high ideals and pragmatism. He established himself and made a mark in the history as a scholar, activist, journalist and educator. His most significant mark was that of being a part of forming the constitution of India as the law minister of the first cabinet of Nehru. Ambedkar is one of the prominent figures from the Dalit community who still stands as an inspirational figure among the Dalits. **Jaffrelot (2005)**¹⁰⁷ published another work in the same year regarding Ambedkar where he puts focus on the three different pictures, as a social theorist, eminent politician and statesman, and as an eminent figure who strongly criticised and opposed the Hinduism and encouraged Buddhism, in order to free people of the social oppression. While talking of Ambedkar's life history, Jafrelot put forth the argument in each case that he was the first to be a symbol of political and powerful strategy among the Dalits. **Nagaraj (2012)** followed

¹⁰⁶ Jaffrelot, Christophe. (2005). *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System*. (The CERJ Series in Comparative Politics and International Studies). Columbia University Press.

¹⁰⁷ Jaffrelot, Christophe. (2005). *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Ambedkar's steps and mentioned in his work *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays: The Dalit Movement in India*¹⁰⁸ that Dalits disregarded the traditional Hindu methods and also the past of them being considered as untouchables but he doesn't fail to mention that rebels in order to fight back need cultural memories too. Through this book, the author envisions the caste system related to Dalit politics. The book talks about the caste system of being the root or centre which is completely based on dignity, entitlement and the religious beliefs of the person. **Nagaraj's** works are important because it put forth the suggestion regarding the framework of the caste system which would provide equal opportunities to the oppressed class all over the country. His work included firstly that the ideas of Ambedkar and Gandhi must be reconciled, secondly, technocratic artisans formed because of modernity and lastly, regarding the history about the Dalits being outcaste and oppressed and humiliated, yet possessed some cultural domain. Similar kind of ideas are found in the works of Iradayam, **Mangubhai and Lee, Joel (2011)**¹⁰⁹, **Rao (2009)**¹¹⁰, **Thorat (2009)**¹¹¹, **Janagan (2010)**¹¹², **Krishnan (2009)**¹¹³, **Chalam (2008)**¹¹⁴ and **Ram (2009)**¹¹⁵.

Randhawa (2010) in his anthology *Dalit Literature: Contents, Trends and Concerns*¹¹⁶ discloses the complexity of the Dalit Literature which gradually becomes a fusion of textuality and contextuality, activism and aesthetics. He also puts forward the fusion of

¹⁰⁸ Nagaraj, D. R. (2012). *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays: The Dalit Movement in India*. Delhi: Permanent Black. Pp. 1-276

¹⁰⁹ Iradayam, Aloysius S.J., Mangubhai, P. Jayshree and Lee, Joel G. (2011). *Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence Against Dalit Women In India*. New Delhi: Zubaan Books.

¹¹⁰ Rao, Anupama. (2009). *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. California: University of California Press.

¹¹¹ Thorat, Sukhadeo. (2009). *Dalits In India: Search for a Common Destiny*. New Delhi: Sage Publication.

¹¹² Janagan, Emmanuel. (2010). *The Status And Problems of Dalit In India*. Vdm Verlag

¹¹³ Krishnan, P.S. (2009). *Empowering Dalits For Empowering India: A Road Map*. Delhi: Manak Publications

¹¹⁴ Chalam, K.S. (2008). *Modernization And Dalit Education: Ambedkars Vision*. Jaipur: Rawat Publication

¹¹⁵ Ram, Nandu. (2009). *Beyond Ambedkar Essays on Dalits in India*. New Delhi: Har-anand Publications

¹¹⁶ Randhawa. Harbir Singh. (Ed.). (2010). *Dalit Literature: Contents, Trends and Concerns*. Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers.

perception and understanding of the concepts of the etiological, sociological, economic and literary history of the Dalits which contributed to develop the method of socio-political-cultural literary to understand their strategies and tactics in order to bring about a transformation in their literature, social status and economic as well as political background. The contents and trends of literature regarding the Dalits help to get a view of the mind-set of the people in the society. One specific perspective cannot be regarded to draw the conclusion about the literature; rather it is a collusion of various schools of thoughts that came up to form this emerging literature. Every contributor to this literature, a Dalit or a non-Dalit tried to analyse the studies and put forward the strong causes of all forms of abuses which the backward classes were subjected to be it social, economic, physical, verbal, racial caste, literary and so on. Buck and **Kannan's (2011)** edited *Tamil Dalit Literature: My Own Experience*¹¹⁷ talked about the Dalits of India and how the class which was the most oppressed and discriminated most badly, had no literary voice. Both on the national and international level, the literature of Dalits had a significant place. Most of this literature was translated from Tamil to English is contained in the volume with a precise introduction. All the nine authors who are mentioned in the book have somehow contributed their personal experiences as Dalit writers in the literary field. Seven of them had also written unpublished short stories and poems. Most of their works had harsh, brutal yet real characters, but most of their works were drawn from careful situations and characters. Dalit Literature is old and yet at the same time is fresh and new, and is a vivid description of the experiences of the Dalit people in the unfair world. In order to write about the oppression and hardships of the Dalits, the writer must have a strong conviction along with ability to criticise the society. Based on the Tamil context, it is described that the moment, a Dalit writer tries to free himself he is

¹¹⁷ Buck, David C. and Kannan, M. (Ed.). (2011). *Tamil Dalit Literature: My Own Experience*. (Translated). Pondicherry: Institut Francais De Pondicherry

arrested and the moment he opposes his criticism, his voice is lowered down and is strangled. The situation is such that he can't even escape the situation because if he tries to, his legs are broken and he is made a cripple. These writers are now lost in the files and pages who had a determined heart to achieve freedom but they were stabbed right in the heart, crushing down their hopes. They were repeatedly stabbed until they lost all their hope. Despite so many negligence and struggle, the Dalit descendants have somewhere been able to voice their opinion which is still prevalent in various echoes. While moving down the lane of bringing out the stories of the struggles of the Dalits, the writer himself takes up the challenges of the situation which comes to his way.

The most appropriate work which should be taken into consideration regarding the Balmiki community is that of **Valmiki (2003)**¹¹⁸ of his famous autobiography *Joothan: An Untouchable's life*. In the book, Valmiki describes the life courses of an invulnerable or the Dalits in the recently independent India of 1950s. "Joothan" means the defiled food left on the plate, usually left for an animal to be eaten or thrown away. Over the centuries, the untouchables or the Dalits are forced to eat the defiled food and the very word shows the pain, humiliation and poverty they were subjected to for living in the lowest strata of the society. Despite being abolished in 1949, untouchability was a bit prevalent in the Dalit society and they were subjected to discrimination, violence, deprived of the basic human rights and were a matter of ridicule. In the autobiography, Valmiki talked of his experience and transformation from a small caste deprived person into a strong political leader under the influence of the most prominent Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. *Joothan* perfectly describes the transformation of the Dalit community. They were silent for long and their sufferings had no end but his autobiography was the contribution to history of Dalits and manifesto of the transformation which led to human consciousness and social belonging. Similar kind of more

¹¹⁸ Valmiki, Omprakesh. (2003). *Joothan: A Dalits Life*. New York : Columbia University Press.

prominent texts are those of Aiyar (1923)¹¹⁹, Das (1985)¹²⁰, Goswami (1994)¹²¹, Jha (1997)¹²², Lal (1997)¹²³ (1999)¹²⁴ (2001)¹²⁵, and Vivek (1998)¹²⁶.

The review of above literatures reveal that many studies have been undertaken in the context of the Indian caste system, Dalits or lower castes and their marginalisation, deprivation, discrimination, etc. However these studies fail to address the issues of Balmiki Community in the hills of Darjeeling, who forms a part of the marginalised lot.

1.5: Research Questions

The review of literature reveals certain gaps. The following research questions have been designed to bridge the existing gap. The researcher has identified the following research questions:

1. What have been the nature, pattern and process of Migrations of the *Balmiki* community to Darjeeling and surrounding areas?
2. How has the *Balmiki* as a migrant community resorted/responded to the push and pulls of migrations?
3. What has been the role of the *Balmiki* Samaj in consolidating the community's hopes and aspirations, dreams, desires and demands?

¹¹⁹ Aiyar, T.S. (1923). *Problems of Depressed Classes*. Madras: M. Subrahmanya.

¹²⁰ Das, Debi Prasad. (1985). *The Untouchable Story*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

¹²¹ Goswami, Bonomali. (1994). *Untouchables: A Novel*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

¹²² Jha, Ganganath. (1997). *Conditions of the Bhangis in the 50th Year of Independence*, in Makhan Jha (ed.), *Scheduled Castes Today*. New Delhi: M.D. Publications.

¹²³ Lal, Shyam. (1997). *Separate Reservation- A Must for Sweepers*, in Bindeshwar Pathak (ed.), *Social Justice And Development of Weaker Sections*. New Delhi: Inter India.

¹²⁴ Lal, Shyam. (1999). *The Changing Bhangis of India: A Study of Caste Association*. Jaipur: Sublime Publications.

¹²⁵ Lal, Shyam. (2001). *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*. Jaipur: University Book House.

¹²⁶ Vivek P.S. (1998). *The Scavengers: Exploited Class of City Professionals*. New Delhi: Himalaya Publishing House.

4. Is it possible to trace the haunting of the Ambedkarian visions among the *Balmikis* in Darjeeling? If yes, how far his vision can be implemented to bring about this dalit community into the main stream? What time frame is required to marginalize the gap between the main stream and the dalit Balmikis?
5. Whether the Balmikis are socially, economically and politically deprived? If yes, what measures may be taken to empower the Balmikis of Darjeeling hills?

1.6: Significance of the Study

The literature on Dalit is vast, ever increasing and emerging in large quantities. However, the present research work looks into the complex ways in which the identity of the Dalit has been constructed within the ambit of the organisations and culture of the district of Darjeeling. Unlike most other works on Dalits, the present work brings forth the ‘agency’ that Dalit Balmikis exhibit due to the fact of their being ‘dalit’, being ‘downtrodden’. This aspect of their lives, i.e. being Dalit, and downtrodden has not propelled them into further misery; rather they have made use of this condition and twisted their circumstances to their own advantage leading to disadvantage in many sphere of life in the hills – this is what sets my work totally apart from others. The significance the work also lies in the two-fold approach it adopts:-

On the one hand, an examination of the challenges faced by Dalit Balmikis while encountering everyday cultural practices and on the other an evaluation of how culture as a whole absorbs, marginalizes and/or throttles them. In this process, what kind of an identity emerges is important for analytical purposes. The work will have a “identity approach” that will question the division of labour; herein lies the point of departure from most other previous Dalit Balmiki research. Moreover, significant contribution to literature is hoped to

be made by looking into location-specific studies.

As with all mainstream social science theory and discourse, the Dalit discourse has been largely confined to analysing and illuminating the lives of Dalit men, ignoring or negating the gender dimension. It may also be emphasised to facilitate the immense and multifaceted narrative on caste has similarly remained unvoiced on the Balmikis' issues. Dalit political affairs and research has also remained largely regional blind. Last but not the least; my work is a critique of all dominant ideas about Dalit writings degradation. True, dalit Balmikis are at the receiving end of antagonism from three structures – caste, class and patriarchy... But, as stated earlier, they are not accepting life as it is – they are fighting, struggling, and deriving an agency for themselves.

In an attempt to deconstruct Dalit Brahminical discourse oppression and discover the sense of agency and worth in their lives, my thesis is a critique of erstwhile notions of '*equality among the unequals*' where Balmikis are passive victims; not agents of change. My work is significant because it has a committed approach to understanding Balmiki lives from a post modernist approach exploration of their experiences as migrant in Darjeeling; this produces more complete and less distorted knowledge than that produced by Darjeeling researchers.

This brings us to the question of 'Dalits epistemology' – which says that dalit Balmikis go ahead lives to facilitate the extensively different contours and patterns to those of upper caste, and adopting the dalits standpoint may reveal the subsistence construction of human relationships. Says Harding, an epistemology is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a 'knower' (can Dalit Balmikis?); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against caste experiences and observations ?) ; what kinds of things can be known (can 'subjective truths' count as knowledge ?), and so forth.

Dalit discourse have argued that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that Balmikis could be ‘knower’s’ or ‘agents of knowledge’; they claim that the voice of science is a masculine one; that history is written from only the point of view of men (of the dominant class and race); that the subject of a traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man. They have proposed alternative theories of knowledge that legitimate Dalits as knower’s.¹²⁷ Researching Dalit Balmikis in Darjeeling Hills has proved that Balmikis are the ‘agents of knowledge’... their voice is also one that can lay claim to reason... and finally, their history (so far neglected) deserves to be studied. Dalit Balmikis has already emerged as an alternative theory of knowledge; and this is what my work asserts.

Related to this comes the vast and novel domain of post-modernism. This along with other variants of post-modernism is crucial of universalistic impressive theories and discards the existence of an authentic self. Its focal point as an alternative is on fragmentation, multiple subjectivities, pluralities and flux.¹²⁸ Dalit lives tell us a similar tale – here, emphasis is not laid on any grand meta-narratives, but on micro-narratives (includes popular stories, myths, legends and tales) that bestow legitimacy upon social institutions. Not only that, dalit stories that form the foundation of this research are a means through which the individual’s relationship to the community, the community’s relationship to itself and its environment is woven together and this is what makes my work all the more unique.

An approach is almost definitional one which starts out from dalit experiences. This debate throws light on the recent controversy between feminists as to who can represent whom? Dalit feel marginalized by upper caste, Brahminical – they feel that at platforms, workshops, seminars and conferences organised for them, it is not their voice that is heard, but that of the

¹²⁷ Sandra Harding. *Is There A Feminist Method ?*, in *Social Research Methods A Reader* (ed) Clive Seale, Routledge, London and New York (2004), Pg. 458

¹²⁸ Mary Maynard. *Methods, Practice and Epistemology – the debate about feminism and research*, in *Social Research Methods A Reader* (ed) Clive Seale, Routledge, London and New York (2004), Pg. 467

Brahminical. Thus, what is urgently needed is a Dalit standpoint epistemology.

The nature/characteristic features of this epistemology will be such that :-

- Attention will be given to the specific needs of Dalit, which are widely different from those of other early writings.
- Their voices (be it through oral sources, or written forms) should be attentively heard and efforts should be made to bring them out into the wider field of accepted literature. (Today, this work is being done on a wide scale, Dalit Bhangi/Balmiki literature is getting translated and reaching out to the middle class, upper-caste public on an unprecedented scale)
- Harding says, that despite the fact that studying subalterns is not fresh, studying them from the standpoint of their personal experiences as a result that they can comprehend themselves and the world can maintain practically account all. The major requirement of a Dalit standpoint epistemology is that Dalit Balmikis should be studied from the perspective of their own experiences so that they develop an understanding of themselves and the world around them.
- Another requirement of a Dalit standpoint epistemology is that the gap between the ‘anthropologist’ and the ‘other’; between the familiar ‘we’ and the exotic ‘they’; between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘Dalit women’ should be eradicated. Clifford Geertz quotes Loring Danforth in his introduction of the book *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* and stresses on this sensitive, but vital relationship between the ‘we’ and the ‘they’... Danforth writes in the introduction called ‘Self and Other’, “*The gap between a familiar ‘we’ and an exotic ‘they’ is a major obstacle to a meaningful understanding of the Other, an obstacle that can only be overcome through some form of participation in the world of the Other... If, however, it is possible to reduce the distance between the anthropologist and the Other, to bridge the gap between ‘us’*”

and 'them', then the goal of a truly humanistic anthropology can be achieved."¹²⁹

Thus the research on Dalit Balmikis can be rightly fitted into the contours of what might be termed as 'Dalit standpoint epistemology', and this is what adds newness to it.

1.7: Methodology

After taking into consideration, the nature of the problem, a brief descriptive and analytical study of the methods are presented below.

The books, newspapers, documents, clippings, newsletters and every other means of the study were thoroughly analysed. A number of families belonging to the community were interviewed in order to arrive to the answers of various questions. To collect the primary information and data, the following processes were adopted: Clear and specific interviews (semi-structured and informal as well as structured), narration of the stories by individuals, observations of the participants and discussions with the groups. This is done in order to present to the readers a mixed method of study where both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study are synthesised and verified. Based on the mixed method, three types of interviews were conducted- structured, semi-structured and lastly, informal or unstructured. (Morse and Field: 1995). The research consists of the primary qualitative information as well as the statement of interviews gathered over a period of time. The study highlights all the necessary questions such as why the tradition of scavenging are linked to only a particular caste. It also explores the condition of men and women sanitation workers of this community in the hills of Darjeeling. The quantitative information (demographic structure, income status,

¹²⁹ Clifford Geertz "Being There" in *Social Research Methods A Reader* (ed) Clive Seale, Routledge, London and New York (2004), Pg. 238-239

occupational structure) about the Dalit community in the hills of Darjeeling was gained via the household surveys which were conducted.

A Dalit post-modernist perspective is required in order to conduct such a research. By using the method of personal interviews (open-ended) the researcher attempts to portray the histories and lives of the Balmikis met during the field study

As per the statement of a social science researcher, *we cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret*. All the recorded interviews were translated and interpreted in local dialect. During analysis of the transcripts, the stories were reconstructed in order to match the action of the statement. In this research, interpretations are represented to the maximum. However, most of the times, a group leader (of any Dalit organisation or women welfare association) or a local non Balmiki was present before the researcher during the interview. One of the most important aspect of the interview was that a number of Dalit women came up in order to tell about their hardships, miseries and past experiences. They shared their story and this made them believe that their voice was getting heard and a medium through which they would be helped. This gave them a ray of hope that someday they would be respected.

Their personal experiences and narratives played a major role in helping the researcher understand their way of life which was analysed through qualitative research technique. Through this method, it was possible to focus on their subjective experiences and meaning. For interviewing, semi-structured and the informal technique was adopted. It was difficult to gain all the necessary information through empirical means but the method was beneficial as they highlighted more on the personal experiences rather than the external life. As far as the questions regarding the Balmiki agencies are concerned, traces could be detected only

through the lengthy sessions of listening to them, recording and trying to understand their standpoints.

Mary Maynard¹³⁰ claimed that quantitative research (surveys and interviews) were the sub-alternate forms of knowing the truth whereas the researcher and the collected data as well as the social fact which aren't dependant on data collection are detached in quantitative research. The qualitative method of research gives a brief view regarding the personal experiences. Hence, the qualitative form of research is more appropriate for research among the Dalits as it helps them in voicing their opinions, and is also significant in Dalit politics. Often the informal and semi-structured method of interviewing is considered in the field of Dalit interview as it is more appropriate and helpful regarding the Balmikis. As the Balmikis were degraded and oppressed, they are suspicious and doubtful of any outsider to interview them.

1.7.1: Data Sources

The process of data collection has been as follows:-

Field studies in Darjeeling Hills (Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong and other hills adjoining areas) were conducted.

Perusals of sources have been both at Darjeeling Hills and some parts of Rajasthan and Haryana. Nepali, English, Hindi, and Rajasthani and Haryani (Khadi Hindi Language) sources have been tapped for the research.

Literature on the Dalit has been acquired from Central Library, North Bengal University, Centre for Ambedkar Studies, Department of Philosophy, North Bengal University, National Library, Kolkata, and Ramkrishan Mission Library, Kolkata.

¹³⁰ Mary Maynard "Methods, Practice and Epistemology – the debate about feminism and research" in Social Research Methods A Reader (ed) Clive Seale, Routledge, London and New York (2004), Pg. 465

Works of Dalit Balmikis writers in Hindi, autobiographical accounts, short stories, poems and plays; testimonies; musical songs, has been collected from Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi.

Conversations with Professors of Political Science, History and Nepali at the North Bengal University and also conversations with Activists of Manual Scavenging Movement, Haryana have proved to be of great help.

Intensive and In-Depth interview of Dalit Balmikis, their family members, their community leaders, executive members of Balmiki Harijan Sangh, representatives of the Governmental and non-governmental organisations has been conducted alongside participant observation.

Interviews with voluntary organisations at Haryana (Vimal Kumar, MSC) and interactions with all-India based Dalit organisations and their leaders (NDHR & Safai Karmaachari Andolan) assembled at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, on Manual Scavenging has greatly influenced the work.

1.7.2: Data Collection

While the interviews were spread out over different parts of Darjeeling Hills, Rajasthan and Haryana, places where contacts could be made and people where Balmiki population have settled, were visited. Language had been one great obstacle because many had spoken in their mother tongue either in Rajasthani or in Haryani. Translation were very slow; most of the time, even translators had difficulty in understanding various Dalit dialects. Secondly, the enormous distance between the field and resercher's native place sometimes made the collection of data an arduous task.

The respondents were diverse and varied. The criteria for selection of respondents weren't fixed and clear. The only fact that was to be fixed was that the interview was to be open-

ended; the selection of respondents was itself to be a process. Cultural, social and political variety was to be the driving principle underlying the selection of respondents; however, the choice of actual persons and individuals within these broad parameters was dependent on the collaboration and co-operation of our grassroots connections at all places.

1.9: Limitation of the Study

The present research is based on an exploratory method which includes interviews with members of the community. There is no written history of the community in the Hills, and therefore, recourse to oral history becomes important and unavoidable. Under such circumstances, the study is likely to suffer from possible biases but my desperate endeavor was not to be undermined or over estimate the respondents while interviewing. Moreover, the limitations with the present study have also been due to non availability of enough literatures. Whatever limited literature were there, were in Hindi, there was hardly any English translation of that literature which was no doubts a serious constrain for the researcher to carry out his studies. This constitutes the limitations of the present study.

The Balmikis leaving in the three subdivisions of Darjeeling under the jurisdiction of my research are residing here and there sporadically. It was difficult to identify and to have their interview in ease.

Furthermore, the community lacks homogeneity, as it has been further sub divided into many minor sub castes, which made the research limited to locate them according to their titles. Here, we cannot pronounce that every family member of the community has been covered under this research. Apart from this there have been many mixed family groups which have been more Nepalese than Balmikis in their socio cultural practices.

The migration of the Balmikis, from different states of India has created the sense of belongingness of their native states. The people those who have migrated from Bihar, use the

title Rawat or Routh, though their Caste Certificate issued by the Government of West Bengal, as assigned them with the sub title of '*Methor*', some of them had refused for household surveys, as such they have been excluded from the study. Moreover, the people those who have re-migrated to their native places in the late 1980s and post 2011s because of the separate statehood agitation in the hills could not be contacted except very few, and those who could be contacted, could not come out with the answers, or were not interactive in the discussions to the questions of the schedules.

During the interviews the participations of the male member in compare to their female counterparts was larger in number. It was also observed that the male members of the Balmikis families were more enthusiastic then their female counterparts. The females in many cases hardly made any contribution in the discussions, because of the traditional folds to mingle with an outsider. As a result of which the feedback from the female section of the society has restricted the research to a certain level.

As far as knowledge goes this research work being the first ever work in the hills on the Balmiki community has added the new dimension in the dalit literature but simultaneously, due to speedy changes in the socio-economic processes of the hills have weaken the study to some extent . In the same direction to the aforementioned, the second wave of Gorkhaland movement post 2007-17 have greatly diverted the issues from the grassroots level to the political one, because of which the recent information of the targeted group could not be touched upon due to the time constrain, which may raise question regarding the reliability of the study.

In those hay days of the Gorkhaland movement during its second phase it was very difficult to make a balance between the political at the core (centre) and community at the peripheries. It was even harder to convince them to provide with proper data to which one may opts for the concluding remarks.

1.10: Chapterisation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Historicising Balmiki Migration

Chapter 3: Empowering the Balmikis: The Limits of Constitutional Mechanisms

Chapter 4: Socio-Economic and Political Processes and Balmiki Marginalisation

Chapter 5: On the possibility of Balmiki Consciousness: Unaddressed Aspirations of the Marginalised

Chapter 6: Summary and Concluding Observations