

# Contours of 'Naming' and 'Renaming': Mapping the Identity Discourse Among Scheduled Castes

Contemporary Voice of Dalit  
1–16

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## Abstract

Scheduled Caste (SC) is an administrative term comprising touchable and untouchable groups of people. SCs are defined as 'homogeneous' classes under Article 341 for all constitutional purposes. It emerged as an official term for the recognition of groups to have preferential treatment in the form of compensatory measurements in the educational, governmental and legislative sectors. The emergence of the term 'Scheduled Castes' ignores the viable differentiation among them, existing on the basis of their status and identity. On the other hand, the problem of nomenclature among SCs is indirectly related to their social identification at the societal and community levels. The article will delve into the discourses of naming and renaming of SCs/Dalits/untouchables and various other terminologies that emerged as an imperative to represent them. Therefore, it is significant to understand the dilemma of homogeneity versus the heterogeneous nature of the identity of SCs.

## Keywords

Dalit, human rights, Schedule Caste, social justice

## Introduction

Caste identity is an imperative for representing and recognizing any individual or social group in the mainstream. There have been a lot of debates and discussions revolving around their identification and identity formation in contemporary times. The commonsensical understanding of social identity is about how we make sense of who we are and what is our social standing at the community and the societal level? Identity can be social, personal, political and psychological in nature.

The issue of identity and identification of SCs has been a recurrent theme since the colonial and post-colonial times. The concept of identity in the post-independent era developed into different labels and nomenclatures among SCs for identifying them at community and societal level. It is, however, necessary

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to understand the emergence of identities in a social and historical context. Through using the concept of 'Identity', the SCs of India were capable of restructuring their subjugated and subordinated past.

Social identity plays a significant role in the way people wish to represent them in the mainstream. There are numerous castes listed under the revised list of SCs in 1957. SCs are dispersed across all parts of India, sometimes sharing the common name and occupation along different regions and states and sometimes acting as distant and disparate masses of small communities within themselves. Some groups within SCs contain its own peculiar form of tradition, customs and its own set of rules and distinction of pure and impure tasks and are internally differentiated. They practise a degree of pollution and untouchability against each other, for example, they will not eat, drink and sit together as well as will not intermarry with some of the sub-caste communities (Issacs, 1965, p. 29).

The following sections of the article will focus on understanding the concept of identity with specific reference to SCs, the problem of nomenclature arising out of the complexities around their naming and renaming under the colonial rule and the post-colonial quest for self-identification following the heterogeneity functioning at the caste level among SCs.

## Theorizing Social Identity

The concept of identity gained attention in the Western world within the social-psychological domains. The study of Tajfel and Turner (1979) theorize the concept of social identity in relation to group membership and inter-group relationships. The group membership instils meaning in the social situations and helps people to define who they are and how they relate with others? The study of Tajfel and Turner is helpful in understanding the social-psychological aspect of the concept of social identity pointing towards the cognitive aspect of making sense of one's own position in different social contexts. Thus, social identity as a concept is inclusive of the processes of social categorization, social comparison and social identification.

Hogg and Abrams (1988, p. 2) defines 'identity' as people concept, who they are and how they relate to others. Identities are diverse and dichotomous in nature, where it categorizes itself into 'self' and 'other' such as colonizers and colonized, Blacks and Whites, upper and lower castes, the West and the orient, etc. These dichotomies are constructed in nature and are influenced by the individual's power and status in the society. Identities are plural, and one person may have diverse identities in its whole lifetime. They establish in a specific social context. We can be an active member of various groups in our whole lifetime. As an individual, we may engage in several roles of our respective identities related to our caste, our gender, a citizen of country, our interests or choices, identity as a student, a professional, an activist, a reformer our personal and professional relationships, etc. (Sen, 2007).

Giddens (1991) argues that individuals identify their 'self' in a reflexive frame via redefining their past identities into newer one. The presence of modern institutions accompanied transforming social lives of individuals. The process of identification is self-reflexive on which we constantly work and reflect.

Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*. Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent. This includes the cognitive component of personhood. (Giddens, 1991, p. 53)

The process of self-identification is rooted and structured within modern institutions.

The article will focus on the question of identity, while analysing it in the frame of Oommen (2001), understanding of 'perspective from below'. The formation of universalizing and homogenizing identities also causes serious problems sometimes as we can observe in the case of enumeration of lower caste groups like 'Scheduled Castes'. Sometimes, contrasting to this situation, people often in search of their autonomous roots assert for their new identity. Jenkins (2003, p. 5) stated the fluid nature of formulation of process of identity among SCs for the purposes of political mobilization. She takes into account '...the complexity of identity, which thwarts attempts to categorize people, but also to recognize the instrumental uses of categories for disadvantaged groups'. She further argues that the very nature of process of identity formation is dynamic in nature, and it constantly undergoes construction and redefinition. 'Often group identities are constructed through contrasting a notion of "self" with "other", as in dichotomous categories of colonizers and colonized, the West and the Orient, whites and blacks, or upper and lower castes' (Jenkins, 2003, p. 5). She located her idea of identity formation in postmodernist discourse, where groups or individuals construct a social meaning towards a newly formed identity through social interaction.

According to Oommen (2010, pp. 38–41), there are two types of identities: individual and collective. Individual identities have role-sets and collective identities constituted identity-sets. There are two sociological traditions that marked the presence of identities in two different frames of reference: one is primordial, which recognizes identity as a latent phenomenon and its presence is universal in any human society, and the other is Constructivist, which recognizes identity as socially constructed in a specific historical context. The modernization leads to the removal of traditional identities and the emergence and acceptance of newer identities at community level.

On the other hand, the discourse on understanding the process of identity formation among the SCs is seen through the lens of social construction of their everyday reality. This constructionist framework is taking note of emergence of social, political and cultural categories among SCs. According to Castells (2010, pp. 7–9), all identities are socially constructed. Identities are the sources of the meaning for the actors who are self-defining and constructing their own symbols. The social actors internalize the process of self-identification for legitimizing their representation in society. Jenkins (1996, p. 4) pointed out that the process of identification is the establishment or construction of any individual or groups to express who they are and how they wish to be seen by others. This could be reflective in the formation of identities such as 'Scheduled Castes' as an administrative category; 'Dalit' as a political category; *adi-Andhra* and *adi-Dravida* as cultural categories; and the usage of terms such as Jatavs, Mahars, Mangs, Dhanaks, Balmikis as a result of formation of their own caste.

Jenkins (2000, p. 8) distinguishes two modes of identification:

self or group (internally oriented) and the categorization of others (externally oriented). All actors are subject to both. In terms of collective identifications, there are, therefore, two analytically distinct ways in which collectiveness may be socially constituted: as groups and as categories, based respectively, in processes of internal group identification, and external social organization.

The processes of 'group identification' and 'categorization' interdependent on each other, in the presence of one another, exists in the society. The process of identifying oneself is based on the shared experiences of individuals with others who are different from them. This identification takes place within a specific sociocultural and political milieu (Louis, 2003, p. 127).

The discourses of 'assertion' and process of 'identity formation' among SCs surfaced during the nineteenth century in forms of protests and social movements at the grassroot level. The collective mobilizations and politicization among SCs instigated during their active participation in Bhakti movement (Chokhamela, Kabir, Ravidas, etc.) and socio-religious reform movements like Ad-Dharam movement in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The main aim of SCs' assertion was to redefine and re-establish

their stigmatized past into an assertive one. In parts of Uttar Pradesh, there are instances where the Chamar group of SCs are rewriting their own history via introducing new genealogies of myths and substantiating their new identity that is 'respectable and dignified' in public discourse (Rawat, 2012). The process of politicization of SCs is beneficial for selected number of sub-caste groups consciously participating in the identity struggle. On the other hand, Dalit political parties do not constitute each and every group of SCs. Kumar (2002, p. 24) argued that 'the Dalit leadership is divided along the party lines and speaks the language of its respective party is another crisis which Dalit leadership has today'.

The movement for self-identification originated in different ideological strands due to cultural diversities, different social and political environment, and the nature of leadership. The Bhakti tradition of the thirteenth century encapsulates the message for the reformation and equality of all classes of marginalized groups. It sets the ground for the *adi*-Hindu and *ad*-dharam movements in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and southern India. By the 1920s, SCs initiated organizing religious congregations, bhajans and satsangs that helped them to create a distinct identity in an urban setting. The Bhakti tradition helped them to gain literacy and improving their socio-economic condition. The significant leaders of Bhakti era were Baba Sita Ram Das, Sant Gopi Dom and Swami Shiv Narayan.

According to Kumar (2006, p. 97), the Bhakti tradition became the expression of self-assertive identity of Dalits. It encapsulates the message of social equality of all classes and the social reformation of the untouchable section of population. The Bhakti tradition acts as a background for the Dalit movement in contemporary India, which is more radicalized and organized in its form. It constructed an ideological theory of a racial origin in the form of *adi*-Hindu movements initiated by untouchables in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and south India.

Rao (2003) traces the history of the emergence of *adi*-Hindu movement initiated by the untouchables during the 1920s, claiming original inhabitant status, while asserting for their identity that they are the real sons of the land and soil of India. This culminated in a kind of Adi ideology among Dalits, which spread from the north to the southern regions of India. The main regions affected by this kind of ideology were Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The caste groups claiming *adi*-Hindu status were the Chamars of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh today named as Ad-Dharmi, Ravidasi, Raidasi, and in south, they are termed as *adi*-Dravidas or *adi*-Andhra. The history of emergence of *adi*-Hindu movement initiated by untouchables during the 1920s, claiming original inhabitant status, while asserting for their identity that they are the real sons of the land and soil of India. This culminated in a kind of Adi ideology among Dalits, which spread from North to South Indian regions. The main regions affected by this kind of ideology were Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Arun (2007), in his work, describes three phases of identity formation that are conflict, symbolic reversal and identification. Conflict refers to a process by which a group of people compete with other group/groups to achieve their objective through either violent or non-violent means. The study of identity formation among Paraiyars (one of the SCs of Tamil Nadu) shows that conflict is the starting point providing self-consciousness and quest for re-imagining one's life on its own. This leads them to the second process, that is, the use of symbols while deconstructing their negative and polluting meanings (e.g., Paraiyars are associated with their polluted identity due to their traditional occupation of drum beating and their eating habits like beef eating). This deconstruction of meanings gave the group a new identity. In the third phase, they will try to identify themselves in this new world of self-created meanings and symbols. This construction of self-identity is observed closely in the tradition of constructivism<sup>1</sup> and mythico-symbolic discursive practices.<sup>2</sup> The study of Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu was a specific case of identity formation, while reversing the stigmatized symbols into an assertive one.

Based on this understanding, the social identity of SCs can be classified on the basis of temporality and the context of emerging generic terms for their identification. The discourse of naming and renaming

can be broadly categorized as arising out of the classical or Indological texts, the colonial era and the emergence of terms like Dalit post-independently. However, the emergence of 'adi' ideology during the 1920s focused on the identification of untouchables as the original inhabitants of India. The following sections in the article will discuss the works deconstructing the notion of rise of generic terms and captivating any form of social differentiation among them.

Therefore, when we tend to understand identity as a concept among SCs, it always tends to be complex in nature. The various debates of social categorization and identification of present-day SCs focus either on their identity formation under the colonial and administrative rule or it is based on the identity-based movements like 'adi-movements' and political organization through emerging leadership among them. The paper tends to divide itself into the debates and discussions around the historical discourse of formation of generic identities on one hand and the quest of self-identification among SCs on the other.

### **'Social Identification' of Scheduled Castes**

The first imprints of identification of SCs in the history of sociological literature is often associated with the term 'untouchable'. Their social position is defined while bringing the concept of 'untouchability' to the forefront and correlating it with the Indian social order. The subject of 'untouchability' as discussed by Ambedkar (1948, p. 11) was well recognized through physical, notional and ethical defilement as the norms prescribed in *Manusmriti*. *Manusmriti* reported three forms of impurity: birth, death and menstruation present in society other than 'untouchability'. During 1935, the Government of India list of SCs identified 429 communities (50–60 million population) as 'untouchables' on the basis of the pollution they caused due to their touch and occupation. According to Ambedkar (1948, pp. 2–22), the untouchability practised by caste Hindus is the unique feature of the Indian caste system, and it is unable to find its parallel in Indian history. He analysed the difference between the practices of defilement in primitive or non-Hindu societies from Hindu societies, where he argued that the case of defilement in primitive societies was temporary in nature, and there were purification measures for removing it, the defilement was imposed only on individuals and not on the whole group/community.

Charsley (1996) argued that the term 'untouchability' gained recognition during the colonial discourse of 1901 when Hebert Risley was the Census Commissioner. The very first statement on the subject of untouchability was made by G. K. Gokhale in 1903 in Dharwad that goes like 'we may touch a cat; we may touch a dog ... but the touch of these human beings is pollution' (as quoted in Charsley, 1996, p. 6).

The Indological understanding of the Hindu social order through classical texts of Hinduism that validates the superior position of Brahmins revolves around the notion of 'purity and pollution', providing them superior status. The theory of purity and pollution became an enduring feature of the social and cultural life in India that governs our social relationships and interactions in everyday life. It also institutionalized the practice of 'untouchability' as a permanent and hereditary principle, owing to restrict physical contact with a section of society known as 'Chandalas', one of the initial names given to identify SCs and Dalits (Jha, 1997, pp. 23–24).

Based on the social and religious disabilities imposed on the untouchables, they were excluded from the *varna* model, that is, the social order of society. They were also identified as *Chandalas* in accordance with the textual understanding of the religious texts. 'Untouchables' were identified as '*ati*-Shudras' in some parts of India and also referred to as 'outcastes' and other names for their identification at societal level. They were often associated with the most unclean and degrading occupations such as sweeping and scavenging, leather tanning and skinning of animals, toddy-tapping, removal of dead animals, weaving, etc. The occupation of individuals is related to their birth in a particular caste that came to be

known as another defining feature of their position in the social order. According to Ghurye (1969, p. 370), the 'ideas of purity, whether occupational or ceremonial, which are found to have been a factor in the genesis of the caste, are the very soul of the idea and practice of untouchability'.

According to Kotani (1997, p. 11), the origin of untouchables is the product of *varna* conception and orthodox Brahmins and was not based on historical facts. *Chandalas* came into existence around the end of the later *Vedic* era (1,000–600 BC). There is a very close relationship between the formation of agrarian society and untouchability. Aryans were mainly herders, and they did not form any contact with those who were engaged in impure occupations unlike them. In the later *Vedic* period, Brahmins acquired the top-most position and used *shastric* laws to establish their sacredness and superior position in society. Kshatriyas added the political feature to this untouchability.

Religious texts of pre- and post-*Vedic* times illustrate the presence of *Chandalas* and also the degree of pollution attached to them, the occupations they engaged into and status they sustained in society. Therefore, the ancient understanding of *Chandalas* is principally Indological in nature. *Vedic* texts refer to the prototype of untouchable, the *Chandala*, only in such references as *Chandogya Upanishad* (5.10.7), 'one whose actions are evil will be reborn as a dog, a boar or a *Chandala*' (Rao, 2003, p. 22). Texts like *Manusmriti* and *Dharmashastra* produced the textual understanding of the Indian society. It conforms to the status and ranking system of four or five caste groups based on the idea of purity and pollution.

## Census Enumerations and Its Impact on Identity of 'Untouchables'

The problem of nomenclature among the untouchables/Shudras/*ati*-Shudras was institutionalised with the rise of census enumeration. This section will trace the history of the emergence of official classification of society through the formation of 'census categories' in colonial India. This section will also trace how the census viewed and classified 'Untouchables' along with the formation of the term 'Scheduled Caste' via the Government of India Act in 1935 and enlisting them under 'Scheduled Caste Order of 1936'. It will also focus on the different criteria adopted by the colonial officials to enumerate them as 'census category' for several official purposes.

While Risley as the Census Commissioner in 1909 was criticized due to his overemphasis on racial basis of caste and stressing on anthropometry, scholars like William Crooke argued that occupation can be the best indices to have the functional understanding of the caste system rather than races. During this time, many social anthropologists and scholars from other disciplines showed their keen interest in gaining knowledge about Indian society and their people. Professor Ripley stressed on anthropometric measurements (facial and head impressions) of various caste groups showing differences in body impressions among the upper and lower caste groups. Max Muller focuses on 'philological' difference in language spoken by Aryans and non-Aryans and how various caste groups addressed similarity with their own community in terms of the common languages they speak.

During the census of 1910, the society was divided among three classes: Hindus, animists or tribals and untouchables. The main objective was laying down a 'test' that can distinguish Hindus from untouchables and tribals. Therefore, 10 principles were outlined for division of society into three sections and clearly demarcating Hindus from other sections of society. (a) Deny the supremacy of Brahmins, (b) do not receive the mantra from a Brahmin or other recognized Hindu guru, (c) deny the authority of Vedas, (d) do not worship the Hindu gods, (e) are not served by good Brahmins as family priests, (f) have no Brahmin priests at all, (g) are denied access to the interior of Hindu temples, (h) cause pollution by touch or within a certain distance, (i) bury their dead and (j) eat beef and do not revere cow. Out of these



10 principles, numbers 2, 5, 6, 7 and 10 divided Hindus from untouchables (Sandanshiv, 1986). Interestingly, the census of 1910 does not count untouchables as 'Hindus', which clearly exhibits that untouchables at one point of time along with lying outside the *varna* order were placed outside Hinduism.

The Census Superintendent for Assam adopted the term 'exterior castes' for the first time as a functional alternative to the phrase 'depressed classes'. The term 'exterior castes' comprise those groups of people earlier termed as *avarna* and 'outcastes'. There was no specific criterion either to define or to classify the ex-untouchables prior to 1931. The census of 1931 was the first systematic attempt to classify and organize untouchable groups of people while enumerating them on the basis of several parameters. The census distinguishes untouchable groups of people from other sections of society on the basis of their social and marriage relationships; civic and religious restrictions; social disabilities related to the usage of public wells, roads, etc.; and their illiteracy, ignorance and poverty (Hutton, 1963, pp. 192–195). The 1931 census distinguishes those castes, which appear or do not appear as depressed classes. The other important factor was to enumerate these depressed classes and to provide them various benefits. Therefore, it became essential to define them and coined a term that is administratively fit for them.

Ibbeston (1974) classified caste groups forming the lower strata in Punjab into vagrant, menial, artisan, gypsies and criminal tribes. His classification of various untouchable castes was on the basis of their traditional occupations. The impact of such a classification was that it was unable for them to escape from their stigmatization. Thus, Rao (1981, p. 6), in his study, examined the defaulted structure of census in India while calculating untouchables where he produced an argument at different levels: first, the population and number of various castes in SCs list lay down a restrictive picture in front of us as it was found that some members of sub-caste groups were unable to enumerate due to their migration to some other place/region, second the structure of questionnaire was partial to acquire detailed results about SCs, third some of them experiencing similar social disabilities as 'untouchables' were also enlisted as 'Scheduled Caste' in the list and, lastly, some of the caste groups, for example, in the southern belt, use their sub-caste names as a part of their identity such as '*adi-Andhra*, *adi-Karnataka*, *adi-Dravida*', have been either left out by the enumerators or are referred to as unclassified. On similar lines, Dirks (2014) argued that it was the decennial census that plays an institutional role in instilling caste as a fundamental unit of Indian social structure. The different decadal census since 1872 invested different strategies to categorize and classify social groups of people based on their social status and occupational engagement. The term 'Scheduled Caste' was standardized as an administrative and official term to denote depressed classes and exterior castes (known as untouchables).

## **Social Categorization and the Problem of Nomenclature Among Scheduled Castes**

The expression 'Scheduled Caste' was standardized in the Constitution, which was first coined by Simon Commission and embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935. Simon Commission and its education committee and franchise committee carefully examined the castes, which were earlier termed as untouchables or depressed classes or exterior castes forming the fifth order of the fourfold Indian caste system. The main objective of designating all lower touchable and untouchable castes under the banner of SC was not only to provide special privileges in government services but also representation in legislative assemblies (Ghurye, 1969, p. 307).

The castes that got included in the SC list were 'untouchables' or *Chandala* who were placed at the bottom and outside the *varna* model. They are sometimes also referred to as 'depressed classes' or

‘outcastes’. The making of SC list was an explicit aim to improve their socio-economic conditions and also to understand and have an estimation of the total percentage of such caste groups, which are termed as ‘untouchables’. The main difficulty in front of government officials was what should be the parameters on which we will classify such groups of people to come under SC list.

Article 341 of the constitution provides, that the president may, with respect to any state or union territory, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of the constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory. (Department of Social Security, 1967)

The list of SCs prepared under the Constitution in SC Order of 1950 follows the same parameters used in 1931 census. The historical custom of untouchability was the basis to determine social, economic and educational backwardness without defining ‘backwardness’ in concrete terms.

SC is primarily a juridical category with all-India applicability, while, at the local level, there exist differences among sub-caste groups with a strong sense of its own identities and separateness from others (Rao, 1981, p. 1). The SC Order list of 1936 enlisted 429 castes as SCs, and after independence, the SC Order of 1950 recorded them as a total of 900 sub-caste groups. Therefore, census played a major role in transforming the identity of untouchables and enrolled them under artificially constructed official euphemism—‘Scheduled Castes’. The applicability of ‘Scheduled Castes’ for all enlisted communities under the SC Order list is merely a matter of availing benefits of reservations. It does not take into account the fact that they do not inter-dine, intermarry with each other. They follow the strict rules of sub-caste endogamy and are placed on different levels according to their occupational status. The castes enlisted among SCs are not homogeneous in their character; rather, they are appended together under the Constitution for securing protective and legislative measures. Tables 1 and 2 represent the distribution of SCs population across the various states of India post-independently.

Galanter (1984) points out that the term SC became the official euphemism for untouchables. It includes the socially deprived and historically disadvantaged groups of people due to their untouchable status that expose them to severe discrimination and disabilities. He further argued that there were a number of disabilities imposed on the untouchables right from restraining them from entering temples, to walking during daylight at locations occupied by the upper castes and denial of use of public facilities such as wells, roads, public offices, etc. They were not allowed to educate themselves, and they were forbidden to learn Vedas. They engaged in menial occupations. Their eating habits (beef and carrion eating) were different, they lived outside the villages and they were denied access to services from barbers and washermen. They were not even allowed to wear any silver and gold ornaments, and many social and religious restrictions were imposed on them that gained legitimacy through sacred and religious texts. The castes enlisted as SCs were enlisted constitutionally for securing the protective and legislative measures. The homogeneity in the identification of SCs is maintained at the level of ensuring benefits under state and central policies rather than understanding the patterns of self-identification among them. This somehow under-represented the case of defining one’s identity through one’s own subjective experiences and homogenized them under the umbrella term.

The social categorization of SCs did not focus on the existing controversy between the two terms ‘Shudras’ and ‘*ati*-Shudras’ simultaneously used for their identification. In addition, the controversy leads to a social differentiation between the clean and unclean castes based on their occupation and location in and outside the *varna* model. Simultaneously, both terms denote two groups of people, which are ‘Shudras’ signifying those groups of people occupying the much better place in hierarchical structure in comparison to ‘*ati*-Shudras’ referred to as outcastes or untouchables. They are divided among themselves as touchable and untouchable groups of people due to their differential occupational



**Table 1.** Population Distribution of SCs in Various States and UTs.

| States                 | Total (in %) | Rural (in %) | Urban (in %) |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| India                  | 16.20        | 17.91        | 11.75        |
| Andhra Pradesh         | 16.19        | 18.25        | 10.19        |
| Arunachal Pradesh      | 0.56         | 0.35         | 1.37         |
| Assam                  | 6.85         | 6.69         | 7.92         |
| Bihar                  | 15.72        | 16.39        | 10.02        |
| Goa                    | 1.77         | 1.58         | 1.95         |
| Gujarat                | 7.09         | 6.87         | 7.46         |
| Haryana                | 16.35        | 21.36        | 14.39        |
| Himachal Pradesh       | 24.72        | 25.59        | 16.64        |
| Jammu and Kashmir      | 7.59         | 8.34         | 5.33         |
| Karnataka              | 16.20        | 18.39        | 11.95        |
| Kerala                 | 9.81         | 10.83        | 6.90         |
| Madhya Pradesh         | 15.17        | 15.58        | 14.03        |
| Maharashtra            | 10.20        | 10.93        | 9.22         |
| Manipur                | 2.62         | 1.21         | 6.81         |
| Meghalaya              | 0.48         | 0.38         | 0.90         |
| Mizoram                | 0.03         | 0.01         | 0.05         |
| Nagaland               | Nil          | Nil          | Nil          |
| Orissa                 | 16.53        | 17.19        | 12.75        |
| Punjab                 | 28.85        | 33.04        | 20.70        |
| Rajasthan              | 17.16        | 17.88        | 14.79        |
| Sikkim                 | 5.02         | 4.96         | 5.50         |
| Tamil Nadu             | 19.00        | 23.79        | 12.91        |
| Tripura                | 17.37        | 17.17        | 18.34        |
| Uttar Pradesh          | 21.15        | 23.41        | 12.54        |
| West Bengal            | 23.02        | 26.88        | 13.05        |
| Andaman and Nicobar    | Nil          | Nil          | Nil          |
| Chandigarh             | 17.50        | 16.00        | 17.67        |
| Dadra and Nagar Haveli | 1.86         | 1.67         | 2.52         |
| Delhi                  | 16.92        | 19.94        | 16.70        |
| Daman and Diu          | 3.06         | 2.90         | 3.34         |
| Lakshadweep            | Nil          | Nil          | Nil          |
| Pondicherry            | 16.19        | 27.18        | 10.67        |

**Source:** [https://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/PCA\\_highlights/pca\\_highlights\\_file/India/Chapter-2.pdf](https://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/PCA_highlights/pca_highlights_file/India/Chapter-2.pdf)

**Table 2.** Population of SCs in 2011 (in millions).

|         | 2001  | 2011  | Variation (in %) |
|---------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Persons | 166.6 | 201.4 | +20.8%           |
| Males   | 86.1  | 103.5 | +20.3%           |
| Females | 80.5  | 97.9  | +21.5%           |

**Source:** Chandramouli (2013).

engagement and their rituals, customs and food habits. According to the *varna* model, the Indian society is divided into four subsections—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras; in which Shudras occupy the lowest position and are employed as slaves to the remaining sections of society. On the other hand, there was one section of population referred to as ‘outcastes or untouchables’ lower than the Shudras and most polluted as their name suggested.

The theories of origin of Shudras and *ati*-Shudras/untouchables enclosed inherent differences in which the 'untouchables' recognized themselves as original inhabitants of India (indigenous population) in contrast to 'Shudras' claimed to be those who were conquered by the Aryans. Ghurye (1969, pp. 322–323) classifies untouchables into two broad categories: pure and impure. Those who abjured beef eating and who polluted through their touch were termed as pure untouchables. According to Ghurye (1969, pp. 310–312):

The social distinction between Shudras on one hand and Chandalas on other hand is not based on the fact of 'touchability' and 'untouchability' but was based on use of different meal vessels. Patanjali assures that the meal vessels of the washer-men, carpenter, black-smiths and weavers can be used after cleaning them in a particular manner and the food vessels of Chandalas and Mritapas cannot be used by others. They were technically 'apapratras'. The word 'apapratras' was used by Patanjali to describe Chandalas and Mritapas. The classes of Mritapas, Chandalas and Svapachas gradually deteriorated in their social position in the time of Manu and Panini. Before it they were living within the limits of village. In the age of Manu (X, 51-2) they not only excluded from the village but also assigned the most degraded position as well as duties and services in society.

According to Sadanshiv (1986, p. 15), Shudras were classified under the fourfold division of *varna* hierarchy throughout the period of *Rigveda* (1,000 BC) that was considered as fundamental principle, but later, it was found through the works of Andre Beteille (caste, class and power) that the *varna* model was incapable of universal applicability across Indian society due to regional variations, and ritual status is not the only factor for the maintenance of dominance. It was also found that in the parts of ancient India; there was the existence of three other classes, which were placed outside the *varna* model, which were criminal tribes, aboriginal and the untouchables (Sandanshiv, 1986, p. 15).

According to Wilson and Kalanjali (1997), in Indian society, working classes mainly belong to the lowest strata and are excluded from every form of privilege. The threat felt by elite groups of unification of working classes (and acting in opposition to them) makes them divide working classes into two groups: *ati*-Shudras (indigenous/original inhabitants of India) and Shudras (craftsmen). Shudras were superior and more privileged in comparison to *ati*-Shudras, and the division among these two groups has become permanent and has resulted in practising untouchability and hierarchy among themselves.

According to Ambedkar (1946, pp. iv–v), Shudras belong to the Aryan race and, at one point of time, classified into only three *varnas*: Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya, and at the time of Aryans, they were classified as division of Kshatriya *varna*. There was evidence of dispute among Brahmins and Shudras. Because of this, Brahmins refused to perform *upanayanam* of Shudras, which socially degraded their position in society, and they fell below the rank of Vaishyas and formed the fourth *varna* of society. Ambedkar classified Shudras and Kshatriya *varna* on the basis of versus 38–40 of Chapter 60 of *Shanti Parva* of the Mahabharata. According to these verses, 'Paijavana' was a Shudra, and Brahmins performed sacrifices as well as *upanayana* for him and accepted *dakshina* from him. This also shows that Shudras at one point of time in history were entitled for *upanayana*, and they were ministers and kings of the state. Ambedkar raised some important questions about Shudras and their origin, for example, Sudas, a Shudra, endowed with a right to compose hymns of *Rigveda*, *Badari* and *Samskara Ganapati* having the right for *upanayanam*, and the works of *Maitrayan* and *Kathaka Samhitas* showing Shudras being wealthy and rich at one point of time in history.

In Bengal, Shudras were divided into four subgroups on the basis of their eating habits (food and water intake) (a) *sat*-Shudra groups include castes like Kayasth and Nabashakh, (b) *jalacharaniya*-Shudras from whom Brahmins and upper castes can take water, (c) *jalabyabaharya*-Shudras from whom Brahmins cannot take water and (d) *ashpriya*-Shudras referred to as tainted and extremely impure of all of them (Ghurye, 1969, p. 8).

Malley (1932, p. 139) argued that the classification of various castes under the 'Scheduled Caste list' is, indeed, confusing and a work of complexity. The SCs list consists of some castes claiming their identity as original inhabitants of India, some of them engaged in polluting/unclean occupations (scavenging, drum beating, toddy tappers, weaving, etc.) and a number of other castes engaged in somewhat clean occupations such as artisans, cultivation and agriculture. Besides being engaged in clean occupations, some of them have enlisted as 'untouchables' because of their intemperate food and drinking habits and other behavioural traits, for example, Musahars of south Bihar are better placed than serfs, but due to their eating habits and living conditions, they are termed as 'untouchables'.

Charsley (1996) and Mendelsohn and Vicziany (2000) argued that the term 'untouchable' was a twentieth-century construction, which became the central concept in understanding these groups of people and form the central basis in establishing 'affirmative action' for deprived sections of society in contemporary times, and it became a unified category covering all the castes among SCs. Mendelsohn and Vicziany (2000) argue that the two different categories of nomenclature of 'untouchables' were political and bureaucratic/administrative in nature. SCs were bureaucratic in character, whereas the political categories were 'adi', 'Harijan' and 'Dalit' that originated in a different time frame and were grounded with different ideologies. The leading term in contemporary times is 'Dalit', which is an expression of more radical and assertive identity. During the nineteenth century, the word 'adi' was used as a suffix by some of the untouchable groups to claim their original status in the region of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and some parts of south India. The term Harijan is the less influential term (Omvedt, 1994, p. 118).

## Problem of Nomenclature Among Scheduled Castes

The following section will contextualize the process of identity formation while focusing on the problem of nomenclature among the untouchables. The emergence of terminologies like Shudras and *ati*-Shudras further adds on to the complexity of understanding who untouchables/SCs were and how do we engage with them in accordance to their social and cultural status? The terminologies that emerged with reference to the identification of untouchables was due to the census enumerations and the Indological understanding of their origin. The hierarchy among untouchables was explicitly studied by Denzil Ibbeston who was the Census Commissioner at the time of 1881 census of Punjab. The hierarchy was based on the social and occupational differentiation among the castes of untouchables. Not only this, the following section will be helpful in understanding the debates around the complexity of understanding untouchables through focusing on the debates of pure/impure untouchables, right- and left-hand divisions, and, finally, the discourse on the origin of the terms Shudras and *ati*-Shudras.

Deliege (1999, p. 11) further argues that though positive discrimination resulted in providing unity of untouchables to a certain degree, having common interests in legislative schemes in contemporary times, it was still unable to create one uniform category of untouchables. There is a lack of solidarity among them. In his book, he also faced a problem of identification and understanding SCs through different names. He stressed on the term 'Chandala', which originates from Sanskrit literature. He defines it as '...a term that designates those who were not allowed to dwell in a town or a village but had to live in special quarters outside the village or town limits'.

Khare (1984, p. 119), in her study of Chamars of Lucknow, represented the four categories of identification of untouchables that are as follows—the first one is the 'guilt-raising' cluster in which the terms such as *achchuta*, *ati*-Shudra, *Charmakara*, *Chandala*, *Harijan* are used; the second one is the 'reforming cluster' constitutive of terms such as *adi*-Hindu, *atmavadi*, *mananvadharmi*, *Harijan*, etc.; third one is the 'secularizing cluster' consisting of terms such as *babu*, *sahib*, *bare admi*, *malik*, SCs,

*samana nagrika*, *weaker segment of society*, etc.; and the last one is the 'politicizing cluster' having terms such as Dalit, *sosita*, *alpasamhyaka* or *laghu-varga*.

Rao (2009, pp. 2–3) also classified four main categories of nomenclatures of untouchable groups of people. They are as follows:

1. Their own caste identities through their caste names such as Jatav, Chamar, Mala, Madiga, Mahar, Dhanak, Balmiki, Dom, etc. These caste identities emanate from the lore of their traditions and mythical lore and their caste legends.
2. The second category is the text-based identification that has been imposed on them through structural exclusion and inferior status indicated by Brahminical texts. The terms emerged from these Indological texts, for instance, are *achchuta*, *asprishya*, *antyaja*, *chandala*, *asuras*, *dasas* or *dasyas*, *rakshasas*, *pariah*, 'Harijans' and *panchamas*.
3. The third category was a result of the administrative policies of the colonial and post-colonial states such as depressed classes, exterior castes and SCs.
4. Finally comes a category of generic identities that the ex-untouchables themselves adopted. These can be divided into two categories, each pertaining to different periods. One that was in the early decades of the twentieth century, precisely in the 1920s that witnessed the emergence of 'adi' identity, centred around 'adi' ideology, that is, which propagated that they were the original inhabitants of this land, and, consequently, the rest of the populace should be regarded as outsiders, or immigrants. The second generic identity is known as 'Dalit' that came into vogue in 1972 in Maharashtra with the formation of Dalit Panthers Movement.

The emergence of these generic terms emerged in contrast to the diversities found among the castes enlisted under the SCs list. The terms like *adi*-Hindu and Dalit are examples of self-identification and quest for representing oneself in the mainstream. The homogeneous identity has been imposed on the untouchables then and SCs or Dalits now that underestimate their own understanding of their status and identity and the diversity that has been there to put forth. Michael (1999, p. 2) proposed that the untouchables occupy the lowest position in the Indian caste system and are partially excluded from the *varna* model. They constitute 16% of the entire population. The foundation of nomenclature for untouchables for defining and understanding them is as follows:

- Harijans (term coined by Narsinh Mehta and used by Mahatma Gandhi to refer to and reform them)
- Exterior castes (by J. H. Hutton during 1931 census)
- Depressed classes (colonial or census officers)
- Outcastes or *Pariahs*, *Mlechha*, *Avarnas*, *Panchamas*, *Nishada*, *Paulkasa*, *ati-Shudras* and *Antyaja*
- SCs as an official term originated in 1935
- Dalits as a self-assertive and radicalized term invented by untouchables or SCs with the aim of self-representing them.

The word 'Dalit' has become the generic identifier for all untouchable groups in contemporary times. It is a result of efforts of 'untouchables' for self-defining and identifying them in contemporary times. 'As defined by Molesworth Marathi-English Dictionary -this is a word in the Marathi language of western India, and is apparently derived from Sanskrit. In an 1831 dictionary the word is defined as "ground" or "broken or reduced to pieces generally"' (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 2000, pp. 3–4). The word Dalit was used for the first time by Jyotirao Phule for social reformation of untouchables and afterwards in

contemporary time the identity struggle in the form of Dalit Panther Movement during the 1970s (Zelliot, 1992). Like Harijan, the term Dalit is also political in nature, but it is more radical and revolutionary in its sense. It gains recognition after the Dalit Panther Movement in 1972. The word 'Dalit' is now widely utilized among some of the castes among SCs as a symbol of self-expression.

## **Scheduled Castes and Their Heterogeneity in the Contemporary World**

These divisions among SCs sidelined the process of identity formation arise during the Bhakti era and Adi movements of the 1920s in the states of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, where the quest of self-defining oneself was the central concern. Although Ambedkar and Phule stressed on the unification of castes among the untouchables for fighting against untouchability and discrimination in uniformity, Ambedkar, during Mahad Satyagrah in 1927, encouraged the untouchable castes to cooperate and assert their right to draw water from the tank. But in post-independent India, the objective of unification of SCs shifts its attention, and the factors affecting mobility of different castes among SCs further fragments them.<sup>3</sup>

There was a heated debate of sub-categorization among SCs, where the states of Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka subdivided the SCs list for fulfilling the demand of the castes lagging behind in their representation and attaining socio-economic mobility within SCs. The SCs list in the aforementioned states were then divided in accordance with the proportional distribution of castes among SCs. The demand of quotas within quotas in different states of India sheds light on the hierarchy and differentiation practised among castes of SCs and how the demand of sub-categorization further fragments them. However, the model of sub-categorization was abolished in all the states except the state of Bihar (still continuing with the Maha Dalit Commission) due to the constitutional feud, where article 341 defines SCs as 'homogenous' and cannot be further subdivided in such a manner even if Articles 15 (4) and 16 (4) allow the state governments to ensure representation of castes in different sectors (Rao, 2009).

There are approximately 1,200 castes enlisted under the SC list. Their heterogeneity can be reflected in terms of their engagement in different occupations, and the following works described in this section are helpful in understanding the heterogeneous character of SCs. According to Desai (1976, pp. 39–42), the untouchables of Gujarat state represent a heterogeneous character. They are socially and occupationally arranged in a hierarchical order of society, where each sub-caste group is located on a different scale. Dheds, Bhangis, Chamars and Meghwals constitute the major percentage of the SCs population of the state. Bhangis are situated at the bottom of the hierarchy due to their occupation. Dheds or Mahyavanshis are above them all followed by Chamars and Meghwals. Out of 29 villages of Gujarat, the untouchability among untouchables did not take place where one single SC group inhabited one village. The presence of two or more SC groups in one village resulted in the discrimination of one group by the others, for example, the practice of untouchability against Bhangis.

The phenomenon of untouchability is a two-tier system, where SCs are discriminated against by the caste Hindus, and, at the same time, those at the bottom of SCs are discriminated against by their own counterparts. The functional aspect of practice of internal hierarchy rooted in difference of occupation and eating habits (Desai, 1976, pp. 49–50).

The untouchable groups of people are well aware of their differences as well as a stratified system of social ranking practised among them. The construction of 'Scheduled Castes' does not recognize the occupational and social diversification at sub-caste level; on the other hand, it understands SCs as one homogeneous group ignoring any kind of distinction or hierarchy. The formation of generic names in order to self-represent and self-define their identity resulted in the fragmentation of these groups.

Moreover, the discrimination against SCs by upper-caste Hindus varies according to their social and economic status in society. This clearly shows that ‘untouchables’ or ‘Scheduled Castes’ do not constitute a monolithic identity (Deliege, 1999).

Judge (2014, pp. xxxv–vi) also recognizes hierarchy among SC groups of people.

These hierarchies are local and are characterized by claims and counterclaims of superiority. Caste hierarchy among the Dalits is one of the major reasons for their failure to get organized for better articulation of their interests. Some of the castes have been able to benefit from the state policies including the reservation policy. In this regard, the Mahars of Maharashtra and the Chamars of Punjab are notable in their mobility. Creating quota within quota as a political demand has emerged due to the lopsidedness of the benefits accrued to various castes through reservations.

According to Singh (2014, p. 5), the SCs groups epitomize social divisions among themselves. They embody gotra division and the existence of differentiation between the major 178 communities of SCs. ‘Differentiation among the subgroups is reported at social (428 communities), occupational (125) and religious (63) levels. Stratification has emerged with the rise of elites who have benefitted from developmental programs. Polarization and inequality have increased among various strata of the Scheduled Castes’ (Singh, 2014, p. 5).

## Conclusion

The problem of nomenclature and the social differentiation that has been present among the SCs has a long history, which this article reflected on. However, the differences on the basis of rituals, customs, eating habits and rules for inter-dining and intermarriage is not limited to the castes enlisted as SCs, the similar kind of internal differentiation is well observed in other castes of the *varna* hierarchy. The hierarchy operationalized at the inter-caste and intra-caste level is often related to the dynamics of power and hegemony that is found among every caste and class. Therefore, this article is useful in understanding the connotations behind the emergence of generic terms and their limitations to capture the heterogeneities present among different castes of SCs.

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## Notes

1. Constructivism is defined as anti-foundational theory arising out of the 'social discursive matrix from which knowledge claims to emerge and from which its justification is derived; the values/ideology implicit within knowledge posits this; the modes of informal and institutional life sustained a replenished by ontological and epistemological commitments; and the distribution of power and privilege favored by disciplinary beliefs' (quoted in Arun, 2007, p. 13).
2. Mythico-symbolic discourses constructed ways of seeing, ways of knowing, ways of understanding self and society, and ways of understanding themselves and their identity (quoted in Arun, 2007, p. 14).
3. Through the works of Alexander (1968), Patwardhan (1973), Aggrawal and Ashraf (1976), Saberwal (1976), Sachidananda (1977), Sharma (1986), Zelliot (2001), Rawat (2012) and Judge (2014), it is clear that the concept of mobility was capable of producing a change in one's socio-economic status but not at uniform level across the castes among the SCs. The factors affecting mobility such as sociopolitical consciousness about their rights and social networking, reservations, urbanization and industrialization, and political assertion will affect different castes among the SCs differently and will engender the fragmentation.

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