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## Dalit Politics in Contemporary India

The term 'DALIT' is a Marathi word and literally means ground or broken to pieces. It was first popularised by the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra by which they meant the Scheduled Caste population.

Dalits generally refer to the Scheduled Caste along the castes that in the Hindu Varna System were called the Varna System and were known as Avarnas or Alishudras. They were considered as impure and untouchables and were placed in the caste hierarchy which perpetuated inequality.

The Dalits forms around 15% of the total Indian population and accorded lowest place in the hierarchy of the caste system.

It is considered that they are socially, economically and politically marginalised.

They are spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. They are concentrated more in some states like UP, Punjab, Bihar, Maharashtra. They are mainly landless and agricultural labourers in the rural economy.

In the URBAN ECONOMY, they form the bulk of manual labour.

Though the state of India are pursuing pro poor policies yet the benefits has remain out of their purview. Post independence regime has failed to bring about systematic redistribution of resources in favour of those at the bottom of society and it has also failed to pursue a consistent strategy of supplying basic needs to the poor.

The policy of protective discrimination or elite (mainly middle class) has emerged among Dalits just as the elites who have been the main beneficiaries of the state policies.

As a result of these changes the entire dalit population may now be divided roughly into two sections, a section of dalits who have remained as they were earlier as a small, a narrow section who are relatively better off than the majority of the dalit population. This, however may be considered as a positive change since it is this section that are primarily responsible for their mobilisation and assertion in contemporary India. Another change may also be noted that blatant caste discrimination which was earlier practised, now it has become mild.

### Political Mobilisation of the Dalits

- (a) Pre Independence Period: Phule and Ambedkar
- (b) Post Independence Period: AISC to RPI  
Dalit Panthers  
Bahujan Samaj Party & the Dalits
- (c) Post 1991 / Era of LPG  
- Period of Mandal Reservation  
- Resurgence of Hindu nationalism

### Pre Independence Period

(a) Though, early attempt was more focussed towards reforms. Reformers like Jyotiba Phule and others were more focussed to transform the people's condition through education and constitutional measures. For this, he sought the support of the ruler who generously contributed to his efforts.

But, real change and political mobilisation of Dalits was initiated by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar who not participated in reforms but realised the importance of the political organisation.