



## Dalit



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### **Abstract :**

*In the paper, I have tried to show the origin and meaning of 'Dalit' words. However, a few examples and proofs of this word are given in this paper. In that, I have given few examples of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar's 'Who Were Shudras? In fact, what I want I have it in through this reading and in this paper.*

### **Keywords :**

*Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Dalit, caste, verna, and shudras*

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### **Research Paper :**

Introduction :

The term 'Dalit' has roots in Sanskrit where the root 'dal' means 'to split, crack, open'. (This Indo-European root appears in German and English in the form of 'dal' or 'tal', meaning 'cut'. In English, 'dale' is a valley, a cut in the ground; in German, 'thal': a tailor is one who cuts; 'to tell a tale' is the same as 'to cut a tally', the cut-marks made by the shepherd on his staff when counting sheep.

'Dalit' has come to mean things or persons who are cut, split, broken or torn asunder, scattered or crushed and destroyed. By coincidence, there is in Hebrew a root 'dal' meaning low, weak, poor. In the Bible, different forms of this term have been used to describe people who have been reduced to nothingness or helplessness. The present usage of the term Dalit goes back to the nineteenth century, when a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary, *Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1826-1890)*, used it to describe the Outcastes and Untouchables as the oppressed and the broken victims of our caste-ridden society. Under the charismatic leadership of *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956)*, this term gained greater importance and popularity. During the 1970s, the followers of the *Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra* gave currency to the term 'Dalit' as a constant reminder of their age-old oppression, denoting both their state of deprivation and the people who are oppressed. This term for them is not a mere name or title: for them it has become an expression of hope, the hope of recovering their past self-identity. The term has gained a new connotation with a more positive meaning. It must be remembered that *Dalit does not mean Caste or low-Caste or poor*; it refers to the deplorable state or condition to which a large group of people has been reduced by social convention and in which they are now living.<sup>(1)</sup> The Dalits are called by different names in different parts of the country. These names were given by the Caste people as expressions of contempt. They include: *Dasa, Dasysa, Raksasa, Asura, Avarna, Nisada, Panchama, Chandala, Harijan, Untouchable*. Each of these names has a history and background. Besides these names, there are a number of other titles or names, which have been given to them at the level of the regional language. For example, Chura in Punjab (North West India), *Bhangi or Lal Beghi in Hindi (North India)*, *Mahar in Marathi (Central India)*, *Mala in Telugu, Paraiya in Tamil and Pulayan in Malayalam (South India)*. These names carry within them the two-term contrast of "we-the pure" and "you-the impure". In response to these insulting labels, the Untouchables have chosen to give themselves a name and this is 'Dalit', which refers to the hardship of their condition of life. This name is a constant reminder of the age-old oppression. The term is also an expression of their hope to recover their past self-

identity. If today the Dalits are reduced to a life of abject poverty and treated as polluted human beings, it is the non-dalit that must be seen as the agent of their dehumanization. By the British, the Dalits were named 'the Depressed Classes' and 'the Scheduled Castes', in the Scheduled Caste Act of India, 1935. Mahatma Gandhi named them 'Harijans' which means 'children of God': but this term was not welcomed by the Dalits because it did not adequately describe their condition. The word "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit language, and means "ground", "suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces". It was first used by *Jyotirao Phule* in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus.<sup>(2)</sup> Gandhi's coinage of the word Harijan, translated roughly as "Children of God", to identify the former Untouchables. The terms "Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes" (SC/ST) are the official terms used in Indian government documents to identify former "untouchables" and tribes. However, in 2008 the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, noticing that "Dalit" was used interchangeably with the official term "scheduled castes", called the term "unconstitutional" and asked state governments to end its use. After the order, the Chhattisgarh government ended the official use of the word "Dalit".<sup>(3)</sup> "Adi Dravida", "Adi Karnataka" and "Adi Andhra" are words used in the states of *Tamil Nadu*, *Karnataka* and *Andhra Pradesh*, respectively, to identify people of former "untouchable" castes in official documents. These words, particularly the prefix of "Adi", denote the aboriginal. In the context of traditional Hindu society, Dalit status has often been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as any involving butchering, removal of rubbish, removal of waste and leatherwork. Dalits work as manual labourers, cleaning latrines and sewers, and clearing away rubbish. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting to the individual, and this pollution was considered contagious. As a result, Dalits were commonly segregated, and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. For example, they could not enter a temple or a school, and were required to stay outside the village. Elaborate precautions were sometimes observed to prevent incidental contact between Dalits and other castes. Discrimination against Dalits still exists in rural areas in the private sphere, in everyday matters such as access to eating-places, schools, temples and water sources. It has largely disappeared in urban areas and in the public sphere. Some Dalits have successfully integrated into urban Indian society, where caste origins are less obvious and less important in public life. In rural India, however, caste origins are more readily

apparent and Dalits often remain excluded from local religious life, though some qualitative evidence suggests that its severity is fast diminishing. Dalits and similar groups are also found in *Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh*. In addition, the *Burakumin of Japan, Baekjeong of Korea and Midgan of Somalia* are similar in status to Dalits. <sup>(4)</sup>

#### THE RIDDLE OF THE SHUDRAS:

Everybody knows that the Shudras formed the fourth Varna of the Indo-Aryan society. But very few have cared to inquire who these Shudras were and how they came to be the fourth Varna. That such an enquiry is of first-rate importance is beyond question. For, it is worth knowing how the Shudras came to occupy the fourth place, whether it was the result of evolution or it was brought about by revolution. Any attempt to discover who the Shudras were and how they came to be the fourth Varna must begin with the origin of the *Chaturvarnya* in the Indo-Aryan society. A study of the *Chaturvarnya* must in its turn start with a study of the ninetieth *Hymn of the Tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda— a Hymn*, which is known by the famous name of *Purusha Sukta*. <sup>(5)</sup>

#### THE BRAHMANIC THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE SHUDRAS:

Has the Brahmanic literature any explanation to offer which can account for the origin of the Shudras? There is no doubt that the Brahmanic literature is full of legends regarding creation which touch upon the creation of the universe, of man and of the different Varnas. Whether or not they furnish any clue to discover the origin of the Shudras, there can be no doubt that all such theories should find a place in a book which is concerned with the problem of the Shudras if for no other reason than that of assembling all material relating to the Shudras in one place and making their story complete. It would be better to take each piece of the Brahmanic literature separately, and note what contribution it has to make to the subject. <sup>(6)</sup>

#### SHUDRAS VERSUS ARYANS:

From what has been said before, it is clear that the Brahmanic writers do not give us any clue as to who the Shudras were and how they came to be the fourth *Varna*. It is, therefore, necessary to turn to the Western writers and to see what they have to say about the subject. The Western writers have a definite theory about the origin of the Shudras. Though all of them are not agreed upon every aspect of the theory, there are points on which there seems to be a certain amount of unity among them. <sup>(7)</sup> Even now, in the 21st century, there is an entire population of people in India and in Hindu regions of Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh who are often considered to be contaminated from birth. Called "Dalits," they face discrimination and even

violence from members of higher castes, particularly in terms of access to jobs, to education, and to marriage partners. Who are the Dalits? Dalits, also known as "Untouchables," are members of the lowest social status group in the Hindu caste system. The word *Dalit* means "the oppressed"; members of this group gave themselves the name in the 1930s. A Dalit is actually born below the caste system, which includes the four primary castes of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors and princes), Vaisya (farmers and artisans) and Shudra (tenant farmers or servants). Just like the *eta* outcasts in Japan, India's untouchables performed spiritually contaminating work that nobody else wanted to do - tasks like preparing bodies for funerals, tanning hides, and killing rats or other pests. Anything to do with dead cattle or cow hides was particularly unclean in Hinduism. An entire group of drummers arose in southern India called the Parayan; they were considered untouchable because their drumheads were made of cowhide. Under both Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, jobs that involved death corrupted the workers' souls, making them unfit to mingle with other kinds of people. Humans were born as untouchables as a form of punishment for misbehavior in a previous life. If a person was born in to the untouchable caste, she or he could not ascend to a higher caste within that lifetime; untouchables had to marry fellow untouchables, and could not eat in the same room or drink from the same well as a caste member. In Hindu reincarnation theories, however, those who scrupulously followed these restrictions could be rewarded for their good behavior by a promotion to a caste in their next life. Meanwhile, in this life, an untouchable could not enter a Hindu temple or be taught how to read. They were banned from drawing water from village wells, because their touch would taint the water for everyone else. They had to live outside of the village boundaries, and could not even walk through the neighborhoods where higher caste members lived. If a Brahmin or Kshatriya person approached, an untouchable was expected to throw him or herself facedown onto the ground, to prevent even their unclean shadow from touching the high caste person. The caste system and the oppression of untouchables prevailed (and still holds some sway) in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh. Interestingly, even some non-Hindu social groups observed caste separation norms in those countries. , they were not allowed to set foot on temple grounds, and only Brahmins could serve as priests. Although they still face discrimination from some quarters, the dalits are untouchable no longer<sup>(8)</sup>

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