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Autore	Viswanath Rupa
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Sommario/riassunto	Once known as "Pariahs," Dalits are primarily descendants of unfree agrarian laborers. They belong to India's most subordinated castes,

face overwhelming poverty and discrimination, and provoke public anxiety. Drawing on a wealth of previously untapped sources, this book follows the conception and evolution of the "Pariah Problem" in public consciousness in the 1890's. It shows how high-caste landlords, state officials, and well-intentioned missionaries conceived of Dalit oppression, and effectively foreclosed the emergence of substantive solutions to the "Problem"-with consequences that continue to be felt today. Rupa Viswanath begins with a description of the everyday lives of Dalit laborers in the 1890's and highlights the systematic efforts made by the state and Indian elites to protect Indian slavery from public scrutiny. Protestant missionaries were the first non-Dalits to draw attention to their plight. The missionaries' vision of the Pariahs' suffering as being a result of Hindu religious prejudice, however, obscured the fact that the entire agrarian political-economic system depended on unfree Pariah labor. Both the Indian public and colonial officials came to share a view compatible with missionary explanations, which meant all subsequent welfare efforts directed at Dalits focused on religious and social transformation rather than on structural reform. Methodologically, theoretically, and empirically, this book breaks new ground to demonstrate how events in the early decades of state-sponsored welfare directed at Dalits laid the groundwork for the present day, where the postcolonial state and well-meaning social and religious reformers continue to downplay Dalits' landlessness, violent suppression, and political subordination.

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