CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

The present study falls in the domain of social geography which may be defined as the study of social phenomena as expressed in space. The term ‘social phenomena’ encompasses the whole framework of human interaction with environment, leading to the articulation of social space by the diverse human groups in different ways. Social geography is a continuation of the philosophy of Vidal de la Blache and Bobek:

“....................it stressed both the humanistic nature of the geographical world...and the classificatory nature of ... human geographical work.........”

Social geography has genetic relations with other social sciences, particularly with social anthropology, sociology, social history, archaeology and socio-linguistics. It deals with the spatial distribution of social groups which can be distinguished with reference to ethical, religious, professional and other features. These social groups has greater influence on landscape in form of type and deployment of houses and land use pattern etc.

1.1 Regional Disparities

Regional disparities vary both over space and across different sectors of the society depending on a range of historical and ecological factors, socio-economic and cultural practices of the region. Different regions of a nation are generally endowed with different sets of natural resources. This difference with the differences in social and political set-up lead to the differences in the socio-economic development of different areas resulting in regional disparities.
The inequality in socio-economic level of the scheduled castes and non-Scheduled castes is well known fact. Its degree however varies from one area to another. This inequality is found in many aspects of life of the two communities. It manifests itself in income, assets, landholdings, occupation and educational attainments resulting in notable variations in their socio-economic development. One of the most striking features of the planned development in India has been that economically backward and socially oppressed people among the different socio-economic groups have not been able to gain much.

The benefits of successive five year plans have been passed more to the already developed regions and social sections. Even within such regions the benefit has gone more to the already rich and socially privileged sections of the society, thereby perpetuating social inequalities in the land holding, occupational structure, income level, educational attainments and in the possession of modern assets. The continuance of such a process is bound to further enhance the disparities in regional development and income distribution in the society. The benefits of planning accruing to selected regions and selected people are undesirable from the view point of balanced regional development and distributive justice. The prevalence of poverty, inequalities and unemployment constitute a major problem in any developing economy. It is commonly believed, if inequalities in the distribution of assets, income and consumption expenditure are not checked, would aggravate tension and endanger country’s stability. The development policies of the government are judged not merely by their success in achieving a fast development of real output, but also in terms of how the fruits of development are distributed between different classes and regions. 4
1.2 Socio-Economic Development

Socio-economic development in the broad sense means the improvement in the quality of life. A better quality of life certainly calls for a higher income, better education, good health and nutrition, a clear environment, quality in opportunities, greater individual freedom etc. The ultimate objective of socio-economic development is to provide opportunities to all people for raising their living standards. Thus development is a process of transition from lower to higher stage of the standard of living.\(^5\)

The term ‘Standard of Living’ refers to the quantity and quality of goods and services regularly consumed by the citizens of accounting during a given period of time. The high degree of inequality implies that the masses in the lower income groups have kind of living standard much below to that indicated by the average figures.\(^6\)

1.3 Caste System in the Indian Society

Since it is the caste system that lies at very root of socio-economic inequality between scheduled castes and non-scheduled castes, a detailed discussion on the caste system is very much called for. Caste is a basic attribute of the Indian social structure. For centuries, it has served as a major reference point in social interaction and continues to be so in some form or the other even today in India. Social hierarchy is based on caste which in turn shapes the general behavior of masses. Slowly but surely, the attitude towards cast rigidity is undergoing a change as a result of education, economic development and social and political reform movements. Caste rigidities have weakened in the course of economic development, urbanization, weakening of feudal values, and more importantly in the process of building a secular and democratic
polity. Land reforms coupled with other legislative measures to uplift the socially deprived and the underprivileged sections of population, have helped transform the traditional view of caste. Urbanization and industrialization in many regions of the country brought about occupational diversification changing thereby traditional inter-caste relations drastically.

Migration has created new climate for change with people adopting new occupations and leaving behind their home villages and traditional occupations which were caste specific. In large cities, like Delhi or Kolkata, the caste antecedents of an individual are neither immediately known nor can easily be ascertained. This does not mean that with all these changes caste as an institution has died out or its hold on the society has been loosened. On the contrary, the introduction of democratic institutions and people's representation in elected bodies from the gram panchayats, zila parishads municipal committees, state assemblies to the national parliament, have given a new meaning to the caste identity.

The geographic patterning of the caste groups is such that in some constituencies some castes are preponderant. This obviously gives them an upper hand in electoral politics as is evident from the fielding of candidates of the same caste by all political parties. This results in the mobilization of votes along caste lines. Land reforms introduced after independence brought about a new equation between the castes. Those castes which had remained the traditional owners of land by and large lost their monopoly on the land. The land rights were transferred to their tenants that were mostly low castes. This naturally resulted in the dilution of the supremacy of the traditional landed elites. They had to face new challenges from these very people who were till yesterday subservient to them and had been living under their perpetual hegemony. The state also adopted a
policy of scheduling certain socially deprived castes. These castes of the scheduled category enjoyed certain privileges. For example, state and parliamentary constituencies were earmarked and reserved for them, they had a quota in government jobs, and scholarships were instituted for them to enable them to join schools and higher institutions of learning. These opportunities were new to them and were intended to help them overcome their traditional drawbacks. However, this also disturbed the social equilibrium which had sustained the Indian society through ages. Higher castes and the middle ranking castes were generally wary of these reforms and openly contested these policy initiatives. Thus caste in independent India became a volatile issue. The area of inter-caste struggles widened and the violence that followed was a new phenomenon unprecedented in Indian history.

It may be necessary to examine these issues at some length and map our socio–geographical outlines of the caste phenomena in contemporary Indian society. The changing role of caste in politics, economy, education, social networking and bureaucracy may be probed in order to comprehend the existing social reality.

Traditionally, the Indian society has been governed by the institution of caste. This institutional frame has operated as a constraint on the freedom of an individual. The position of an individual in society and his /her sphere of social interaction and code of conduct were determined by his/her caste, that is to say, by an accident of birth in a particular family. Caste, therefore, operated as an instrument of social ordering. Each individual was supposed to lead a life in accordance with the socially accepted norms imposed by this rigid social order defined by the caste. The concept of caste should be evaluated in this historical backdrop.
1.4 Evolution of Caste System

The origin of the caste system is of course, shrouded in mystery, although there is a general agreement that the beginnings were made in the Vedic Age. It all began as a part of the process of peopling of the SaptaSindhva region by the IndoAryans after the decline of the Indus valley civilization. The racial composition of population of that time seems to be important in this regard. While the Palaeo-Mediterranean’s and the Proto-Austroloids were already there, a new ethnic element that was introduced in the population was that of the Nordics (Indo-Aryans). As the mode of agriculture took its roots and expanded in space it resulted in a new organization of social forces of production.

The expansion of the agricultural mode of subsistence implied assimilation of hunting and food gathering as well as pastoral communities into an agricultural society. This process of transformation was attended by a simple division of labour among the different constituent groups who came together to live in the pioneer villages. The colour of the skin became the primary basis of this social division. The IndoAryans asserted their superiority by creating a four – fold division of the society which came to be known as ChaturVarnaya and placing themselves in the upper strata of the Brahman and kshatriya ranks. The Indus valley people and tribes who lived on the periphery were assigned a lower status of Vaisyas and Sudras, or even treated as outcastes. The IndoAryans emerged as the custodians of knowledge (Brahmans) and defenders of territory (Kshatriyas).

On the other hand the aborigines of Indus valley were assigned mundane jobs such as cultivating the fields or exchanging and
manufacturing artisan goods. There were other unclean jobs, such as treating the dead bodies or removing the skins of the dead animals. These jobs were handled by the lower strata of society, sometimes described as the ‘exterior castes’.

It may be interesting to note that while a similar division of labour emerged in all other agrarian societies in the world, a caste system of different kind emerged only in India. What led to the institutionalization of this division of labor- which became so rigid that it could not be altered or challenged is a question which is not easy to answer. Each caste group became associated with a specific nature of work. So much so that a particular vocation became a hereditary trait of the family and immutable in time.

It is generally known that initially the four fold varna division emerged in the Vedic Age. These four varnas were Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. These groups constituted a hierarchical social division with Brahmans at the top and Sudras at the bottom. Within each group, particularly among the two upper segments of the Varna system, individual families started getting differentiated on the basis of clan or gotra. These divisions became institutionalized as marriages were permissible within the same caste. This generally led to the emergence of a social practice of varna endogamy and gotra exogamy.

Later on, as the economy diversified and a section of population concentrated in large settlements, occupation also diversified. Eventually, the Varna divisions ramified in the process of economic diversification into the jati divisions. The jatis, however, were hereditarily associated with certain occupations which defined their ritual status and the rank in the society. The jati pratha was
broadly in conformity with the *varna* system. This means that each jati corresponded to a particular *varna*. It may be concluded that the *varna* system acted as an India model representing the Indian unity. The *jati* system on the other hand, was a regional specificity. The question of relations of one caste with the other caste and relations with the members of the same caste can perhaps be understood in the context of regions. The *jati* system thus represented the diversity of the regional ethos within the overarching all-India unity. It may be noted that the processes of cultural differentiation expressed itself over a domain of language, implying that each cultural region was in reality a language / dialect region.

Each region was differentiable from neighboring regions on the basis of spoken language. A particular *jati* strictly functioned within a language area. The *jatis* in Bengal are not comparable with the *jatis* in Karnataka, or for that matter in Maharashtra. This is not to say that migrations from one region to the other have not been common. In fact, migrations were a common phenomenon. They did result in a mechanism of preservation of cultural traits. Each immigrant group in a city found it more appropriate to function as a brotherhood. This promoted intra-group interaction. The immigrant groups divorced from their traditional homelands, evolved a system which kept them a closely-knit community, rooted in their cultural tradition and yet living in an alien region. It was this mechanism that made inter-regional (cross-cultural) marriages a rare phenomenon. With the passage of time sub-castes which were fragment groups from the major castes came into being. While initially, they were sub-divisions of a caste, gradually each sub-caste started functioning as a caste in itself.\(^8\)
The sociological literature on caste is voluminous. Studies on caste cover a vast area of Ideological, social - anthropological and sociological research. The approaches differ greatly. It is pertinent to refer here the differing, viewpoints on the origin of Varna and jati system. Briefly, three major viewpoints can be highlighted here. First,
caste is viewed as a product of the division of labour. Secondly, it is viewed as a cultural phenomenon that operates as an institution. Thirdly, caste is viewed as a social stratification leading to the institutionalization of social inequality. It is this vision of social inequality ingrained in the Indian mind that confronts with the principles of democratic polity introduced since independence.

For all practical purposes membership of a caste is hereditary and cannot be acquired. Membership of a certain caste also determines the marriage field as all caste groups is endogamous. It also determines the pattern of social interaction (whether one can accept or can not accept cooked food or water from a member of a certain caste).^9

1.5 Theory of Caste and Class

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s writings on the class and caste came as a theoretical project from the time he described the fight of Indian scheduled castes (dalits) as being against “brahminism and capitalism”. Although, he was an economist by training, not a sociologist, he did an immense amount of research on Indian social history. His early essay on castes written as a student in 1916, deals with the Shudras and Untouchables. A large amount of unpublished writings and notebooks provided the basis for the essay on “Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Indian History”. These writings do not measure up to be theory; in itself they do provide resources for one. Ambedkar did more than just taking ‘caste’ as an important element of social structure in the Indian history.^10

1.6 Caste System and Social Economic Institutions

Historically, the caste system has formed the regulatory base for the social, cultural and economic life of the people in India. Ambedkar devoted considerable intellectual efforts to understand the
nature of caste system, its effect on the standard of living of groups, particularly located at the bottom of caste hierarchy in order to suggest possible remedies against the discrimination induced to deprivation in Indian society. He recognized that caste was a system of social and economic organization (production and distribution) based on certain customary rules and norms, which are unique and distinct. In general, the caste-based society and economy is the one in which property rights (or occupations) are hereditary, compulsory and endogamous. The organizational scheme of the caste system is based on the division of people in social groups in which civil, cultural, religious and economic rights of each individual are pre-determined or ascribed by birth and made hereditary. Endogamy remains the central feature of caste system. The assignment of civil, cultural and economic rights is unequal and hierarchical. The system also provides for a regulatory mechanism to enforce the social and economic organization through the instruments of social ostracism (the system of social and economic penalties), which make the institution of caste rigid and stubborn, resisting change.

These features imply that the Hindu social order is based on three interrelated principles, viz. pre-determination of social, religious and economic rights of each caste, the unequal and hierarchical division of these rights among the castes; and provision of strong social, religious and economic ostracism supported by the social and religious ideology to maintain the Hindu social order. In Ambedkar's view, the doctrine of inequality is the core and the heart of the Hindu social order. What is important is that the philosophical elements in Hinduism also directly and indirectly support the system.

This leaves no difference between legal philosophy (law) and moral philosophy (morality) in Hinduism. What is moral also becomes legal. There is no distinction between the legal and the moral. Morality becomes social and binding force on all.
The notion of ‘human rights’ under the Hindu social system takes a specific meaning. It becomes clear that unlike other human societies the Hindu society in its classical form does not recognize the individual and his distinctiveness as the centre of the social purpose. The unit of the Hindu society is not the individual. Even, the family is not regarded as a unit of society, except for the purposes of marriages and inheritance. The caste system is also governed by the principle of rank and gradation. The rights increase in ascending order from untouchable to Brahmin. It is hierarchically an interlinked system. In this framework castes are artfully interlinked with each other in such a manner that the rights and privileges of higher castes become the disabilities for the lower castes, particularly the untouchables. In Ambedkar’s view, the caste in a single number cannot exist. Caste can exists only in plural number. There cannot be such a thing as caste as a singular phenomenon. So castes need to be conceived as a ‘system’ of societal governance, which are interlinked in unequal measures of social, cultural, religious, economic relations with each other. Isolation and exclusion of (untouchables)-social and physical—is also a unique feature of the Hindu social order. Ambedkar observed: “Classes or social groups are common to all societies, but as long as the classes or social groups do not practice isolation and exclusiveness, they are non-social in their relations towards one another. Isolation and exclusiveness make them anti-social and inimical to one another.”

1.7 Caste and the Morphology of Settlements

Rural settlements in India have largely been influenced in their residential patterning by the caste and the clan/lineage structures. Every settlement in India is in a way a mosaic where people live in
their own exclusive social worlds despite the fact that they meet members of other castes in different situations – secular as well as religious. The traditional way of life and the spatial organization of habitations continue without much of a change. However democratic institutions to which the rural population has been exposed since independence and the impact of planned development including creation of social infrastructure within the villages (e.g. schools, dispensaries, seed depots, banks, etc.) have added new elements to the traditional settlement morphology. These developments notwithstanding, the traditional order based on caste structure is still intact.

The village mirrors the intricacies of the caste-based Indian society. The ritual hierarchy of castes expresses in space is the residential patterning of different castes within a rural settlement in whatever region of India it is located. In fact, the social morphology of rural villages in India is a spatial surrogate of the ritual hierarchical social order based on caste. What happened was that the most favorable sites within the village settlement (abadi) were occupied by the cultivating caste, the dominant caste. The outer periphery of this agglomerated settlement unit was occupied by other service castes that generally performed clean services. There was yet another periphery in which the unclean castes, or the untouchables, holding the lowest rank in caste hierarchy, were living.
Fig. 1.3 (A): Residential Patterning of Caste Groups in a Rural Village Schematic

Source: Aijazuddin Ahmad (1999), Social Geography.

Figure 1.3(B): Residential Patterning of Caste in a Rural Village

Source: Ahmad, Aijazuddin Ahmad (1999), Social Geography
This model was universal and represented a type in itself. If Muslims, e.g., Sheikhs, julahas or Fakirs, were a component of rural population, they also followed a zonal distribution pattern similar to that of the Hindu castes (Figs. 1.3-A and 1.3 B). O.H.K. Spate noted that an Indian village did not follow a definite layout plan. However, “within the seemingly disordered agglomeration there is, a strong internal differential, that of the separate quarters for various castes”. While caste based residential segregation is universal, the village in south (India) presents an extreme form of spatial segregation.\textsuperscript{13}

\subsection*{1.8 Caste in Urban Neighborhoods}

The residential housing in urban neighborhoods is a continuation of the rural model – separate quarters for different castes. Studies of the Himalayan towns such as Chamba, Kangra and Kullu reveal a close relationship between mohalla names and the caste/ethnic groups associated with them. In fact, the mohalla formation was essentially based on the principle of caste/class segregation. The capital towns of the princely states also indicated a clear impact of the feudal social order. The royalty and nobility chose for themselves the most advantageous sites, close to the fortress or the palace, followed by mohalls in which the elite groups (courtiers, officers religious leaders) lived; next were the mohallas of artisan and trading castes (metal and stone workers, weavers, carpenters, masons, perfume workers). Adjacent to them were the mohalls of service castes, both ritually pure (water carriers, domestic servants, cattle keepers, shepherds) as well as impure (sweepers, cobblers, butches).

In a hilly town, an added dimension is that the caste hierarchy expresses itself in the altitudinal zonation of mohalls. The higher the positions in caste rank the higher the location in the town
other things remaining the same. Mohalls of Chamba such as Bansi Gopal, Nand and Drobhi have traditional habitations of the Brahman, Mahajan and Rajput families. Julahas (weavers) are concentrated in a mohalla called Julakri, Smiths in Sapdi and butchers in kasakra. The general pattern is that the mohallas of higher castes are surrounded by castes having lower rank in ritual hierarchy. On the periphery are the mohallas of the low cates.14

1.9 Caste and Land ownership

Historically, the factor of caste has operated as a major determinant of social status in many critical spheres of life. One such critical area was the access to land, the main productive asset in a agrarian society, like India. As noted above, caste groups were surrogate classes and a division between those who owned land and those who did not, could easily be identified along caste lines. The upper castes invariably were the landed elites.

On the other hand, those in the lower rung were largely landless, working on the land of the higher caste farmers. There were regional differences in the types of land ownership and tenurial relations across diverse agro-climatic conditions. It is also understandable that land system of British India, such as those described as ryotwari, mahalwari or zamindari, came in response to the diverse agro-ecological conditions, and the regionally diverse socio-political structures. Under Zamindari, an Indian form of feudalism, emerged the landed elites, who were high castes while the labour supply came from the low castes who were treated no batter than the serfs. Exceptions apart, there was a broader correspondence between the ritual hierarchy of caste and the distribution of ownership rights on land. The landed elites emerged as dominant castes.
They were drawn from among the ranks of the Hindu high castes, such as Rajputs, Kayasthas and Brahmans as well as upper castes among the Muslims.

**Figure 1.4: Caste and Land Relations in Traditional Agriculture in British India; Examples from United Provinces of Agra and Oudh and Bihar; Schematic.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rajputs</th>
<th>Saiyids</th>
<th>Brahmans</th>
<th>Zamindars: Landed Elites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jats</td>
<td>Bhumihars</td>
<td>Kurmis</td>
<td>Tenants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamars</td>
<td>Dusadh</td>
<td></td>
<td>Landless Laborers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ahmad, Aijazuddin Ahmad (1999), Social Geography.

The British not only retained the system as such, they in fact, strengthened it further turning it into a rigorous exploitative mechanism to serve the best interests of the colonial rule. The growing accumulation of land in the hands of the members of the higher castes eventually reduced the artisans, Sudras and the other sections of the outcastes to the level of paupers. In fact, all chances of their having access to land were blocked by the dominant castes. Their marginalization acquired a form which contributed immensely to the Indian poverty. 15

**1.10 Castes of the Scheduled Category**

Caste acquired a new meaning in India after independence. After the introduction of reservation policy in 1950, caste became a powerful instrument of political mobilization. A large number of castes groups were assigned the status of scheduled castes. There was over-riding political compulsions under which certain groups
were brought under the schedule. There were specific regions within the same state, or extending over several states, in which a particular caste enjoyed the scheduled caste status. The major groups among the caste of the scheduled category display a peculiar geographic pattern of distribution. Many of them are everywhere but, some are specific to certain states, or even to a cluster of districts in a state.

Scheduled castes are an integral part of the social structure of the regions of their habitation. In their economic life, as well as in other spheres of life, they are still dependent on the higher castes. This dependence has not decreased with time. In fact, they were the main suppliers of labour. This explained their heavy concentration in the states of the North Indian plain as well as over the coastal plains of the peninsular states.

The Scheduled castes however, were conspicuous by their absence in the hilly and the forested tracts predominantly inhabited by the tribal communities. The tribal society by and large was egalitarian. There was, therefore, little chance of the emergence of a stratified social order. A clear-cut division of labor which could lead to the emergence of an occupational specialization was alien to the tribal culture. This is the reason why backward castes, low castes or the untouchable castes remained a phenomenon of the peasant society. The scheduled castes were mostly a rural phenomenon. However, with growing industrialization, they were drawn into a variety of industries, particularly cotton textiles and leather. This led to their agglomeration in the cities associated with these industries. The caste based discrimination, however, continued. The urban industrial sector offered them employment in the occupation which were generally treated as unclean or polluted.\textsuperscript{16}
1.11 The Meaning of Development

The meaning of development is different to different individuals as is evident from the views of a selected group of scholars which are given below.

Adleman and Morris (1973) in ‘Economic Growth and Social Equality’ in Developing Countries stated that hundreds of millions of desperately poor people throughout the world have been hurt rather than helped by economic development. According to them, economic growth has bypassed a large percentage of population in developing countries. They argue that average Gross National Product is not a reliable indicator of improvements in the economic well-being.

According to Meior, development is defined as an upward movement of the entire social system or it may be interpreted as attainments of a number of goals of modernization, such as a rise in productivity, social and economic equalization, modern knowledge, improved institutions and a rationally co-coordinated system of policy measures that can remove the host of undesirable conditions in the social system that have perpetuated a state of underdevelopment.

Mehmet (1978) states that a nation should aspire to a standard of living for its entire people as high as can be achieved with the resources available to it. He argues that there should be an equitable distribution of income, gainful employment and education to all in accordance with their talent, victory over disease equality of social status so that the nation may be effectively unified economically and socially.

Ali (1979) remarked that even if the real national income and real per capita income has grown, it cannot definitely be said that economic welfare has increased until and unless the resultant distribution of income is also considered. He further stated that in addition to growth aspect, the emphasis should also be laid on the
re-distributional aspect through the spread of education, wage creation and asset transfer policies so that the benefits of development can reach directly to each and every down-trodden category of the society. 20

Some enlightened Indian leaders viewed their task in terms of three revolutions: Political, social and economic. The political revolution ended with independence. Social revolution meant the elimination of discrimination based on birth, religion, caste and community and the reconstruction of social structure on modern foundations of law. The economic revolution was to be the ‘transition from primitive rural economy to scientific and planned agricultural and industrial economy’ Radha Krishan, the renowned philosopher, underlined, that a ‘socio-economic revolution’ in India has not only to achieve the real satisfaction of the fundamental needs of the common man but also to go much deeper and bring about a fundamental restructuring of the Indian society. The basic task of economic planning in India was, therefore to bring about a structural transformation of the economy so as to achieve a high and sustained rate of growth, a progressive improvement in the standard of living of the masses leading to the eradication of poverty, inequality and unemployment as well as to provide material base for self reliant socialist economy. 21

Poverty, unemployment and inequality are related phenomena. Therefore the success in solving or reducing one of these means a favorable effect on others. The alleviation of poverty in one or the other form, therefore, has occupied an important place in the list of stated objectives of all the Five Year Plans of the country. 22

In India, the Planning process began in 1951 with the launching of the First Five Year Plan to increase the economic growth. It was only in 1970s that the growth with social justice as made one of the main objectives of five year plans and a number of
anti-poverty and employment generation programmes have been launched in the successive plans to remove the socio-economic inequalities. The Special Component Plan for scheduled castes and Tribal Sub-Plan for scheduled tribes have been launched by the government with a view to raising the levels of living of the most downtrodden and underprivileged section of the society. The term SC was first used by the British in the Government of India Act, 1935. Prior to this, some of these castes were included among the Depressed Classes, a category used for the first time at the beginning of the 20th century. Traditionally, in the Hindu social order they are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, called *Shudras*, and are treated as untouchables.²³

1.12 Problems of the Disadvantaged Groups

In the literature on poverty the term “chronic poverty” refers to a situation where people remain poor for much longer period of time, and many of them pass their poverty to the next generation. In this sense, chronic poverty is a concept, referring to persistence of poverty for a relatively longer period of time. Also, the people who remain poor for longer period of time are most likely to be the ones who are deprived along many dimensions such as the access to productive capital assets, employment opportunities, and education and skills. They also face social and political marginality that keeps them poor over long periods of time.

Among various factors responsible for chronic poverty are the low economic growth, initial inequality, social marginalization and failures of the State. Among these factors, however “social marginalisation” and “Initial Inequality” are particularly relevant for understanding persistence of chronic poverty among the discriminated groups. “Social exclusion” from participation in social, political, and economic processes in any society creates conditions for
the persistence of chronic poverty for the excluded and the discriminated groups. Social exclusion essentially refers to "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from the full participation in the society within which they live" (Arjan De Haan, 1999). The societal institutions that lead to exclusion and cause deprivation are key to the understanding of the concept of exclusion and discrimination. The exclusion may occur in multiple forms, and cause diverse adverse consequences for the excluded and the discriminated group. Therefore, it becomes imperative to recognize the ways in which social exclusion can occur, and cause deprivation and poverty among the discriminated groups. There are number of groups whose chronic poverty is caused by the process of discrimination due to their position in communities. Ascribed status linked with ethnicity, race, religion, and caste constitute the basis for discrimination, social marginalization and disadvantages to these groups. In India, exclusion revolves around social processes and institutions that exclude, discriminate, isolate, and deprive some groups on the basis of groups' identities like caste and ethnicity.

In India, there are a number of such social groups, which constitute a sizable portion of population. These include former untouchables or scheduled castes, tribals, nomadic, semi-nomadic and de-notified tribes (or ex-criminal tribes) etc. These groups put together constituted more than 250 millions in 2001 (about 167 millions SCs, 86 millions STs and other small minorities). These groups have suffered in the past from exclusion in multiple spheres, which led to their severe deprivations. The schedule caste constitutes the largest social group accounting for about 17 percent of the total population as per census 2001. The exclusion and deprivation of scheduled castes is closely associated with institution of caste and
untouchability. In a traditional framework of caste system, the exclusion and discrimination in economic spheres like occupation and labour employment, is eternal to the system, and a necessary outcome of its basic features (Ambedkar 1987, Akerlof, 1976, Scoville 1991 and Lal 1984). In the case of the lower caste untouchables, the exclusion resulted in severe deprivations and poverty since they were denied access to all sources of livelihood i.e. property rights, education, and certain occupations, or economic activities. Caste-based exclusion involved the lack of entitlement, not only to their economic rights, but also to civil, cultural, and political rights. It involves what has been described as living mode exclusion i.e. exclusion in political participation, and in social and economic opportunities (Minority at Risk, UNDP, and HDR 2004). It is this caste-based institutionalized form of exclusion particularly of the low caste untouchables from access to economic, civil rights, and human development for long period of time that has resulted in the severe consequences of their economic conditions.24

The adivasis or the Tribals (STs) constitute the second largest social group in India and accounts for about 8 percent of the total population. They are also closer to the SCs in terms of exclusion and deprivation. The STs isolation and exclusion, however, is not related to caste or religion, but is based on their ethnic identity. Historically, the STs have been different from the mainland Indian society with a distinct culture, language, social organization, and economy practicing hunting, food gathering, and shifting cultivation with habitat of their own in the river valleys, and forest regions. They suffered from isolation, and neglect, which inflicted considerable deprivation and poverty among them. In their case, exclusion can take several forms such as the denial of right to resources around which they live, unintended and intended consequences of policies of the Government and societal processes. 25
1.13 Impact of Rural development on scheduled castes

The scheduled castes constitute as one of the most disadvantaged groups in Indian society. They have been stigmatized people and, on this account have suffered from numerous disabilities which were regulated through religious beliefs and practices. Some of the common features among them are untouchability, low economic status, segregation, lack of political power, low level of literacy and social mobility. All these together have reinforced their wretched conditions. More than 85 percent of the SCs in India even today are engaged in primary sector, particularly agriculture. Their proportion as agriculture labourers are considerably higher than the general population.

The condition of the scheduled castes in terms of residence, housing, health and standard of living is precarious. Firstly, majority of them are too poor to own any property. They live and build their dwellings on the can land generally belonging to higher caste landowners who engage them as agricultural labours that bind them to their job for throughout their lives.

Traditionally the Indian society has been governed by the institution of caste. The position of an individual in society and his/her sphere of social interaction and code of conduct were determined by his/her caste, this is to say, the accident of birth in family. Caste, therefore, operated as an instrument of social ordering. Each individual was supposed to lead a life in accordance with the socially accepted norms imposed by this rigid and unchanging social order defined by the caste. They still continue to suffer from segregation specifically with regard to habitation. They reside at segregated places known as ‘Harijan Ghettos or Tolas’ in town and villages. They often suffer from malnutrition, disabilities and chronic health problems such as tuberculosis, leprosy, malaria and venereal diseases.\textsuperscript{26}
Government policy against discrimination and for Empowerment recognized the backwardness and deprivation suffered by the SCs and the STs way back in 1950s. Recognizing their unique problems, the Government framed specific policies for their economic, social, and political empowerment. The Government has been utilizing a two fold strategy to overcome the deprivation of the SCs and the STs. The remedies mainly included (a) measures and safeguards against discrimination and to provide equal opportunity in economic, civil, education, and political spheres; and (b) developmental and empowering measures particularly in economic, education and social spheres. The “remedial measures against discrimination” include the enactment of Anti-Untouchability Act, 1955 (renamed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, and the Schedule Caste/Tribe Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989. Under the first Act, the practice of untouchability and discrimination in public places, and community life is treated as an offence. The second Act provides legal protection against violence and atrocities by the high castes, and enables scheduled castes and the scheduled tribe in their attempt to secure equal rights. The Government policy however, does not stop with the legal safeguards against exclusion and discrimination, but goes beyond, to provide equal opportunity and fair participation in the economic and political process of the country.

Under The 'Reservation Policy' specific quotas are reserved, in proportion to the population, in Government and other services, educational institutions, public housing, other public spheres, and in various democratic bodies including the Parliament, State assemblies, and Panchayat Raj Institutions from district, to village levels. These pro-active equal opportunity measures are thus, used to ensure proportional participation of the SCs and the STs in various public spheres, which otherwise may not have been possible due to
the residual and continuing caste and untouchability based exclusion and discrimination against the SCs, in some spheres if not all.

The measures against discrimination in the form of legal safeguards and reservation policy are confined only to State run and State supported sectors, but in private sectors namely agriculture, private industry, and cooperative sector where more than 90 percentage of the SC and the ST workers are employed, there is no legal safeguard available against discrimination. In the absence of legal safeguards and reservation policy in the private sector, the State has used "general programmes" for the economic, educational, and social upliftment of the SCs and the STs. The focus of these general programmes have been to improve the private ownership like agricultural land, and non-land capital assets, education, skill development, and improved access to the social needs like housing, health, drinking water, electricity, and others.

In the non-farm self-employment activities; the schemes are developed to provide financial capital, training, and information to undertake new businesses, or to improve the existing businesses. Integrated Rural Development Programs is the earliest self-employment programmes to enable identified rural poor families to augment their income through acquisition of credit-based productive assets.

Thus, the Government has consistently used both, general pro-poor policies, and special measures to compensate for historical denial, and to bring improvement in the human development of the SCs and the STs and reduce the gap between them and rest of the population.27
The phenomena of regional disparities in socio-economic development of social groups is the most attention-grabbing and yet challenging theme in social geography. Several scholars in the field of Geography, Sociology and Economics have studied the various dimensions of socio-economic development including the core – peripheral contrasts by using territorial indicators most appropriate to the region.28

Scheduled castes constitute an oppressed and disadvantaged group in the Indian society. The genesis of their disadvantaged status lies in the Hindu social structure. For ages they have been the subject of social injustice and exploitation, The Hindu social structure being rigid in nature denied them the opportunity of social mobility. Consequently, they could not be exposed to the benefits of modernization. Their social progress remained highly restricted and they were forced to do unclean and menial jobs which yielded only marginal income.

The Directive Principles of state Policy enshrined in the constitution oblige the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people particularly of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and protect them from social injustice and from all forms of exploitation. These Directive Principles also provide for the reservation of seats for scheduled castes in the State Assemblies and the Parliament. Article 338 provides for appointment, by the President, a special officer to “investigate all matters relating to safeguard provided for scheduled caste under the constitution.”

The contemporary Indian society is characterized by a semi-feudal social structure and this is more visible in case of Himachal Pradesh. The allotment of land was one of the major programmes for improving the economic lot of scheduled castes. Large sections of
scheduled castes population derive their livelihood by working on the land of the upper caste Hindus.

The deprived and disadvantaged groups are still exposed to the experience of cumulative inequality. The marginalize groups are yet to experience the benefits of multifarious developmental programmes. There is a vast gap among the various segments of the scheduled castes so far as the impact of development is concerned. The situation of scheduled castes has not substantially changed during the five decades of development planning. They are still relegated to the bottom of the social-economic structure. In spite of all the constitutional measures adopted by government agencies and endeavours of voluntary organizations like Harijan Sevak Sangh and Bhartiya Depressed Classes League, the fact remains that untouchability is being practiced in many parts of India with all its vigour and religiosity, and the Himachal is no exception to this.

The social, economic and political situation of India cannot be understood properly until and unless a due consideration is given to the condition of scheduled castes particularly Dalits. In order to gain an insight into the base on which the whole system of our country is founded, the issues concerning caste system have to be properly understood. Britishers took advantage of this fragile social structure and ruled India for more than two hundred years. In a country where its citizens are divided so deeply on various lines viz. caste, religion etc., then any external power can take advantage and hold the country as slave.

During 63 years of independence there has been much talk about policies and programmes targeting those sections of the society who are regarded as the ‘weaker section’ (especially in the context of scheduled castes). But there is still a wide gap in the socio-economic development of scheduled castes and non scheduled castes.

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The caste system in the Hindu society has been based on a strict hierarchy of four varnas: Brahmins (Priests and Scholars), Kshatriyas (Rulers and Soldiers) Vaishyas (Merchants and Farmers), and Shudras (Servant class). Underneath the four main castes, there is a fifth group, which constitutes the scheduled castes. They literally have no caste. They in fact lay outside the caste system and are called the Adi-Shudras or Dalits. Who are said to exist solely to serve the forward or twice-born castes. They are untouchables. Lately the word Dalits has been used to connote how they have been dealt with in the past. Thus, the word, exploited is a synonym to describe these peoples. They have been considered as polluted, impure and unworthy for a touch even.

The government of India after an inquiry into the caste system come to a conclusion that lower castes have been depressed in all spheres of life namely social, economic and political. Theoretically, every body in India has the same rights, duties and status, but in practice the picture is otherwise. There is rampant social backwardness, lack of access to the food, education and health care system which push these castes into the bondage of upper castes. Nevertheless, in the recent past the Dalit society has also thrown up powerful leaders like Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, who fought vociferously for the cause of Dalits. (Katler 1997). In spite of the ideal goals that the Constitution of India has set for the State to achieve, many sections of the Indian society particularly the scheduled castes and also many areas of the country are still living in a state of social and economic deprivation.

1.14 Disparity in the Implementation of Reservation Policy

In the ancient period of India, the backward castes had been denied all kinds of social and economic endowments. Hence, they had been lagging behind in the process of development. The social
and economic deprivation among the scheduled castes had been quite common during pre and post independence era. Therefore there was a need for a number of safeguard policies. One of them is, 'Reservation Policy'. The objective of the reservation policy is to eradicate the social and economic disparities that existed in the society. Article 15 (4) and (4) of the Indian constitution has made provision of reservation for backward classes in educational institutions and public employment. The reservation policy has to be followed by both central and state governments.32

1.15 Scheduled castes

This is not to say that post-independence period has not brought any socio-economic and political change in the life of the scheduled castes. Constitutional provisions, political processes since independence and efforts by the leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have created a wave of rising expectations in the life of scheduled castes. Gradually, since then, the scheduled castes are slowly becoming aware of their rightful place in the society and are asserting for the reordering of the society for their betterment and advancement. This has created a number of pressures and pulls resulting in socio-political tensions in the Indian society.33

1.16 An Overview of Scheduled Castes

The scheduled castes today constitute a significant proportion of Indian population. In the year 1935, the scheduled castes were estimated at about 5 crores. The decadal growth of scheduled castes in India during 1991-2001 was 30 per cent.34

According to the 2001 census, the scheduled caste population in India is 166,635,700 persons, constituting 16.2 per cent of the country's total population. About four-fifths (79.8 per cent) of them live in rural areas and only one-fifth (20.2 per cent) are living in
urban areas. The sex ratio of 936 females per thousand males is slightly higher than the national average of 933. The highest percentage of (28.9 per cent)scheduled caste population is found in Uttar Pradesh (21.1 percent) followed by West Bengal (11.1 per cent) and Bihar (7.8 per cent) Andhra Pradesh (7.4 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (7.1 per cent). In fact, more than 57 per cent of total scheduled castes population inhibit in these five states. Proportionately the largest proportion of population of scheduled castes to total population of the state is in Punjab (28.9 per cent), followed by Himachal Pradesh (24.7 per cent). In Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Pondicherry proportion of scheduled caste population is exactly equal to the the National average of 16.2 per cent. The smallest concentration of scheduled caste population is in the North-Eastern tribal states such as Mizoram (with negligible or only 272 person) followed by Meghalaya (0.5 per cent) and Arunachal Pradesh (0.6 per cent).35

1.17 Status of Scheduled Castes in Himachal Pradesh

The Government of India set up a number of teams and committees to study the conditions of untouchable castes in India. One of these committees was the Parliamentary Committee on Untouchable Castes of India. This committee, in the course of its tour of Solan, Sirmur, Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Una and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh observed that untouchability was still being practiced against certain Scheduled Castes in the schools and the public institutions. The scheduled caste employees working in villages, like school teachers, patwaris and other field workers were the victims of social discrimination. They were denied the residential accommodation even on rent. The teachers belonging to scheduled castes were not allowed to touch the utensils and pots of high caste colleagues and draw water for themselves form the wells.36
In the present study an attempt has been made to estimate and capture the magnitude of the regional disparities in socio-economic development between scheduled castes and non-scheduled castes. The socio-economic variables on which this study is based include land holding, occupational status, income level, educational attainment and possession of modern amenities. The four physiographic regions viz. the Trans Himalayan Region, Greater Himalayan region, Middle Himalayan region and Shivalik individually constitute the basic unit of study.
REFERENCES AND NOTES


