PREFACE

Regional disparities are a universal Phenomenon. That varies both spatially and socially depending on a range of historical and ecological factors and prevailing socio-economic and cultural practices of a region. 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, and greater individual freedom etc. The ultimate objective of socio-economic development is to provide increasing opportunities to all people for raising their living standards. Thus development is a process of transformation from lower to higher stage of standard of living.

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. Social hierarchy was based on caste which in turn governed the behavior of Indian people in whatever walk of life they were. Thus, caste in independent India became a volatile issue. Scheduled Castes have been socio-economically oppressed, culturally subjugated and politically marginalized for centuries. The historical impact of traditional caste based restrictions on the ownership of property, access to employment opportunities and freedom of occupation are still visible in a significant measure even after six decades of political freedom. They have suffered from the dual disabilities of severe economic exploitation and social discrimination. They own very few assets and are largely dependant upon agricultural pursuits and the low income generating occupations like shoe making, sweeping, bamboo basket making, black smithy, weaving, poultry and piggery etc.

Although the Government of India is very much interested in improving the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes, the results of these efforts remains yet to seen in rural areas of the country and more especially in the area of Himachal Pradesh the evidence collected through a sample Survey shows that the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes, in general, and untouchable castes in particular,
continue to be pitiable in the interior villages of Himachal Pradesh. Untouchables are socially, educationally, economically and politically backward. Lack of access to economic resources and persisting ignorance appear to be the prominent factors for their miserable plight. To have a deeper insight into the problem an empirical study is rightly called for. This research attempt therefore seeks to fill this gap.

A number of attempts have been made at the national level to study the level and causes of disparity in the socio-economic development of scheduled castes and non-scheduled castes, but no detailed and comprehensive study, so far, has been conducted in the field of geography on Himachal Pradesh. In this study an attempt has been made to examine the causes underlying disparities in socio-economic development of scheduled castes and non scheduled castes in the first instance and then its regional manifestation in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The study will examine the disparity between the two sections in the context of inequalities in the distribution of assets, income, land holding, occupational structure, educational level and modern amenities etc. The success of existing government policies and programmes on the upliftment of scheduled castes also form part of this analysis. The findings of this study may prove helpful to the planners and policy-makers for the effective implementation of programmes aiming at the betterment of the weaker section as well as to the academicians and researchers to carry out further research on the regional disparities in socio-economic development among the different socio-economic group of Himachal Pradesh. The present study deals with the regional disparities in socio-economic development among scheduled castes and non-scheduled in different physiographic regions of Himachal Pradesh namely Trans Himalayan region, Greater Himalayan region, middle Himalayan region and Shivalik region.

The major objectives of the Study are as follow:-

1. To study the socio-economic levels of the Scheduled Castes and Non-Scheduled castes.

2. To study the prevailing inequality and social disparities.
3. To study the comparative picture of different regions of the study area with respect to the socio-economic development of the two sections i.e. schedule and non-scheduled castes.

4. To study the impact of government policies on the caste question in Himachal Pradesh.

In order to achieve the first three objectives of this study, a sample of 280 households of scheduled castes and 280 households of non-scheduled castes covering 28 villages of 7 blocks has been conducted. The sample represents all major physiographic regions in different zones of Himachal Pradesh viz. Trans Himalayan region, Greater Himalayan region, Middle Himalayan region and the Shivalik. It is hypothesized that there are marked differences in land holding, occupational structure, income level, educational attainment and modern facilities between the two sections of the study area. Socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes continue to be very poor in comparison to non-scheduled castes even after more than six decades of political freedom of the country.

The study has been arranged into eight chapters. The first chapter is introductory which deals with theoretical background. The second chapter deals with the study area i.e. Himachal Pradesh. The Third Chapter focuses upon the research design, review of literature, statement of the problem, aims and objectives, major hypothesis, data sources and methodology and selection of study area. Chapter Four deals with demographic profile of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Himachal Pradesh. Chapter five is concerned with the Govt. Policies and Programmes on scheduled castes. Chapter six deals with Social Geography of Different Physiographic regions of Himachal Pradesh. Chapter seven contains the analysis of the data regarding the socio-economic development of scheduled castes and non-scheduled castes populations and inequality thereof. The summary, conclusions and suggestions have been covered by the last chapter of the study.