Preface

The humaneness of a society is determined by the degree of protection it provides to its weaker sections and disadvantaged members to lead a life commensurate with dignity and honour. In simple operational terms, it means the right of the weak and under-privileged to the protection of the State and requisite aid and opportunities to compete alongwith the more advanced sections of the society.

The depressed castes, as the Scheduled Castes were known earlier, accounting nearly 16.32 per cent of the population of India, have suffered from extreme social and economic backwardness. They, shorn of any education and worthwhile means of livelihood, were subjected to worst kind of social segregation in the form of ‘Untouchability’. By any account, they led a life of bare existence living always on the fringes of the society - isolated and ignored.

Though the moves for improving the conditions of these castes were taken long time past by some of the illustrious religious and social reformers and organisations, yet the issue of removing of their vexatious problems got a real big momentum and propped up to centre-stage by the entry of M. K. Gandhi on the Indian political scene. Gandhi held the removal of untouchability and other disabilities of these castes as a cherished mission of his life. Yet somewhat at the same time, another stalwart born in these castes, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, having gone through the first hand experience of what it meant to be a Scheduled Caste, brought new hopes and aspirations for these downtrodden people. Eminent scholar as he was, he pleaded their cause on every possible platform and vowed to bring justice to them.
As such, when came the question of removing of various socio-economic disabilities suffered by these castes, the views of both Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, weighed very heavily before the political, social and religious leadership of the post-independence India. Their views first echoed in the portals of Constituent Assembly through the debates and discussions in that body of august peoples and later in the form of the Constitution itself that aimed to bring justice, social and economic, to all by developing on egalitarian lines. Thus, the first and foremost institutionalised set-up to administer social justice to the Scheduled Caste communities is our Constitution itself. It is certainly a matter of gratification and a measure of farsightedness on the part of Constituent Assembly that they not only outlined the end e.g. as reflected in the Preamble, but also prescribed the means to achieve it.

Under the obligation to the Constitution and national commitment to do something substantial for the weakest section of the society, the Union Government and the State Governments, soon after the independence, launched various welfare schemes with the objective of making a breakthrough in the socio-economic development of these castes. Since then 50 years of wilful efforts in this direction have gone by. Though this period may seem minuscule as far the history of deprivation of these castes goes, yet it is pretty high time to look around and know the direction of progress of these castes, if not the place where they have reached. The matter nonetheless becomes imperative when the State concerned is Punjab which is the home to the highest percentage of Scheduled Castes population (28%) and is one of the most prosperous State among the other States of the Union.
Several conflicting views have been expressed about this issue. While some assert that the Government efforts all along the years have largely been successful, others are quite sceptical about the results obtained and complain of loss of direction from the way shown by Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and founding fathers of the nation. They allege that the facilities meant for the Scheduled Castes have not reached to the deserving ones and have been appropriated by the ‘creamy layers’ among these castes and thus the condition of most of the Scheduled Castes remain what it was half-a-century before. Since the Governmental programmes designed to uplift the Scheduled Castes have involved large outlays of public money and will call for more funds, it is essential to have a factual assessment of the situation if these investments are to yield more returns. It is in this background that the study of ‘Welfare Schemes for Scheduled Castes in Punjab in Gandhian Perspective’ is conceived. It inter-alia consists of:

1. A study of the origin of caste system and how it affected the social structure all during the gone by period of time. This is to understand the problems faced by the Scheduled Castes in right perspective so as the solutions offered could be judged authentically.

2. Solutions suggested to ameliorate the conditions of Scheduled Castes by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

3. What safeguards and other legislative measures the founding fathers enunciated to bring these castes at par with the other citizens of India?

4. An objective study of the various schemes launched by the State Government of Punjab for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and their impact on them.
Though, in Punjab, the history of many a State welfare schemes for the Scheduled Castes goes well past to the several decades before and after independence, yet the efforts in this regard got a big push and became more concerted after the establishment of a separate Directorate of Welfare (Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes) by the State Government in the year 1994-1995. The present study for the sake of continuity, consistency and coherence of data is mainly based on the data drawn from the period 1994-95 to 1998-1999.

5. To know the approach and strategy adopted by the State Government to ameliorate the condition of the Scheduled Castes in the State, the various schemes launched and their intended benefits, the quantum of funds spent and their sufficiency as to the task on hand. Whether the measures adopted over the years are in the right track and direction? Whether the benefits of welfare schemes have reached to the people for whom they were intended to or have been appropriated by few in these castes? Whether the scarce financial resources have been used prudently and efficiently or have been frittered away and wasted upon some non-productive schemes?

6. Last but not the least, to know the extent to which the ideas and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi have been incorporated and followed by the State in framing and implementing the various welfare schemes for the Scheduled Castes?

The methodology of the study consists of two approaches at the different stages of the work,

1. The first one is the Historical Approach which deals with the origin of the caste system. This part also deals with an analysis of the writings of Mahatma Gandhi
and that of Dr. Ambedkar. Apart from his ‘Autobiography’ or ‘The Story of My Experiment with Truth’ and ‘Satyagraha in South Africa’ the only other original work which deals with Gandhi’s thought in a systematic manner is ‘Hind Swaraj’. Rest of his writings in the form of letters, speeches, notes and interviews are now available in a 100-Volume project named ‘The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi’. Similarly, all the speeches and writings of Dr. Ambedkar are also available in a 15-Volume project named ‘Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches’. The text of the deliberations held in the Constituent Assembly are also available in the form of ‘Official Reports’ published by the Government of India. Thus the study in this part is based on the original resources. The secondary sources wherever used are just to cross-check the information taken from the primary sources.

II. Next is the empirical work. It is an analysis and examination of the various schemes launched for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes by the Government in the State of Punjab. For it all the methods of data collection i.e. Observation (both participant and non-participant), Questionnaire and Interviews have been used. The relevant data of the Government of Punjab on the subject have been consulted at length and scanned. For this purpose, the investigator also being an official of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department ( The Comptroller and Auditor General of India) and dealing with the State of Punjab ( Office of the Principal Accountant General, Punjab, Chandigarh ) had an authentic and easy access to the data.

For the analysis of data collected an effort has been made to correlate Approach-I to Approach-II
I want to utilise this opportunity to acknowledge my profound gratitude to all those who helped me in completing this work.

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CHANDIGARH

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