CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
I. INTRODUCTION

Any discussion on Scheduled Caste (SC) people embracing their socio-cultural and welfare aspects would remain incomplete in the absence of a brief account of their genesis, and socio-economic characteristics. An attempt has, therefore, been made in the present study to throw some light on the genesis of SCs, the diverse problems they are confronted with in the management of their household affairs within the limited resources available to them, and the extent to which the constitutional provisions aimed at easing their socio-economic problems have been successful in protecting their interests.

It is an undeniable fact that the economic development of a country depends much upon the quality of its human resources. But history reveals that the Indian society has not only been divided along caste lines, but also has suffered as a result of diverse social inequalities emanating from an old myth of divine origin which propagates that people of different castes originated from different limbs of Lord 'Brahma', the creator of this universe. The caste system in India has, therefore, been hierarchical in nature, and serves as an important determinant of an individual's status in the society. The division of society along caste lines gave a privileged status to the people of upper castes who dominated and ruled over the people of lower castes in every walk of life for centuries, finally leading to a complete subjugation and exploitation of the latter by the former.
As described in the scriptures, there was no caste system during the Vedic period. But subsequently, based on the principle of divine origin, people were categorised according to their duties and professions which were then transferred from one generation to the other. Ultimately, for convenience and discipline in the society, four categories viz., Brahmins (priests), Kshyatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (businessmen), and Sudras (menials) were named as castes, and the Sudras who attended to the menial jobs of the society were later named as "Scheduled Castes" in our constitution. Gandhiji called them "Harijans". These people were entirely dependent on the grace of the higher caste people, and practically lived on annual doles. Such humiliating dependence of the SCs on the Caste Hindus gave way to a sense of discrimination among different groups, and perpetuated a sense of superiority and inferiority complex. Hence, the caste system which was developed through functional assignment of duties for disciplined functioning of the society, led to the fixity of occupations by birth with restrictions on inter-mixing, inter-dining, and social proximity. It was this caste system, which isolated many sections of the society from the main stream of Hinduism, and led to the sufferings of the segregated Scheduled Castes. This social inequality gave birth to the institution of untouchability. The ultimate outcome was that these untouchables were reduced to a very low social and economic status in the traditional Hindu Society, who eked out their living by working for the landlords, traders, and other well-to-do people of the society.
In order to have a detailed account of the depressed castes, the census report of 1911 made an attempt to list out the castes suffering from social and religious inequalities in consonance with the traditional caste theory. The census report of 1921 used the term 'depressed class' to identify communities who suffered from social stigma and ritual pollution. However, the term 'Scheduled Castes' owes its origin to the Government of India Act, 1935, first coined by the Simon Commission, and later embodied in the Section 309 of the Constitution. The British Government for the first time issued an order in 1936, identifying the castes who were brought within the ambit of the term 'Scheduled Castes' in different provinces. The communities brought within the ambit of SCs, irrespective of their place of living, not only suffered from social evils but also were deprived of occupational placements at par with the caste Hindus, and were prevented entry to places of Hindu worship.

In this backdrop of existing social structure with its roots in caste system, the Harijans suffered a greater degree of deprivation in fulfilling their minimum needs. This state of affairs cannot solely be attributed to the vicious cycle of poverty as such. Other factors which contribute a great deal are prejudices, taboos, superstitions, and cultural beliefs held firmly against them over centuries. Hence, economic plight coupled with superstitions and prejudices made them vulnerable in every walk of life. The discriminatory treatment of the Harijans was evidenced in non payment of prescribed minimum wages, forced labour, repayment of ancestral debt, besides indignities of women and other humiliating actions by
After Independence, situation changed very fast, and emphasis was laid on socio-economic upliftment of the SCs through constitutional provisions. Many welfare schemes in the field of education, health, nutrition, housing, land distribution, village reconstruction, and employment generation initiated during different plan periods brought a change in the lifestyle of this underprivileged mass reeling under poverty.

In India we have adopted the minimum standard of living as the yardstick to define poverty. The concept of poverty line is based on three components: (a) the minimum nutritional level for subsistence, (b) the cost of minimum diet that may provide the minimum nutritional requirement and (c) the per capita consumption expenditure on diet. The Indian Planning Commission has defined poverty line on the basis of recommended nutritional requirement of 2400 calories per person per day for the rural areas and 2100 calories per person per day for the urban areas. In consonance with the above calorie requirement, the Seventh Five Year Plan put the per capita per month consumption expenditure at Rs 107 per rural, and Rs 122 for urban areas at 1984-85 prices as the cut-off points to identify the extent of poverty. On the basis of the above criteria, it was estimated that the magnitude of poverty in rural and urban areas during the Seventh Plan period were of the order of 41% and 28% of the total population, respectively. If the cut-off point of Rs 11,060 per household per annum as prescribed for the Eighth Plan period is taken into account, the magnitude of poverty would be still higher.
However, there is no difference of opinion about the fact that the magnitude of poverty in rural areas is worse than that in urban locations. The obvious reason for such difference in the extent of poverty between the urban and the rural settings may be attributed to the differences in the availability of avenues for employment, and consequently income in the two situations. In the countryside, the rural poor, particularly the Scheduled Castes, being devoid of land assets of their own and human capital in terms of skill and education, are the worst sufferers. As such, the income of these households consisting of unskilled labour force engaged in tiny land holdings, wage employment, and low paid menial jobs in non-farm occupations is just sufficient to eke-out a living. This does not mean that there has been no positive change in the level of income and the level of living of the Scheduled Castes in course of time. During the last four and a half decades, positive changes in the above direction have taken place, but the changes are not as spectacular as was expected. The concept of rural development embodies enrichment of quality of life of the masses who are ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and ill-educated. Therefore, in the present context, the development of underprivileged communities assumes a new dimension than was conceived a few years back. It is not the economic betterment in terms of increased level of employment and income that alone counts; it is rather the level of education, health, sanitation, and nutrition which are of paramount importance, if the quality of
The past studies revealed that despite constitutional provisions and grant of equal citizenship rights to the SCs along with others, very little has so far been achieved in bringing about a desired socioeconomic change in their status. Large scale investment in the Harijan welfare programmes by different state Governments have yielded a lukewarm response. And in many states socioeconomic status, health and sanitation, and the general level of living of the SCs, mostly in rural areas, remain deplorable. It is only in the urban areas, that the life style of the SC people have changed for the better, and the constitutional guarantees have enabled them to lead a life almost at par with the other classes of the society. But the plight of their counterparts in the countryside has not undergone a significant change. It is the occupational placement coupled with increased money income that would bring about a change in the life style and can remove the existing social disabilities bridging the gap between the caste Hindus and the SCs.

About 100 million SC population in India being devoid of productive assets of their own in one form or the other, depend upon wage employment, leather work, and other low income occupations. The SCs as a farming community are reckoned with as either share croppers or sub-marginal or marginal farmers practising subsistence farming, and pursuing their inherited traditional occupations. The level of literacy of the SCs accounts for 14.7% as compared to 33.8% (excluding SCs and STs) at the all India level. The female
literacy is at the rock-bottom level of 6.44% as against the all India average of 22.5% (excluding SC's and ST's). This state of affairs serve as a bottleneck for the SC's in availing the new employment opportunities created by the Government.

A look at the scenario in the State of Orissa reveals that as per 1981 census, there are 93 SC communities numbering 38,65,543. This constitutes 14.66% of the total population of the state, and 3.7% of the total SC population of the country. Of the total SC population, 90.6% live in rural areas, while 9.4% live in the urban areas. Though the SCs are scattered all over the state, there has been a greater degree of concentration (52%) in the coastal districts. Keeping the concentration of SC population in view, anti-poverty programmes have been launched in different parts of the country, but the benefits of such schemes have not been uniform throughout. Since the definition of poverty changes over time, place, and also according to the stages of prosperity of a country or region, the socioeconomic status of the poverty ridden SCs too follows suit.

It is in this context, the assessment of socioeconomic status and the problems of management of the households of SCs in an economically backward state like Orissa assume special relevance. The present study is, therefore, a modest attempt in this direction, and covers five SC communities, viz., Bauri, Pana, Hadi, Kandara and Dhoba of the coastal district of Puri in the state of Orissa. The objectives of the present study are as follows:
1. To analyse the awareness of the sample households to various developmental programmes launched in the study area,

2. To study the attitude of the sample households towards religious beliefs, superstition, and modern amenities of life,

3. To examine the socioeconomic status of the sample SC households and to delineate the factors that determine their level of employment and income,

4. To examine the consumption pattern (food and non-food items) of the sample households and the magnitude of savings and dis-savings, if any, under different situations,

5. To examine the nutritional requirements and gap, if any, through inter-personal, inter-activity and inter-income group comparison, and

6. To study the role of adult male and female members of the sample households in the decision making process relating to various economic and socio-cultural problems.

Hypotheses

1. With the exception of various welfare programmes, the outlook of the sample SC communities for housing, drinking water, health and sanitation has changed for the better,
2. Through better awareness the SC communities participated in various welfare programmes which resulted in their socioeconomic and cultural changes for better,

3. With the increase level of employment and occupational mobility their total and disposable income and consequently the asset position improved significantly which bettered their socioeconomic status,

4. The consumption pattern of the SC households was greatly influenced by the generation of additional income and savings,

5. Under changed situation, the respondents have been aware of the balanced diet and have eliminated the gap between nutritional requirement and intake,

6. The sample SC households adopted the norms of the caste Hindus in respect of various socio economic decisions.

Plan of the Thesis

The dissertation has been planned to contain six chapters. The first chapter begins with an introduction highlighting the genesis of the SCs and their diverse problems, the objectives and the hypotheses for the present study. The second chapter presents a brief account of the past work done by different researchers at the national and the state level in this direction. The third chapter deals with the Materials and Methods which embodies geographical profile of the study area,
viz., the district, the selected blocks, and the selected villages. It also includes the sampling technique followed and the analytical procedure adopted in analyzing the data collected from the sample respondents to fulfil the objectives. The fourth chapter throws light on the governmental efforts in initiating various developmental and welfare programmes for the socioeconomic upliftment of these downtrodden people. The fifth chapter contains the findings of the study embodying the socioeconomic and cultural life, level of employment and income, health and sanitation, consumption pattern, level of living and the decision making process along with a critical examination of the same to provide meaningful interpretation of the situation with plausible reasoning. The last chapter concludes with a summary of the findings with special emphasis on the problems that the SC households face in deriving maximum benefits from the Government welfare programmes, and places on record some suggestions which may be useful for the future policy-makers of the Government in formulating and executing various welfare programmes for the SC populace.