Preface

As a result of Hindu caste system, two broad segments had developed in the Indian society, namely, one, of those who were privileged and the other one, of those on whom restrictions were imposed, say, untouchables. The worst sufferers of the system were untouchables. The Scheduled Castes were kept apart from the rest of the Society due to the prevalent practice of untouchability. The Indian caste system based on the notion of purity and pollution believed that the Scheduled Castes were impure and polluted. As a result they were forced to live outside the village/town proper and suffered from discrimination in all walks of life. The Scheduled Castes were placed low in social hierarchy and suffered from disabilities and discrimination. These disabilities can be categorized as (a). occupational disabilities; (b). educational disabilities; (c). social, cultural and religious disabilities and (d). political disabilities.

Looking into occupations of the Scheduled Castes it can be said that the Scheduled Castes were economically poor and generally were dependent on agricultural labour and other low-income occupations besides their caste occupation. In fact, the greatest majority of Scheduled Caste occupational force is engaged in agricultural labour in rural areas. Besides this all the primary leather workers, scavengers, and who deal with carcass recovery and flaying were almost the Scheduled Castes. In urban areas, a large proportion of cart pullers, hamalis, and the like manual workers and other unorganized non-agricultural wages labourers and civic sanitation workers belong to the Scheduled Castes.

The Scheduled Castes also suffered from educational disabilities for centuries. Historically they had been most uneducated and illiterate group. The mass illiteracy among the Scheduled Castes was in turn was due to the social and religious sanctions imposed on them. The sacred books, Brihaspathi and Manusmrithi have prohibited any attempt on the part of Sudras, leave alone Scheduled Castes, to recite Hindu religious slokas and if they ventured to do so, the smrithi ordained that the tongue of such person be cut off.

Untouchability was the major social disability of the Scheduled Castes. Hindu society insisted on the segregation of untouchables and would not allow them to live inside their own areas. The caste Hindus public appearance and behaviour is contrary to their true intentions and feelings. The caste Hindus discriminates the Untouchables. Scheduled Castes’ social identity was highlighted by the fact that they were generally required to live at a distance
from the main village settlement. Residential segregation was somewhat strictly enforced. Thus, most of them lived in the outskirts of the villages and slums in the towns, in Kutch houses that were made of mud and thatched roof. The life of these sections of people had been miserable and unhygienic. The environment of these people was in no way conducive to the achievement of better standards.

Caste has been most important locus of power in traditional India. The power structure in such a society is characterized as tradition oriented and ascriptive. A largely feudal society emphasized, the rule of elders and tradition, and the dominance of higher castes. In such society power is generally linked with economic religious factors besides education. Brahmins held power in Indian society for a long time because of the importance given to the ritual status and knowledge in the past. Later the economically dominant castes wrested power from Brahmins. This was made possible because of the shift in the importance from the ritual status and knowledge to number land holdings and economic power.

After India attained independence the plight of the Scheduled Castes was the primary concern of the social reformers and planners and their efforts shaped into a formidable action. Independent India’s commitment to equality, socialism and welfare led to the launching of multi pronged welfare measures for the development of the Scheduled Castes who constitute a formidable section of the population in the country. The planners of Independent India visualized social change among the Scheduled Castes by bringing about social mobility among them.

Constitutional protection was provided to the Scheduled Castes to undo the social injustice and all forms of exploitation and to bring them into the main stream of development. The Indian Constitution has provided a Section for the abolition of untouchability and the Union as well as the State governments has taken legislative measures to enforce this section. Apart from this, every effort has been made to promote the educational and economic interests of these sections of society. They are offered big fee concessions and stipends to help them to carry on their academic pursuits.

The post-independence period has not brought any socio-economic and political change in the life of the Scheduled Castes. Equality cannot be achieved if we treat the strong and the week, the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the intelligent on the same footing. Constitutional provisions, political process since independence and the impact of leadership
of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have created a wave of rising expectations in the life of Scheduled Castes in general and in the life of the neo-Buddhists in particular. Gradually, since then, the Scheduled Castes are slowly becoming aware of their rightful place in society and are asserting for the reordering of society for their betterment and advancement. This has created a number of pressures and pulls resulting in socio-political tensions in Indian society.

After more than 60 years of independence, it is pertinent to ask what has been the impact of the policies of the government on the socio-economic conditions of those belonging to the Scheduled Castes. There have been a considerable number of empirical studies on the Scheduled Castes in India since independence. Apart from such studies, many social scientists have elaborately analyzed the changing status of scheduled castes in India. However, most of these studies are either based on secondary data or localized when some primary data have been collected. Each of these covered some limited aspects of development in a certain region. No comprehensive study based on primary data and covering multiple aspects of improved status has been undertaken so far. The earlier studies reveal that the pace of change is rapid in urban areas whereas the change is slow or absent in rural areas. In view of the above, the overall aim of the present study is to examine the present status of the Scheduled Castes in the rural and urban areas of the Andhra Pradesh in terms of education, occupation and social status in Andhra Pradesh. This study is unique because this is a micro level study. No study has been yet conducted on these lines in Andhra Pradesh. The task was onerous. But a humble attempt is made to investigate the status of Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh in general and the three regions, namely, Coastal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema in particular. Concerted and sincere efforts are made to study the status of the scheduled castes. The author owns the responsibility of any omissions and commissions in the study.