

Women Empowerment and Its Different Aspects: Reference to Scheduled Caste Woken

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Abstract

Women empowerment can be described as a process to help women become financially strong, to be educated and help them enjoy an independent social status. Women have gone through a lot of struggles in the past times for this kind of life. Various incidents come across where the women have to prove themselves for each and every decision they take and have to depend upon the male folk for everything they can do in their own lives. These cases have directly or indirectly hampered the life and the status of a women, spoiled their dignity to a great level and curbed their independence. Women empowerment means giving that power to the women which can help them to break all the shackles of the life and move forward towards a better life without thinking about what the society and the family would think.

Keywords

Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment, Legal Empowerment, Educational Empowerment, Decision Making Power, Justice, Equal Status.

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Introduction

S.C. woman is said to have more freedom than her counterpart in the higher castes. But this freedom does not really mean anything. This is the freedom given to her by men for their own convenience. She goes out of the home to work long hours to earn some money, however meager it may be, and on this money she has no right. She is the breadwinner of the family but the bread eludes her. Despite working long hours at home and outside, she is the last claimant to the food at home. Worst still, she suffers exploitation at the workplace at the hands of employers and superiors. This situation has gone on for centuries, ever since patriarchy came into existence. One has incidents of discrimination against S.C. Women in Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. It has been going on since ancient times. In the Medieval period also S.C. women performed functions like that of Dai, Dhobin, Nayin, Pathiwali, etc. But there was some respect for them in those days.

S.C. Women in Ancient Period

During this period women were respected and treated equally like men. In educational scenario of this period. Gargi and Maitrayee are well-known names who excelled as scholars. Sita, Damyanti, Draupadi and three of the Panchkanyas, Ahilya, Tara, and Mandodari are still the inspirations for today's society. Around 500 BC approximately the importance as well and status of the women started alleviating due to Smritis and other religious texts giving diktats which adversely affected women's lives. It is revealed that Shudras, Brahmins, and Vaishyas were the castes who tackled and treated their women badly by formulating several laws and having them to follow otherwise they compelled them to undergo a horrible punishment.

S.C Woman in the Medieval Period

A few women belonging to the S.C. community performed useful socioeconomic functions in the Medieval period. They were the potter, Dai, Pathiwali woman and Nayan.

Scheduled Caste Woman Status in Present Scenario

Today S.C. woman performs as agricultural labourers, in factories as domestic servants in the houses of the upper caste. She is visible in most of the unorganized sectors like construction work, Beed Rolling etc. Today, she competes with men in the casual labor market willing to do any kind of work owing to a lack of working opportunities.

Today S.C. women are working in various government offices, they are active members of Zilla Parishads but they are still bearing the burden of a double-

day, sexual division of labor and overall patriarchal ideology without any protest. Why is it so? It is not sufficient to answer it only in terms of political economy or Brahminical ideology. Amongst other social movements, the women's movement is unique in many ways. Feminist consciousness makes one aware of the forms of power relations that men and women have with each other and also adds to our understanding of what it means by the common saying that 'all women constitute a caste' i.e. 'Pichdhi Jat'. This truth or reality is coupled with glorifying womanhood in Hindu patriarchal terms and dividing women into different castes. Male dominance or patriarchy is so deeply rooted in us that both men and women in India will readily offer that patriarchy is a Western phenomenon and a Western problem. Women in the developed world are living in a degraded status because of "their" permissive value system, market orientedness and consumerism. It is commonly argued by many social thinkers that in India women are more protected by community, caste, kinship and family networks.

Scheduled Caste Women in the Agricultural Sector

In the unorganized agricultural sector S.C. women work for land preparation, sowing, planting, irrigating, threshing, winnowing, storing crops etc. About eighty percent of women who live in rural areas work in agriculture. These women work as casual or daily wage laborers who are indebted to the landlords, agreeing to pay back the loan by working on their farms. These women grow food for their families and for the society and they also grow cash crops such as potatoes, apples, pears etc. The division of labor is acute in this field and has led to wage differentials. These women earn very low wages but perform physically tiring jobs.

Health Issue of Scheduled Caste Women

Scheduled caste women eat only the left-overs after serving their husbands and children. It is useless to speak of nutritious food, in the light of acute poverty. These women who grow food for others, have to fill their stomachs with water! This is really the pathetic condition of S.C. women. Since these women don't eat well, they also can't feed their children properly. Malnutrition among S.C children is a common problem. If they get ill they can't afford medicines. Money-minded doctors and medical practitioners do not provide medical help to people with insufficient money. They demand high fees which these people cannot afford.

Even at the workplace there is no such benefit as medical allowance, or medical leave for them, because most of the S.C women work in the unorganized sector. Unless these women work, they can't feed the family and they can't run the

family. Here, it is worthwhile to mention some of the health problems of S.C. women related to their work.

The Contemporary Scenario Women's Performance and Multiple Roles

The achieving of equality of status for women was one of the specific objectives which are implicit in the preamble, Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle of the state policy of the Constitution of India. But a deeper examination of this constitutional guarantee reveals the heterogeneous nature of the Indian society such as inequalities in the social structure based on sex, caste and community. Social change is a complex process that does not affect the different sections of women uniformly, therefore, the status of women cannot be defined easily. A detailed and careful study is needed to understand the nature of constraints and disabilities that affect the women in their performance and multiple roles in the society, economy and polity as members of different sections of the population and with their level of social status.

The women leaders who enjoyed the power also have neglected downtrodden women and did not try to improve their social, economic and political status. But they must have played an important role in forming the social programmes, and legislation for the welfare of women. Regrettably and unfortunately for S.C. women are neglected in considering their share in the active politics and their potential in the national paid lower than men. There is no self-employment among S.C. women. The only way to help them come out of this exploitation is to encourage them by providing opportunities for self-employment. Adequate training, education, financial inputs, tie-ups for the supply of material and marketing of finished goods that they may produce, need to be provided by some agency. Entrepreneurship should be encouraged among S.C. women.

Now we will examine the social political economic and educational aspects empowerment of scheduled caste women in India.

Social Empowerment of Scheduled Caste Women

Most of the scheduled caste women are living in rural areas. Schedule-caste women are socially discriminated from the other high-caste people. Gender discrimination starts at a very early stage in the life of a scheduled caste girl. Normally girl children are retained at home to look after the siblings. Another thing is the compulsory marriage of the girls at a very early age after which the education is stopped. Generally in the male-dominated society, polygamy is allowed and more so in many scheduled caste families. Because of this the position of the women deteriorated. Joint family system, polygamy, property structure, early marriage and

permanent widowhood were hurdles for the development of all women in early marriage and permanent widowhood was a barrier for the development of all women in the early period. But in the 20th century after the Mahatma Gandhian movement to educate women, slowly changes granted in the situation of women. But here, rural women were more blessed than urban women because divorce and remarriage were permitted for them.

Political Empowerment of Schedule Caste

Political participation of scheduled caste women is also very low. Starting from the 1st Lok Sabha to the 16th Lok Sabha very few scheduled caste women were able to make a room for them to participate in politics and involve themselves in the decision-making process. In the first Lok Sabha only one seat was won by scheduled caste women namely Margate Chandra Sekhar who has given Deputy Health Minister. In the Second Lok Sabha elections three scheduled caste women got elected. No scheduled caste women were given any port polio. In the third Lok Sabha the number of scheduled caste women who got elected increased to four. In the Fifth Lok Sabha schedule caste women were elected. This time also nobody was given a ministerial position. Only one scheduled caste women were got elected in the sixth Lok Sabha. This time also nobody was given any port polio. In the seventh Lok Sabha four scheduled caste women were elected.

Three scheduled caste women were elected in the ninth Lok Sabha. Here, also nobody was given a ministerial position. In the tenth Lok Sabha five scheduled caste women were elected. Surprisingly ten scheduled caste women were elected in the eleventh Lok Sabha. Unfortunately this time also nobody got opportunity to take part in the decision-making process.

Nine scheduled caste women were elected in the Thirteen Lok Sabha. This time also nobody was given port polio. Coming to Fourteen Lok Sabha ten scheduled caste women were elected. In the Fifteen Lok Sabha seven scheduled caste women were elected. Among them only Panabaka Lakshmi was given Petroleum Minister. In the Sixteen Lok Sabha three scheduled caste women were elected. No scheduled caste woman was given any port polio in the Modi Cabinet.

From the above statistics, it is clear that though the number of scheduled caste women participation is increasing, but scheduled caste women's involvement in the decision-making process has been marginal due to male and other forward caste people.

Educational Status of Scheduled Caste Women

Educationally scheduled caste women are slowly in the process of development. In most of the cases, the dropout rates of girls in primary and secondary

education are higher in this community due to various reasons. The following are the main reasons:

1. Resistance from the family to send girls to schools.
2. Fear of insecurity in villages.
3. Lack of physical facilities like accommodation, school, transport and medical facilities.
4. The girls were forced to take care of the siblings when the parents were away at work.
5. Girls were forced to do domestic chores which prevented them from attending school.
6. Working to earn for the family prevents the girls from attending school.
7. Working with parents to earn their livelihood in beedi factories or other unorganized sectors made them illiterate.
8. Because of the sick and unemployed parents girls were forced to work.
9. Many were forced to get married at a young age, which stopped schooling.
10. The social restriction is that the girls should stop education after marriage.

Schedule caste women belonging to the creamy layer of the society are better with good education and socially and economically they are well off like other high castes. In rural areas, the first generation girls from scheduled castes need the attention of the Government and other organizations.

Economic Condition of Scheduled Caste Women

Women work equally along with men in the scheduled caste community 75% of scheduled caste women are agricultural laborers and they are the backbone of the Indian economy. Though scheduled caste women earn equally along with their husbands, but they do not have economic freedom most of the scheduled caste women in urban areas are working in an organized sectors. In municipalities and municipal corporations they are working as scavengers and sweepers. Because of education now the economic position of scheduled caste women is somewhat better. Some of the scheduled caste women are placing themselves in higher services like IAS and IPS also. They are trying their level best to compete equally along with men in all aspects.

Political Dimensions of Empowerment : It means to have a system in which the women would get equal rights in the political sphere, there would be participation of women in the decision-making process of the country and even reservation for them in different political systems.

The political dimension of empowerment, as stated earlier, relates to the acquisition sharing or the bestowing of power to women. Political empowerment requires greater political participation on the part of women and getting at state and national levels.

Legal Women Empowerment: It includes the provision of a good legal structure that would help to provide the rights as well as help women get justice whenever required.

Legal empowerment relates to the laws providing equal opportunities for women in various fields, and protecting them. There is no doubt that Indian Constitution clearly grants gender equality and Articles 14, 15 and 16 are important in this respect. The State also imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. However, despite the equality and many personal laws relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession and adoptions, the legal empowerment of women remains a distant goal so far as field situation is concerned. They are still discriminated and exploded in the name of patriarchy, tradition, religion or social sanctions, The ground reality also shows that female infanticide, domestic violence as well as crimes against women are on the increase in India. Legislation in itself cannot create miracles as it has only a limited impact.

Economic Women Empowerment : It implies providing women with a better and good life, helping them earn for themselves and their families, and reducing their financial dependence upon the others.

Economic empowerment of women means their economic independence or access to an inherited or self-generated income. This is considered an important dimension of empowerment of women. There is no doubt that employment opportunities have increased for women and many of them are employed in meaningful employment. Economic independence has paved the way for the enjoyment of other freedoms. At times of calamity such as widowhood it has enabled women to be self-dependent and courageous. In the modern context women are participating in large numbers in medicine, engineering and management and are exhibiting to the world that they could play an equally important role as men in nation-building.

Educational Women Empowerment : It means providing women with the knowledge, confidence, skills, and education that would help them to become empowered. Education not only helps women to gain knowledge but also provides the necessary courage and inner strength to face the challenges of life. It has enabled them to procure a job and supplement the income of the family and achieve social

status. It is often argued that education is a powerful tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women indeed the different organs of the United Nations (e.g. UNICEF) and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step in women's equality. The Government of India, New Education Policy (NEP) points its hope to this strategy.

Conclusion

The contribution of employment to the improvement of women's position is largely seen in the modern sector. Unlike agricultural and other related traditional jobs, most of which operate in extended domestic milieu, jobs, most of which operate in extended domestic milieu modern jobs operate in fixed places outside the family and have fixed working hours, tenure and better pay. They enable women to move out of their problems and evaluate their position vis-a-vis men in many areas of social life.

Various schemes introduced by central and state governments like DWCRA, JRY, TRYSEM, IRDP etc. have provided new income-generation opportunities to women. Besides, the role of NGOs in giving such opportunities has also been. been very important. Even self-employment has become an important means for the emancipation of women. Which is considered necessary for their empowerment?

However, despite all these, their percentage in the labor force in organized and unorganized sectors is quite low their proportion is still low in government and private jobs. They are mostly engaged in low-paid jobs and even discriminated against in terms of wages for equal hours of working In other words, gender gratification still exists in the economic field.

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