



Dalit women in India: An Analysis of Sociological, Political and psychological Dimension

KIRAN VERMA and VIKAS KUMAR

M.Phil. Research Scholar

Department of Adult Continuing Education and Extension

University of Delhi, Delhi -110007, India

ABSTRACT

In Indian society Dalit women are most discriminated and deprived section in our caste-based system. They have been not only victim of the structural hierarchy of caste, but also face inequality in this patriarchal society. They are not only suffering from gender discrimination but also faces economic, political and social deprivation. The main objective of this paper is to understand the political, social and psychological dimensions of Dalit women in India.

KEYWORD

Dalit women, Gender Inequality, Caste-Discrimination, Political Rights, Social Right, Psychological Rights, Constitutional Rights, Legal framework

INTRODUCTION

In Indian society there are thousands of castes available but broadly it is divided into four parts which is very hierarchical in nature. This order of varnas hierarchy is described in Hindu scriptures or religious textbooks. The main purpose of this varna system in this pyramid structure is to regulate the social system through performing their work for the society. In ancient time of Vedic period (1500- 1000 BCE) this classification is based on the occupation or profession of society like Brahmins (priests, teachers, intellectuals), Kshatriyas (warriors, kings, administrators), Vaishyas (agriculturalists, traders, farmers) and Shudras (workers, laborer's, artisans) but over the year passing this become more rigid and determined by the birth. Here Shudras were considering the bottom level in this caste system. They were generally known as untouchables, Dalits or harijans.

The word Dalit has been used for the backward and exploited section of the society. Dalits were subjected to basic human rights, social and structural exploitation. Dalits constitute 16.23% of the total population and Dalit women numbering 49.96% of the total Dalit population (Census 2011). This class faces economic, social, cultural, and political discrimination. According to Dr. D.N Majumdar "Untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes."

In India, women are the most deprived section in our society. According to the 2011 census report, they face gender discrimination along with denied various kinds of opportunities like education, work from outside, political participation, etc. by our traditional society for the ancient time. Many cultural & social restrictions imposed on them by their family and the traditional cultural system of society. The aim of this paper to understand the different approaches like socio, political and psychological dimensions which may directly or indirectly affect Dalit women life.

SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Historically we all know that Dalits are treated or viewed by higher caste as physically impure or desecrated. As they are not allowed to enter the main living area of villages or towns, live close to, or even cross the path of the upper caste. At this time, they were not allowed to buy their land or it is seen by the brahmin that their impure shadow can destroy their religious value or as we called “*Dharm Bhrasta*”.

The status of women in India is socially very backward, although the news of violence, rape, sexual harassment, and crimes against women has been seen in the newspapers. But if we talk about Dalit women, then the category of crimes against them is very wide. The lived experiences of Dalit women are painful. “When drawing on bitter memories and writing about them, the tendency to reconstruct instead of resurrecting the past is inevitable” (Whitehead, 2009:126).

In their social life, they face social and caste discrimination in their surroundings, as well as they forced to follow the patriarchal evils created by the hierarchal masculine society. They are face inequality in society, religious discrimination like they are not allowed to enter the temple or use other common natural resources of villages like water. Due to the socio-economic backwardness, they are victims of the purdah system, dowry system, community violence, prostitution, and other serious sexual offenses.

POLITICAL DIMENSION

Political representation and participation are very important pillars in the development of any country. India is the largest democracy in the world, that is why there is a lot of diversity on the basis of political, cultural, gender, caste, etc. In present times, as a result of various social and legal reforms, Dalit community political participation in Indian politics has been increased. Many leaders like *Kanshiram*, *Mayawati*, *Mulayam Singh Yadav*, etc. have come from this marginalized section and became powerful leaders in Indian politics but the representation of Dalit women in Indian society is very limited. However, under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) provides the one-third of the total number of seats were reserved for women candidates, which has now been increased to 50 percent in many states to ensure their political participation at the local level.

In India, for a long time, there has been a demand to reserve 33 percent seats for women candidates in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Assembly. In this effort, in 2010, the Women's Reservation Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha but could not be passed by the Rajya Sabha.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Dalits in India are kept at the bottom in the hierarchal caste-based system of society. Today, even after the 70th year of independence the condition of the Dalit community remains very pathetic. They face untouchability or even caste-based violence by the higher class. Women are in our country still victims of gender discrimination, but if we talk about Dalit women they are witnesses of dual problems like caste discrimination, sexual exploitation, religious inequality at the social level with the impact of psychological level together.

There are many provisions in the Indian constitution to improve their social status. Article 17 of the constitution prohibited social practices of untouchability but in contemporary time, many social practices have been followed by the society such as untouchability, ban on entry of Dalit women into temples, not allowed using water from public wells or ponds, restriction of inter-caste marriages and discrimination in educational institutions. Dalit women are also a manual scavenger and, in many villages, they are keeping their town clear

regularly. They are socially excluded and faced many social and economic restrictions including access to the natural common resources of the town like water. They are even not allowed to enter the temples of the town.

In India Dalit women are one of the marginalized and socially excluded section of our society. The caste and gender discrimination, violence including rape, human trafficking, force to do prostitution activities all of these together makes their life extremely vulnerable.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Indian govt takes many steps to brought them in front line. Govt passed the manual scavenger Act 2013 and Atrocities 1989 that legally banned these discriminatory social practices and offensive customs which may stop the progress to Dalit women community. Govt should focus on Dalit Women community to improve their life and social status in society. There are many constitutional provisions in Indian constitution to use as a safeguard for their welfare. The main objective of these provision is to remove the various backwardness faced by Dalit women.

The most important provisions of the Indian constitution to use welfare for Dalit's women, improve their social status, and helps to keep them equivalent to upper caste peoples are given below:

1. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

- Article 14: Right to equality before law
- Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination on ground of Religion, Race, Caste, Sex or place of Birth
- Article 16: Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment
- Article 17: Abolition of Untouchability
- Article 19: protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech etc
- Article 20: Protection in respect of conviction for offences
- Article 21: Protection of life and personal Liberty
- Article 21a: Right to education

2. SOME SPECIAL PROVISIONS

- Article 330: Reservation of seats for SC/ST in house of people
- Article 332(iii): The number of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of any State under clause (1) shall as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats in the Assembly as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the State or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State or part of the State, as the case may be, in respect of which seats are so reserved, bears to the total population of the State.

3. STATE MACHINERY BODIES

- National commission for schedule caste: It is an Indian constitutional body established with a purpose to provide safeguards against the exploitation of Scheduled Caste and Anglo-Indian communities to promote their social, educational, economic and cultural interests, special provisions were made in the Constitution. Article 338 of the Indian constitution deals with National Commission for Scheduled Castes.

4. ACTS AND PROVISIONS

- The Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes (prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013
- The Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) ACT, 1955

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the main purpose of this paper was developed a understanding of the caste system and different problems face by Dalit women at present time. We have discussed the multidimensional approach to deeply understand the challenges faced by them. The above analysis is important in order to understand the effect of higher caste society attitude towards them at social, political and psychological level.

Further, we have discussed the different problems they have experienced day to day life which is gender exploitation or caste-based discrimination at the religious or social level as we have discussed already like not allowed to enter temple or uses of public resources. As we discussed above that they face economic deprivation and also social exclusion or considered to be impure, untouchables, or even their shadow has been taken desecrated by higher caste society.

The different challenges faced by Dalit women at the social, political and psychological level require different positive solutions which helps to improve their status at different level. Firstly, government policies should be implemented at the ground level. Secondly, government and state legislative should take collective measures against gender or caste-based discrimination and should take some legal safeguards for welfare of Dalits women community.

The empirical evidences like constitutional provision and legal norms discussed in this paper that Government of India should takes different steps for the improvement of that particular marginalized section of society or for the welfare of Dalit women. Therefore, the study concludes with the suggestions that the social inclusion of the Dalit women could possible if central and state government take some collective initiatives and strongly implemented at the root level of the community like increasing the participation of Dalit women in decision making bodies, spread awareness regarding education, manual scavenging carrying out through mechanized robot or machines and these types of caste based profession should strictly prevented and policies and acts regarding manual scavengers needs to implemented at the root level of the communities, ensure their participation in political representation or access to judicial process for judicial relief and lastly, through legal reforms, legal aid and counseling should be provided them to eliminate caste based discrimination. We positively hope that this study may also beneficial for other marginalized section of society and will provided a way to future research work.

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