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SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN ISSUES AND CHALLENGES: A SOCIOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyze the Scheduled Caste women. The Government has been paying less attention than they deserve, but it now appears to be slowly awakening. This study is basically exploratory in nature. But the prime motive of the study is to identify the institutional problems of the Scheduled Caste women and to remodel or redesign our institutional arrangements through a radical structural change with emphasis on equity and equality of women as par with men in all spheres of social life. Moreover, the insights emerging from the study point to the need for further research in the area. They could also be useful to the planners and policy makers to evolve new strategies for the educational development of Scheduled Caste women. Similarly, about two-thirds of the trained women were found employed, largely in wage employment but those engaged in self employment were marginal. Reality of Indian society plays its discriminatory part in India. In a male dominated society, Scheduled Caste women suffered unimaginable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape. The scheduled caste women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcastes, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour.

KEYWORDS: Prospects, violence, Issues, Challenges, Caste Discriminatory, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes 2000, approximately 75% of the Dalit girls drop out of primary school despite the strict laws of the Government of India, which hold reservations for Dalit children (National Commission n.pag). There are large numbers of reported atrocities on Dalit women that can be found recorded in various newspaper articles, journals, and government reports in India many of which can be viewed on www.ambedkar.org. The majority of the stories we read and hear are of bright young Dalit girls who are punished by the upper caste teachers in rural area of India, for daring to score good grades. Feeling rejected most girls in this situations drop out of school and have nowhere to turn but towards manual scavenging and other repulsive jobs (News Archives).

According to the Therefore, Dalit girls feel discouraged to enter education and we see the lowest literacy rate for Dalit girls compared to the Total population of educated upper caste girls (National Commission n.pag). The Annual Report of University Grant Commission for 1999-2000, shows that Dalits in general have very low participation rates in higher education (Annual Reports of University n.pag). Since only a small percentage of the total population of Dalit women are educated, the fate of the majority is very grim.

According to India's Ministry of Labour, 85% of the Dalit women have the most formidable occupations and work as agricultural laborers, scavengers, sweepers, and disposers of human waste. Many of these women work for minimal wages under the upper caste landlords, since it is proposed that by the National Commission for SC/ST that 85% of the Dalits are landless (News Archives). When the Dalit women refuse to work for ridiculously low wages or fail to follow their harsh orders it results open violence, humiliation, beatings, rape, and jail. There are also a number of cases where the houses of Dalit women have been burnt down (Agarwal; News Achives). In one particular case, a four months pregnant agricultural labourer, from the southern part of India, was stripped naked and beaten, in front of the whole village and her family by the upper caste landlord. Later, she was retained in jail, where the police beat her. This resulted in the miscarriage of her baby (News Archives).

The 1992-93 Annual report from the Ministry of Welfare shows 1,236 reported cases of rape on Dalit women and the National Commission for SC/ST shows that approximately 10,000 cases of human right violations on Dalits are reported every month. But what is even more disturbing, is that only one out of ten of the cases are reported annually whilst, nine go unreported. In addition to this, according to the Human Right watch Report, approximately 115 million children are in slavery and 2.6 million children are held as bonded labourers (Narula).

After fifty-five years of India's independence and despite the excellent laws in place to protect Dalit women, they are still suffering unimaginable atrocities from the high caste Hindus. It is believed that thousands of these cases go unreported and unpublicized because the poor Dalits that live in rural areas, who are the worst victims, have no control on power, wealth, justice, police and the media (Thind n.pag). The only way these Dalit women can escape the viscous cycle of poverty, abuse and oppression is through education. Through education more Dalit women can come to know their basic human rights and they can then raise an even stronger voice against abuse and exploitation from the upper castes (Thind; Agarwar). Many Dalit Non-Government Organizations (NGO's), both in India and abroad, have been involved in raising the plight of India's 250 million untouchables.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- * To study the background characteristics of Scheduled Caste women.
- * To analyze the various challenges faced by Scheduled Caste women.
- * To understand the forms and intensity of violence experienced by Scheduled Caste women.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper focus on scheduled caste women issues and challenges : a sociological observation This research paper is based on secondary source. data are drawn classified from the Publications of books, monthly journals, article, magazines, produced by the State Government, comprising literature review, and population census.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This empirical Literature study reveals that Scheduled Caste population in India, as per 1991 census, are women. Bringing all of them above the poverty line is a stupendous task. At both the national and the state level, plans and programmes exist for the economic and human resource development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but women have not received any special mention in these as to their needs, their problems and the methods for relieving them of their hardships. It has been taken for granted that whatever economic or welfare measures have been formulated for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, they will automatically reach their women also (Dahiwale, 1980).

Although women's representation in employment has increased somewhat, quantitatively, in qualitative terms, there is a greater shift towards low paid, low status and unskilled jobs in agriculture where the wages are very low. The literacy rates among women are disappointingly poor in comparison with women of other social groups. Rahate (1985) observed that some Scheduled Caste women in the rural areas had left their traditional occupation totally, whereas some were not willing to leave their traditional job. Doshi (1980) revealed that 72.4 per cent of the Harijans were engaged in nonconventional jobs. Heggade (1985) reported that the Scheduled Caste women remain till today the least benefitted section of our society. They are often not provided with proper share in work opportunities and continually remain being exploited.

The economic problems of women labour range from growing unemployment, low wages, long duration of work hours, stagnant and deteriorating working conditions, discrimination of wages between male and female workers, absence of job security, and irregularly implemented protective legislations like social security, minimum wages, social insurance etc. The study done by Murli et al. (1981), among women labourers in construction industry reveals that 46 per cent were Scheduled Castes and 21 per cent tribals. Their wage rates were lower than those of men and hardly any contractor adhered to the labour laws. Seventy-three per cent of the Harijan women in the study group of women worked as agricultural labourers,

Including those whose family had a small piece of land? Also, most of the girls between 10 and 14 (before marriage) worked as coolies.

Among the 55 Harijan families in Raigur, all the 68 adult women were agricultural labourers, including members of those 36 families who had a bit of land. include lack of adequate demand for their labour, and work places for women working within their one-room dwelling units which are also poorly lit and ventilated, which has negative effect on the health of home-based workers. The women who depend on middlemen often face harassment in the form of availability of less work, high rate of rejection as well as large cuts from their wages. Some women also experience sexual harassment. Ghosh (1993) reports that women of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are mainly involved in beedi-rolling scheme. Mandays available in this activity, around 275 days in a year, do not provide full 8 hours work in a day. Women had to work 5 hours a day on an average.

According to Gopalan (1987), the unequal status of women is owing to a vicious circle in which they have got caught. Their low levels or absence of literacy, coupled with low levels of skills, lead to low levels of employment and low wages, confining them very often to marginal categories of work or unpaid work. Consequently, their economic status gets depressed, in turn affecting their general status. Women continue to toil in labour intensive jobs like rice plantation, cleaning and storing grains, picking leaves and fruits, hand shelling groundnut, picking cotton seed, etc.

The kind of work they do is often monotonous and full of drudgery, rarely with any intervention of an appropriate technology. We see many examples of brave Dalit women who being quite aware of the horrifying truth and despite the heavy odds still strive to put an end to their suffering (Thind; Agarwal; News Archives). In doing so they most certainly ensure a brighter future for the generations to come. Ruth Manorama, an active member of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women, once stated that in a male dominated society, "Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class and gender" in which she sums up the plight of Dalit women, highlighting the fact that Dalit women are a distinct social group and cannot be masked under the general categories of "Women" or "Dalits" (News Archives).

BACKGROUND

Ancient India (3200-2500 B.C.), the caste system was non-existent since even the most learned men were good householders and had varied occupations. The women of ancient India were just as superior as men in learning, education, and intellect. The choice for her mate was according to her own wishes and marriage was practiced after the coming of age. She attended parties, competitions, and religious functions as she wished. The remarriage of young widows were also a common practice (Thind). The creation of a number of Hindu religious books including the Manusmriti, Atharva Vedas, Vishnu smriti, and many others like these and their strict compliance by the Brahmans (upper priestly hindu caste), led to a society in which equality between men and women was far from existent (Agarwal).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution, also makes it very clear in his article titled “The rise and fall of Hindu woman” that the root cause of suffering for women in India are these so called Hindu religious books (Thind; Agarwal). Books like the Manusmriti divide people into a stratified caste system and promotes inequality between men and women (Thind; Agarwal). According to the Manusmriti, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth (n.pag). It not only justifies the treatment of dalit women as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a number of violent atrocities on women as can be seen in the following verses (Agarwal; Manusmitri): Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskaras are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas.

The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras, they are as unclean as the untruth. (Manusmriti IX.18) A Brahman, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any shudra woman. (Manusmitri IX.25) Even the killing of a dalit woman is explicitly justified as a minor offence for the Brahmans: equal to the killing of an animal (Manusmitri). If the killing of an untouchable was justified as a minor offence, you can imagine the treatment they received throughout their lives.

Women and Aging Problems and Prospects: From Societal Perspective, The Disengagement Theory views aging as a process through which society and the individual gradually withdraw or disengage from each

other. There is transfer of power from the old to the young making it possible for society to continue to function. The Activity Theory asserts that in order to be happy in old age, individuals need to be active. It argues that if existing roles and relationships are lost it is important to replace them. Replacement to roles and relationships is necessary because when activity –level drops, there is corresponding drop in level of satisfaction.

The Continuity Theory is also known as the Development Theory. It states that older adults try to preserve and maintain internal and external structures by using strategies that maintain continuity. Continuity theory has excellent potential for explaining how people adopt to their own aging. Changes come about as a result aging person's reflecting upon past experience and setting goals for the future. Modernization Theory holds that elderly persons typically fail to change to satisfy the norms of the modernization process like material economy, achievement orientation, technological maturity and mass consumption. Against this backdrop, a research has been conducted to know the problems of aging women. The main objectives of the study are to know the various social, psychological, economic and health problems of the aging women. The study also suggests remedies for tackling their problems.

Issues and Challenges: 'Issues and Challenges for Development of Scheduled Caste Women and Children' was organized by the Ministry of Women and Child Development on 18th – 19th January, 2011 at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. The Conference reemphasized that the goal of holistic empowerment of Scheduled Caste Women and children would entail a radical transformation in the mindsets and societal perceptions within the family, the community and the nation as a whole. An integrated approach which focuses on the holistic empowerment and development of Scheduled Castes women and children is necessary to ensure that the constitutional vision of equality is fully realized. From the available data, it emerged that while in some sectors such as health and education, there had been an improvement and the gap between Scheduled Castes population and others had narrowed, disparities remained. A major limitation highlighted, in this context, was the absence of data, disaggregated by gender and social categories.

Caste Discriminatory; Indian society plays its discriminatory part in India. In a male dominated society, Dalit women suffered unimaginable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape. The scheduled caste women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcastes, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment

due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour. Even as we are in the 21st millennium, caste discrimination, an age-old practice that dehumanizes and perpetuates a cruel form of discrimination continues to be practiced. India where the practice is rampant despite the existence of legislation women continues to suffer discrimination. The situation of Scheduled Castes women in India needs special attention, thus there are several acts and policies to protect the rights of women had been enacted by the government of India. Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements.

Violence experienced by SC women: As this study focuses on crimes perpetrated against Scheduled Castes women on the basis of gender and caste. It is evident that the basic human rights of Scheduled Castes women is frequently violated and are often described as the oppressed of the oppressed, the violence and oppression on them being more complex and manifold even compared to Scheduled Castes men. There is an inseparable relationship between caste status, occupation and discrimination. The Scheduled Castes woman faces triple discrimination because she is an untouchable, of a poor class and is a woman. However, for a nuanced analysis of the data, it is necessary to differentiate between the types of crimes. For the purpose of this study we have grouped crimes using the following terms: Grievous cases: Murder, Rape, Attempt to Murder, Outraging of Modesty, Severe Physical Injuries, Kidnap and Abduction Non-Grievous cases: Physical abuse not resulting in injuries, Verbal abuse and mental harassment.

Under-reporting of violence: While analyzing the data on the numbers of reported cases of violent crimes against SC women, it is important to remember that many crimes go unreported and never appear in official records due to various reasons, ranging from non cooperation and reluctance of police to file the case under PoA Act to hesitation on the part of victim because of its poor socio-economic condition. In 2006, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) published a detailed study on violence against dalit women in four states in India. Among the surveyed women victims of caste based violence, 40.2% were unable to seek any type of legal redress and 26.5% were blocked in their attempt to seek redress before they reached the police.

The study also found that 1.6% of women obtained informal justice at the community level without involving the legal system and that 17.4% of women were blocked from obtaining legal redress either by the police or by other state actors. This means that that in 85.7% of instances of violence experienced by women in the four states, they were unable to take benefit or help of the legal system at all.² This suggests that the official figures of numbers of incidents of violence against SC women reported to the police in Maharashtra could be significantly lower than the number of incidents that actually take place and go unreported.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

empowerment of women and highlight the issues and challenges, Empowerment of women is essentially the process of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Kofi Annan takes violence against women as the most shameful of human rights violation.

To him ,” violence against women takes various forms such as : domestic violence, rape, trafficking in women , forced prostitution and violence in armed conflict such as murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy and honour killings, dowry related violence, female infanticide and parental sex selection in favour of male babies, female genital mutilation and other harmful practises and traditions Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Deepa Narayan in in her edited book ‘Measuring Empowerment’ takes “ Empowerment as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives “ It tries to analyze the effectiveness of women’s participation in the political process, largely to be judged on the basis of their political awareness, their capability of decision making in a male dominated society, their consciousness about various issues concerned with women viz. providing education to girls, health, nutrition, fighting against dowry, oppression, rape, molestation etc .

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This empirical study reveals that Scheduled Castes on the educational, social, and economical status of scheduled caste women in modern India. My aim is to highlight the harsh reality of the suppression, struggle and torture Scheduled Castes women face every day of their miserable lives. The hardships of Scheduled Castes women are not simply due to their poverty, economical status, or lack of education, but are a direct result of the severe exploitation and suppression by the upper classes, which is legitimized by Hindu religious scriptures of course, educated and employed women are less prone to exploitation, discrimination and humiliation, but it is the women, who are illiterates, low educated and still engaged in their caste based occupations are more discriminated, exploited and humiliated in the society. Indian society plays its discriminatory part in India. In a male dominated society, Scheduled Castes women suffered unimaginable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape.

The scheduled caste women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcastes, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour. Women from Scheduled Castes suffer from twin problems- born out of their social status and gender group. This study is basically exploratory in nature. As such it cannot make tall claims about the relevance of its findings. Moreover, the insights emerging from the study point to the need for further research in the area. They could also be useful to the planners and policy makers to evolve new strategies for the educational development Scheduled Castes women.

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