Changing Status of Women in Indian Society: A Study of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe Perspective

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Abstract

Democracy is one of the most contested creations made by homo sapiens to date. It furnishes liberty to decide what kind of life human beings aspire for themselves. It provides a platform for them to exercise their inherent creativity. Human society as such has been battling to attain the objective of democracy. But, the achievement of democratic objectives in real life is not an easy proposition. By many democracy has been comprehended just as a system for men only. Legal rights have not been snatched away from women. Women have been ill-treated in the past and till today in many places, the story is still the same. The society premised on patriarchal ideals acknowledged women only as "objects". Her only responsibility is to reproduce heirs to a male-dominated society and to furnish nourishment to the family by taking care of the home, by confining themselves to the four walls of that home.

Keywords: Democracy, Equality, Justice, Patriarchy, Feminism, Emancipation and Quest for Identity.

Acknowledgement

Introduction:

The patriarchal system repudiates the very basic tenets of democracy because women are treated as a "means and not an end". Advocates and theoreticians of democracy were not able to envision a democracy if half of humankind, i.e., women, are deprived of egalitarian status and rights in tandem with men. The women's movement aimed against patriarchal hegemony and the battle for political rights in developed countries is not a hyperbole.[1] Women theoretically have been given equal political rights with men as a result of their struggle. However, patriarchal deconstruction did not lessen male authoritarianism neither in politics or society. "Half of humankind is politically still a 'minority".[2] The situation in the developed countries in this regard is quite disheartening and in the developing countries, it is a mess.

Women have been guaranteed equal rights in the Constitution of India. Apart from utilizing their franchise, they have every right to contest for any socio-political office. Gender-based discrimination is strictly prohibited. Apart from one female Prime Ministership, one notes that women still need constitutional empowerment to be able to take part in the country's democratic socio-political procedures. Around 72 per cent of Indian women still depend on a male bread-winner, husband or son. The 28 percent that remains comprises of economically empowered women who are not able to exercise their full-fledged social freedom either restricted by their husbands or by societal pressure. The culture of patriarchy is very much responsible for weakening freedom and equality in the political domain. In fact, society's prevailing economic

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[1] Huber, Jean, (1973), *Changing Women in Changing Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago

[2] Saxena Kiran (1994), 'Empowering of Women: The Indian Context', *Indian Journal of Political Science,* vol. 55, no. 4, p: 391.

and social pattern has kept women behind; as a corollary, one can see meagre women in the public domain.[3]

In the present scenario, the term women empowerment has become a vital discussable topic. Each one speaks of womens' empowerment. But, it can be said that women who lived in ancient times were in a better status in society. The women in the Vedic era were living a golden life participating equally with men in spheres of human life.[4] Discrimination was not made between men and women. Women were completely free and equal to men during this time. Some of the great women were Apala, Ghosa, Visvara, Gargi, Lopamudra, Indrani etc... Certainly, during the era between 1500 B.C. to 500 A.D., i.e. the Post-Vedic era, the women had to tolerate a disadvantage as Manu had put down limitations on the privileges and rights of women and as a corollary of this, womens' status got a blow and disadvantage, and they were restricted to just the four walls of the houses. But, women's empowerment has become the slogan of the prevailing scenario. People all around the world speak of this phenomenon. A natural query could emerge as to why we need the empowerment of women. Are they less empowered? Is power really important for women? These are some of the instrumental and rudimentary questions and certainly, India too is confronted with this. But, in terms of every set of development and socio-economic status indices, women are confronted with worse-case scenarios than men in all areas and in all classes of the population. In work, jobs, spending health status, education and decision-making powers, there is a vivid disparity between female and male entitlements. Womens' empowerment has become more important as democracy and globalization progress.[5]

Status of Women in Society

Society in the early-Vedic time was matriarchal, and the position of women was much superior as juxtaposed to men. Women in the Vedic period were to be educated, and there was no purdah system. They had every right and will to choose a man of their choice and get married. They were interested in political issues, however, male domination did exist and was not completely absent. Later on, the Indian womens' condition started to deteriorate in the Post-Vedic era. Hindu Dharma Shastras and traditions had already made way for the absolute subordination of male-led society. Women had no property rights, for them their husbands were gods, and the system of sati and dowry undermined the freedom and dignity of the women. During the Mohammedan rule, upper-caste women were confined to their homes and there was a preference for early marriages. But, the British rule in a way change the scenario of women and helped in the revival and freedom and lost identity of Indian women. The idea of empowerment exhibits itself at every level of societal interplay. It is found in empowering the weak and the meek and the disenfranchised, providing access to the marginalized to tools and the resources they require to make their own destinies.[6]

Women empowerment in Indian society is imperative since the advantages will be experienced not just by the women themselves but by the nation and the society as a whole. True democracy can only be achieved when women take part in development and governance equally in every walk of life and decision-making level. Be it household chores, communities, workplaces, government, and the global domain, the participation of women will make society more responsive to the requirements and development of the nation or all the people.

Role of Indian Social Reformers

Social rigidity and irrational social practices became conspicuous features of eighteenth Century India. Religion, the pivot of Indian life, had always exercised great influence on the people in their social ways and habits and superstitions began to persuade all aspects of social life. Hindu women's legal position, especially in the sphere of inheritance, was unsatisfactory because

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[3] Ibid., p. 392.

[4] Chakrabarty, Manas and Yang L. Bhutia (2007), 'Empowering Indian Women in the new wake of Globlisation', *Indian Journal of Political Science,* vol. 68, no. 01, p. 115.

[5] Ibid., p: 115.

[6] Ibid., p: 116.

women were usually not included in succession to property, which led to their reliance on men. In such circumstances, one cannot imagine women's property and inheritance rights.

Long prior to the Eighteenth Century, some abominable socio-religious practices had crept into Hindu society, which impacted Hindu women in the worst way. The most obnoxious practices are child marriage, infanticide, polygamy, coerced celibacy of widows and burning of widows, i.e. Sati custom. The position of females touched the lowest ebb during the British period. It was not until the 19th Century that serious efforts were made by social repress to give women an honourable position in society. In the 18th century, when the British began to govern India, the position of women was miserable. The Vedic freedom that women were supposed to enjoy were no more in sight. Only the fossilized narrow practices of a commiserative static society existed.

The British rules launched a new kind of economy, educational system and state structure which laid the basis for the change in the status of women. At the time of the advent of Britishers, it was laid down that the laws to be looked after by the East India Company's courts in matters relating to personal laws were "those of the shastras with respect of Gentoos"[7]. Some Pandits were used to proffer the Law for the courts. The Privy Council held that: "The meaning placed upon the authorities by the commentaries is the meaning which binds the courts." The courts adopted certain commentaries ignoring others, while in Hindu law "customs could override the written texts of the law." Customs should have been permitted along with the commentaries and digests to be the source of Law. They did become more certain and informative, but it suppressed a dynamic element in Hindu society and made it unchangeable except by Legislation[8].

Consequently, evil customs like "sati" "purdati", polygamy, child marriage, and coerced widowhood began lowering the status of women in all aspects. From the Bengal Regulation of 1772, it could be interpreted that the Britishers were not willing to introduce changes in the private norms of the Hindus until the Hindus themselves demanded the introduction of some specific measures to ameliorate the Hindu female's position and status. Female feticide at their birth wasn't a popular practice worstly it was covertly practised. It was more prevalent among the wealthier and upper sections of the people in certain areas and reasons for infanticide varied, the common and important being to avoid difficulties in getting married. Whether it arose from pride or poverty, superstition or ignorance, the custom was a crime. The society tolerated it was itself proof of the degradation to which it has stopped[9].

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the vanguard of the Hindu Reformation, was the first of these pioneers. He believed in individual freedom and equality of all human beings despite sex. He attached the deeply rooted dominating hierarchic social institutions and introduced a social reform movement that culminated in the Brahmo Samaj establishment in 1828. Raja Ram Mohan Roy worked untiringly for the abrogation of 'sati' and Lord William Bentinck declared the practice of 'Sati' illegal in 1827 and a new era was ushered in. Many orthodox people made representations to the Governor-General against the abolition of 'Sati.' They argued that the practice of Sati was entirely discretionary and argued that it was obnoxious on the part of Britishers to have a devoted and pious Hindu lady deprived of the enjoyment of her nuptial rights in heaven with her husband[10].

The tragedy became all the more poignant when the widow was a child. Shri Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar[11] released females from the agony of living lives as widows. His efforts and the miserable position of females compelled the Britishers to pass another Act to improve their lot. The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act, of 1856, was brought into the act to get rid of all the legal hurdles to the re-marriage of Hindu widows. But this Act remained a dead letter for a long time because the executive branch could not help widows by arranging a second marriage or it could

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Nehru while speaking in the Lower House of the Indian Parliament on May 21, 1954.

[9] Chopra, P.N., B.N. Puri and M.N. Das (1986), *A Soul Culture and Economic History of India*,. vol. III, p. 84.

[10] Verma, V. P. (2010), Indian Political Thoughts. Laxmi Narayan Agrawal, Agra, pp. 19-21.

[11] Encyclopedia of Social Work in India.,vol. II. p. 367.

not be forced upon families. Swami Vivekananda and other reformers fought for the betterment of females as they rightly felt that the best way to measure the progress of a nation is to see how women are treated. Polygamy, though an old social evil, pervaded Hindu society but was confined primarily to opulent and higher sections of society. It became an issue of social prestige and personal pride. It encouraged social immorality and vice.

The revolutionary movement witnessed the participation of a smaller group. The early 20th century saw the mushrooming of women's organizations and the starting of the demand for political rights. In 1917, Sarojini Naidu led an Indian women's deputation and went to the British Parliament demanding womens' enfranchisement premised on equality with men. The 1921 Reform Act enlarged the franchise only to those wives who had education and property.[12] Mahatma Gandhi had a completely opposite view of this. He had proclaimed himself to be uncompromising when it came to the rights of women. He was of the belief that women played a positive role in society's reconstruction and that the identification of their egalitarianism was an important move to bring about social justice. He wholeheartedly and with all efforts supported womens' enfranchisement.

Mahatma Gandhi looked upon women as instruments for gaining general equality of status and chances and justice politically, socially and economically. Thus, the first impetus was given by the freedom movement, which was the starting of a new period for Hindu women and was a significant factor in shaping the future of women. Many factors that led to the upliftment of females' position like the influence of Britishers and the political struggle for Independence, gave impetus to the feminist movement. The coparceners jointly owned the joint family property and a female could never be a coparcener. Female members were entitled to maintenance only. At partition, some of them were entitled to a share in lieu of maintenance though they got only a limited estate The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937[13], was passed to ameliorate the legal footing of widows. They had the right to inherit the property of their husband who died and sons and widows of predeceased sons, no doubt this was an enjoyment right for life only.

The Hindu Women's Right of Separate Residence and Maintenance Act, 1946, was implemented to ameliorate the familial or social standing of Hindu women. It provided for the separate residence and right to maintenance to Hindu women without having so-called judicial separation under certain circumstances. Thereby her socio-legal position became sound. This Act discouraged polygamy by permitting the first wife to get maintenance and live separately if the husband married again. During the British period, no change was brought about in the ancient Law of adoption and guardianship. A female could neither be adopted nor adopt herself. The mother persisted to be the natural protector of her children after the father.

Besides the above, Ambedkar's contribution towards women's emancipation was a milestone in Indian society. Ambedkar as a chairman of the drafting committee and first law minister has done a number of work towards establishing equality for women in Indian stratified society. He proposed a 'Hindu Code Bill' in the parliament but unfortunately, it had not passed as a law. Hindu Code Bill was redemptive for women, following that the Indian government has passed the essence of the Hindu Code Bill step by step under other names such as Hindu Marriage Act-1955, Hindu Succession Act-1956 and women reservation in a local political body.

The Constitution guarantees all equality in front of the law or the equal safeguard of the law within the Indian territory and that there shall be zero discrimination against any citizen on the premise of race, religion, sex, caste, place of birth, etc. However, the state has the power to make good arrangements for women and children or for the progress of any educationally and socially backward citizens. Some special provisions for the improvement of the status of females have been introduced in various legislative enactments. By the time of India's Independence, enlightened Hindu public opinion came to be dedicated to bringing the law into line with modern social developments. General codification of Hindu Law in the form of the Hindu Code Bill was

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[12] Status of Women in India (1971-1974), A Synopses of the Report of the National Committee on Status of Women , p. 103.

[13] Ibid., p 105.

drawn up and presented to Parliament in 1950, which ran into vehement opposition at the hands of old men of orthodox society. Later on, some statutes were passed, namely the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1955, the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 and The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, which have largely affected the position of Hindu female. They have not only consolidated the changes that had come to be made in the old Hindu law during the British period but have gone further too and introduced some changes of fundamental importance and brought about a greater measure of equality between the sexes.

SC/ST Womens' Status after Independence

The state of affairs of Scheduled Caste Women in India requires special mention. Scheduled Caste women are marginalized and stigmatized not just by higher castes people but also at times from members of their own communities. More than two hundred million people are Scheduled Castes, also infamously referred to as "untouchables" or "outcastes". They are one of the biggest socially stigmatized groups all over the world and makeup two percent of the population of the world. Most of them are financially weak and makeup half of the two hundred million "Scheduled Caste population and 16.3 percent of the total Indian female population". The customary social interdicts are akin to Scheduled Caste women and Dalit men.

Caste, referred to as jati, is a "common phraseology". For several centuries caste as a social relations system has been a pivotal point in Hindu society. Scheduled Castes', the term is not only the name of the specific caste, "but it is a class of such people from among the untouchables" who the President of India has declared as 'Scheduled Castes.' Many conjectures, controversies, and explanations have come up about its source, nature, and role in Indian society. The struggle for Independence started with efforts to remove some of the social evils, including die eradication of untouchability and the miseries of the depressed class[14].

The nineteenth-century socio-religious movements played a considerable part in the awakening of the depressed classes in India. The Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj and the Ram Krishna Mission were the main reformist organizations. Many Scheduled Caste Organizations were established. On August 17, 1932, the Communal Award was announced by the British Government. Gandhiji announced his fast unto death as a mark of protest against the allowance of separate electorates to the depressed classes. The predicament of the untouchables entered a new era post the famed abstention of Gandhiji, which was ensured by the Poona Pact signed on 24th September 1932. The paper summarizes the political condition of Scheduled Caste Women. Scheduled Caste women are isolated more on the premise of their class, caste and gender. They are discriminated against on the caste hierarchy and untouchability while simultaneously experiencing extreme deprivation[15]

If one traces the Dalit movement, it is as old as the emergence of the idea of untouchability, which in the Hindu structure was the darkest spot. Although Hindu reformists made a lot of efforts to battle against this social evil right from the initial days, the actual concern surfaced during the freedom struggle, when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi fought against it on their own ways. On one hand, Mahatma Gandhi strived for the complete abolishment of untouchability for the emotional amalgamation of Hindu society, whereas Ambedkar wanted to eliminate the Varnashram structure of the Hindu social order.

The rise of new social classes in India was directly linked to the finding of a new social economy, a new type of state and state administrative machinery and the expansion of new education when the British ruled. The reshuffling of Indian people into new classes and new social groupings took place as a corollary of the fundamental capitalist economic change in Indian Society. In the Government of India Act, of 1935, 'Scheduled Castes' as a term came up for the first time. The Depressed classes were categorized systematically in 1931 by Hutton, the

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[14] Roy, G. (2015), "*Study on Condition of Schedule Caste Women in India After Independence Special Reference to Bihar: An Analysis*, Proceeding of the Indian History Congress, vol. 76, p: 894.

[15] Ibid.

then Census Commissioner of India. The list of Scheduled Castes published in 1936 was a continuance of the previous list of Depressed Classes. The Scheduled Castes made up about 16 per cent of the entire population. The depressed classes or Scheduled Castes or Harijan or Acchut are the nomenclatures of the Scheduled Caste as Dr Ambedkar wrote, "All the names have been officially and unofficially at times or other for the untouchables. The term under the Government of India Act is 'Scheduled Castes' but that came into use after 1935, before that they were called Harijans by Gandhi and depressed classes by the government of India."[16]

The Act of 1919 gave recognition for the first time to the existence of the depressed classes in the history of India. Mahatma Gandhi said, about untouchability, "In my opinion, untouchability in the form in which we practice it today is not and ought not to be, an essential part of Hinduism. There is sheer ignorance and cruelty behind it. It does not protect religion but suffocates it." A resolution was passed in 1920 in the Nagpur session of the Congress held in December stating that the eradication of untouchability was needed for achieving liberty and freedom. Congress was dominated by Gandhiji since 1920. A resolution was passed in 1921 asking the Hindus to repeal untouchability and to help ameliorate the condition of the submerged classes." In 1922, a committee was appointed by the Congress to come up with a scheme embodying practical ways to be embraced for improving the position of the so-called untouchables throughout the country." This was with the objective to impact the constructive programme that Gandhiji introduced post the failure of the non-cooperation movement and was embraced by the Congress working committee sat Bardoli in February 1922.

The 19th-century reformers had paved the way for the dying movement of women's emancipation which cannot, of course, take root unless at least a few women get emancipated. The groundwork was the main achievement of the 19th-century reformists in India. In the early twentieth Century, a beginning was made in the direction of organized efforts for the betterment of women by forming women's organizations led by women. In 1910, *Bharat Stree Maha Mandai* was inaugurated as an attempt to bring all organized women's groups together. In 1917, Mrs Dorothy Jinaraja, wife of the President of the Theosophical Society, started another organization. The Association officially led a delegation in 1917 for the women's franchise.

In 1927 the All India Women's Conference was established. When it started it's focus was on education but later the focus shifted to the establishment of a new Constitution for India. An important added dimension to the Conference was to discuss on issues pertaining to the welfare of the people of India, especially women and children. The Women's Organizations in 1931 gave a joint memorandum to the franchise subcommittee of the Round Table Conference that was scheduled to meet in London. The memorandum highlighted:

- All citizens would have equal rights and obligations with no discrimination on the basis of sex.
- All citizens are to be given equal opportunity in public employment, office of honour or trade with no discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or colour or sex.
- Women fought the election on equal footing with men in the merged general elections.
- Neither reservation of seats for women as the such nor special nomination.[17]

The All India Muslim Women's Conference 1916, followed by the Women India Association 1917, the National Council of Women of India-1925 and All India Women's Conference-1926". These women's organizations were important because for the foremost time, women organized themselves and they talking about issues that mattered to them. In fact, these organizations were a move ahead for more development in women's empowerment direction. All these organizations have requested for womens' welfare and adopted some good programmes for the amelioration of the conditions of women. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) declared itself as a non-political women's organization, but, it had intimate connections with the Indian

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[16] Ambedkar, B.R. (1946) "What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables," Thacker and Co. Pvt. Ltd., Bombay.

[17] Roy, G. (2015), "*Study on Condition of Schedule Caste Women in India After Independence Special Reference to Bihar: An Analysis*, Proceeding of the Indian History Congress, vol. 76, pp: 896.

National Congress. The Indian National Congress became the main organization under which diverse groups with various kinds of perspectives came together. Likewise, the AIWC too had women activists of diverse spectres of political perspectives.[18]

After Independence, there emerged in India women's movement, as the hallmark of this period was the women's movement's politicization. For the political parties, due to the universal adult franchise, women turned out to be a "vote bank". Thud, every political party has women's wings. One of the oldest women's organizations is the AIWC, that has intimate ties with the Congress Party even though it announced itself as a non-political organization. In 1954 The National Federation of Indian Women (NFTW) was established which is affiliated with the Communist Party of India. Post the Communist Party's split, the CPI (Marxist) had organized a distinct women's front in 1970, i.e., the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). The "CPI (Marxist-Leninist) had a loosely affiliated organization of women in the Progressive Organization of Women (POW)", earlier connected to the Naxalite students' group in Hyderabad and later ensued by the more independent Stri Shakti Sangh.

A womens' wing was established by The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) known as the Bharatiya Mahila Morcha. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh's (RSS) womens' wing is the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti that also looks after the Mahila Morcha, the BJP womens' wing. The Mahila Dakshta Samiti, the Socialist Party's women's wing, has become the women's wing since 1977 of the Janata Party. Some women's organisations also furnish residential amenities and vocational training for women. However, the women's movement in India is structurally and ideologically heterogeneous. It consists of many activities and is highly decentralized. It comprises countless organizations in both cities and rural areas. It also reflects differences in the approach to women's issues.[19]

The difficulties of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women are not just because of penury, economic position, or absence of education but it is a straight corollary of the extreme subjugation and ill-treatment meted out by upper castes, which is get it's legitimacy by Hindu religious texts. Ruth Manorma, a robust National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women" member, said that in a society which is dominated by males, "Dalit women are confronted with the burden of class, caste and gender thrice " in which she concludes the hardships of Scheduled Caste women, underscoring the fact that Scheduled Caste "women are a well defined social group and cannot be put in the general categories of ' 'Dalit' and just women. The sole way these Scheduled Caste women can get rid of the brutal cycle of penury and subjugation is via education.

More Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women have the right to know their fundamental human rights and stand up against discrimination and exploitation from the upper castes through education. The predicament is rooted in the fact that the poorest of the poor, Scheduled Caste Women do not have the chance and most importantly the means to fight for themselves at home or outside. Since 90 % of the Scheduled Caste populace is spread in rural regions, they are the ones who suffer the most. Constitutional rights and advantages are hardly familiar among them, only about 10 to I5 percent of those know in rural areas.

So far, constitutional advantages covered only a small of the Scheduled Caste population. The majority of Scheduled Caste Women are "landless agricultural workers" working on daily wages for others. Women make up around populations' fifty percent and also the voters listed in India's participatory democracy". About 80 per cent of Scheduled Caste Women live in rural India involved in household and domestic chores. A lot of them are even involved in economically to help in the livelihoods of their families.[20] Although seventy-four years of Independence have passed, women have still been confined or their wings clipped in their participation in the

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[18] Saxena, Kiran (1994), "Empowerment of Women: The Indian Context", *The Indian Journal of Political Science,* vol. 55, no. 4, p. 394.

[19] Ibid., p.395.

[20] Ibid.

political procedures that filter to the village Panchayats as well. The educational advantages that the reservation system provides only antagonize their quandary as the Scheduled Caste women and men most often avoid adopting lowly skilled jobs. This just adds to the proliferating unemployment percentage existing among the Scheduled Castes. For women belonging to the Scheduled Caste, it is important to establish a proper political and socio-economic environment so that they are able to efficaciously take part in the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

The Constitution of India's Article 17 mentions that 'untouchability' cannot be practiced, it is eliminated in all forms. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, are infamously known for such practices and atrocities meted out to women or marginalized groups like the Dalits. Relatively talking, it is noted that atrocities against Scheduled Caste people happen to be in less number in the South Indian state juxtaposed to North India. One factor for this difference is that states in North India and the people are very more engaged in what they think are age-old customs and traditions. The majority of them reside in rural regions where caste and land ownership play a dominant role in the village.

In the 1920s Scheduled Caste women were robustly engaged in the anti-untouchability and anti-caste movements. Today for most of the Dalit movements in the Indian villages they are the fortifications. They persist to play an important part in the land rights movement. They are also playing an important part in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. But, they still have to do a lot of ends to structural injustice and exclusion- belligerence that persists to keep them in their place.

Strategies for Changing the Status of SC/ST Women

Womens' empowerment is a phenomenon of the 90s and shows the fourth phase of the policy approach towards the engagement of women in the development process. Till date, this appears to be the most correct and rational approach embraced. The definition of empowerment is as "establishing power within" " providing power to" and "enabling". Thus, empowerment is a procedure which is multidimensional that needs to allow groups or "individuals or groups of individuals" to acknowledge their entire powers and identity in all aspects of life. The process is definitely comprehensive, which includes: sensitization, confidence building, the self worth realisation, organising, taking part in decision making and eventually having access to and regulates over resources equally and fairly. "Empowerment is a 'process' and not an 'event".[21]

A fresh chapter regarding womens' equality was opened in the Constitution of India. Article 15(3) gives the states the power to make any good or unique services for children and women even in breach of the basic duty of non-discrimination among citizens based on gender and sex. These provisions have made the reservation of seats for women in educational or local institutions valid and legit. The seventy-third constitutional amendment furnishing one-third of the seats to women members in all the rural local self-government institutions is taken as a landmark achievement towards womens' political power. The same kind of "provision for the one-third reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and in the Legislative Assemblies of the states by way of the 81st constitutional" amendment is under the scrutiny of the Parliament. These facilities are fundamentally to establish more consciousness "among women and to strike a greater gender balance in the decision-making bodies".

A very difficult goal Social empowerment is by far the most hard and long term objective to get due to social equality includes equality of opportunity, recognition of equality and above all, status equality. It fundamentally comprises a change in the beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes, which are difficult to attain. Social Legislation could do very less in the respect expected, furnishing a legit sanctity to social equity activities. When it comes to privileges and rights, Indian women are constitutionally protected and there exists special legislative enactment. Women are granted equality by the Constitution of India. In addition, the states get empowered to take up programmes of "positive discrimination" favouring women to neutralize the cumulative educational, political and socio-economic benefits confronted by them. Apart from

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[21] Singh, V. and Kishor Kumar (2012), "Empowerment of Rural Women", *Indian Journal of Political Science,* vol. 73., no. 3, July-September, pp: 453.

other fundamental rights, provide surety of egalitarianism before the law, equal law protection averts bigotry against any citizen on the basis of caste, religion, sex, race, sex or place of birth and furnishes equality of opportunity to all in cases of jobs. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(A) , 39(B), 39(C) and 42 of the constitution.

It was only in 1980 in the Sixth Year Plan that serious thoughts about empowering women and providing them economic development began with the publication of the report on the womens' status. The report furnished details about the myriad roles women have to juggle and development for them was a necessity. The absence of an appropriate and sensitive perspective led to the insufficient focus on women by the earlier plans. The Sixth Plan's main theme was "economic amelioration of women" via better chances for jobs, sharing new skills and developing prevailing skills. As a corollary, today, there are "27 programmes which have eight departments and six ministries that solely target and concentrate on women in training, wage employment, skill development and income generation measures.[22]

Conclusions:

In India, during the last 74 years, there have been such achievements in some selected areas but quite a few failures too. Female literacy rose, the expectation of life at birth increased, and girls average age at her marriage increased. Against this, we also find that a large percentage of women are still illiterate. Over 80% of women work in an unorganized sector where no child care or maternity benefits are available. Female workers in this sector are still paid less for equal work. About 60% of pregnant women are still anaemic. Sex-specific mortality rates still show a high death rate for female children. Violence and crime against women are on the rise. Convicts of rape are hardly punished. Dowry deaths show no decline. Thus, women are still subjugated in all dimensions of life and require to be empowered in all spheres of life. All dimensions of society need restructuring specially Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe women's perspective.

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