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Reach of social welfare schemes to Dalit women: A conceptual framework

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Abstract

According to India Human Development Report, 2001, inclusive development cannot be attained unless women participate equally in the development process and derive equal benefits from the same. Developing countries like India, show huge gender inequalities among different states that has direct bearing on human development status.

As per "India Human Development Report 2011" published by Planning Commission of India, the Human Development Index value of Gujarat has increased from 0.466 in 1999- 2000 to 0.527 in 2007-08; a gain of 13 Percent over the period. In Income, Health and Education sector it has gained 15 percent, 13 percent and 13 Percent, respectively over the period 1999-2000 to 2007-08, but the rank declined to 11 from 10 at national level.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Empowerment, Gender inequalities, Rights

1. Introduction

Woman is an incarnation of 'Shakti'—the Goddess of Power. If she is bestowed with education, India's strength will double. Let the campaign of 'Kanya Kelavni' be spread in every home; let the lamp of educating daughters be lit up in every heart

—Narendra Modi

Lack of access and entitlements to resources leads to the denial of rights, such as the rights to livelihoods and civil rights affecting Dalit women's ability to protect and assert themselves. The lack of right distributive justice inspite of protection by the law, in the context of burdens Dalit women face, reinforces the caste hierarchies and the unequal power relations in society. Hence, addressing Dalit women's resource rights remains key to building an egalitarian society." - Meera Vulayudhan, Frontline 2009 ^[1].

Women have been subjugated by the patriarchal social structure and denied opportunities for growth and development. Efforts are made by the Central and State governments in India to fulfill the Constitutional mandate for empowerment of women, to ensure that women enjoy all rights on the basis of equality with men by formulating different laws, policies, schemes and programmes. The real measure of government commitment is reflected in the budgetary outlays made by the State. There can be a number of populist promises, but if those are not followed by allocation of resources, those do not get implemented (Mahender Jethmalani, Director, Pathy Centre for Budget Analysis, Ahmedabad Gujarat) ^[2].

2. Definitions

Empowerment' may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives.

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¹ Dalit Women and Resources : Accessing government schemes (2013)
Sathi All for Partnerships with CWLR members, NACDOR, NMPS and their local groups
For the Ministry of Women Child and Development

²Gujarat Government Spending on Social Security and Welfare of Women:
An analysis of spending by the Department of Women & Child Development

- **Empowerment of women** means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them.
- **Emancipation** is Freedom from any form of bondage or oppression
- **Empowerment** means Freedom to make choices, take decisions and enjoy freedom from violence in all social institutions.

3. Review of Literature

1. **Deepika Nair and Shivani Bhardwaj (2013)** ^[3] contends that the Ministry of Women and Child Development sanctioned the study on “Dalit Women and Resources” as the situation with regard to Dalit women’s access to government resources needs to be understood comprehensively. There is a need to track the progress of the 12th five year plan based on the indicators of inclusion with gender, vulnerability and caste equality lenses. The research attempts to explore if education, skills, credit options, natural resources, housing and land as resources had increased livelihood opportunities to alter the resource base for Dalit women in India.

2. **Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal and Wandana Sonalkar** ^[4] assert that as the lowest in the caste hierarchy, Dalits in Indian society have historically suffered caste-based social exclusion from economic, civil, cultural, and political rights. Women from this community suffer from not only discrimination based on their gender but also caste identity and consequent economic deprivation. Dalit women constituted about 16.60 percent of India’s female population in 2011.

Dalit women’s problems encompass not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with religion, caste, and untouchability, which in turn results in the denial of their social, economic, cultural, and political rights. They become vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation due to their gender and caste. Dalit women also become victims of abhorrent social and religious practices such as *devadasi/jogini* (temple prostitution), resulting in sexual exploitation in the name of religion.

3. **Mangubhai and Joel G. Lee (2006)** ^[5] opine that in contravention of both national laws and international human rights standards that prohibit any physical, sexual or psychological violence against women, varying forms of violent acts specifically targeting Dalit women are occurring on a large scale across India today. That physical (affecting bodily integrity), verbal (affecting

the psyche), and sexual (affecting bodily/sexual integrity) violence are the most common, and often combined, forms of violence suggests that at every level Dalit women’s personae is being attacked.

4. The Cycle of Injustice and Oppression

Even after reservation policy, positive changes and a constant support of the political machinery in the country towards eradication of discrimination against the Dalits, it is still not easy being a Dalit.

Dalit women in India are considered the Dalits among Dalits and suffer from a three-fold oppression:

- On account of gender because of existing patriarchy,
- On account of their caste 'the untouchable',
- Finally, on account of their class - as are the poorest and most marginalized communities.

Table 1: Literacy Rate of Dalit and Non-Dalit Women

Year	Literacy Rate (%)					
	Dalit Women			Non-Dalit Women		
	Total Literacy of Dalit Women	Rural	Urban	Total Literacy of Non-Dalit Women	Rural	Urban
1971	6.44	5.06	16.99	18.70	13.08	42.05
1981	10.93	8.45	24.34	29.85	17.96	47.82
1991	23.76	19.45	42.29	39.16	30.62	64.05
2001	41.90	37.84	57.49	53.7	46.58	72.99
2011	56.5	52.6	68.6	65.46	58.75	79.92

Source: Census of India, 2011

5. Initiatives Taken for Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups and Women in Difficult Circumstances ^[6]

- Schemes of National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation
- Integrated Child Development Scheme
- National Rural Health Mission
- Janani Suraksha Yojana
- Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- Swadhar—A scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances
- Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)
- Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY)
- Ujjawala—A Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana(RSBY)
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)—A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)—Sabla
- Swayam Siddha
- Scheme for Working Women Hostel
- STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women)
- Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana
- Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

³ Dalit Women and Resources : Accessing government schemes (2013) Sathi All for Partnerships with CWLR members, NACDOR, NMPS and their local groups For the Ministry of Women Child and Development

⁴ Global Justice : Theory Practice Rhetoric (8/1) 2015; Dalit Women In India: At The Crossroads of Gender, Class, And Caste

⁵ Dalit Women Speak Out Violence against Dalit Women in India Overview Report of Study in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu/ Pondicherry and Uttar Pradesh ; National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights New Delhi March 2006

⁶ Empowerment Of Women In India: A Critical Analysis - Mamata Mokta

6. National Mechanisms and Problems in Implementation ^[7]

The Indian legislative framework promotes and protects women, starting from fundamental constitutional provisions like Article 15 which affirms the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of caste and gender. Article 21 guarantees the right to life and to security of life; and art. 46 specifically protect Dalits from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Moreover, the Indian State has approved more specific documents aimed at protecting Dalit women; the most important is the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act approved in 1989.

But the law has largely failed in its ambitious mandate. The provisions that promote women rights have to be considered empty of meaning, since the low level of implementation left the situation basically untouched, and has led to a perceived and de facto impunity for the perpetrators of crimes against Dalit women.

There is an urgent need for the redressal of violence against women as an absolute priority. The elimination of discrimination and violence against Dalit women and girls are the key to the achievement of gender equality, peace and development. Women should be given essential protective and promotive measures, so that they can access their fundamental rights.

7. Women Empowerment in India ^[8]

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres.

From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women.

India has also ratified various International conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

The Cairo conference in 1994 organised by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society— political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment

(Swashakti). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in 2001.

8. Recommendations for the better implementation of the schemes of Dalit women

1. Selection and identification of the talented Dalit girls needs to be done scientifically
2. Competitive spirit should be instilled in the Dalit girls.
3. Selection of candidate to be done at college level itself for coaching
4. Result oriented, teaching is essential
5. Activities oriented towards confidence building needs to be chosen
6. Loan facilities needs to be made available
7. Financial aid to be given to the meritorious Dalit girl to compete for UPSC, SPSC
8. Hostel facilities for dalit girls at all levels of education should be provided
9. Reservation policy for Dalit girls should be made available in both admission and employment along with other girls but not as separately created
10. Government has to be increased awareness among dalit women about their rights and privileges. This should be augmented by information technology, which should reach even to the remote rural citizen who form the large majority of Dalit women population in our country.

The special programmes for Scheduled Caste have been taken up from the very beginning in terms of their special situation. Disabilities of caste on them by nefarious traditions. However, in retrospect it is clear that these programmes are notional and continued to be defunct with low level of participation and achievements of the objectives.

9. Suggested Recommendations ^[9]

- The Government Of India (GOI) should bring out disaggregated data based on caste and gender and build schemes to address the needs of Dalit women
- The GOI should take effective measures to prevent atrocities and multiple forms of discrimination against Dalit women as recommended by CEDAW, CERD, and the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women
- The GOI should take steps to eliminate the culture of impunity for perpetrators of violations, incl. physical assaults, sexual harassment, rape, naked parading, and forced prostitution
- The GOI should adopt convergence model within concerned ministries and establish a special task force to address the issues of violence faced by Dalit women elected representatives;
- The GOI should recognise the concerns of Dalit women human rights defenders and ensure specific policy to address the range of violence faced by them
- The GOI should bring out a guideline to serve a protocol to be followed by all investigations officers in the cases of sexual violence – particularly rape and gang rape cases
- Dialogue with governments, relevant UN bodies, the private sector, local authorities, national human rights institutions, CSOs and academic institutions needs to be promoted and sustained with a view to identify, promote

⁷ Violence Against Dalit Women Submitted by All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), New Delhi, India.

⁸ Empowerment Of Women In India: A Critical Analysis - Mamata Mokta

⁹ Violence Against Dalit Women Submitted by All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), New Delhi, India.

and exchange views on best practices related to violence and discrimination against women

- The GOI should establish support services and shelter for the survivors of violence and ensure proper rehabilitation.

10. Assessment And Audit of All Current Schemes for Dalits to Support Access to Social and Economic Rights^[10]

- Conduct a complete assessment and audit of all current schemes relevant to supporting access to social and economic rights with attention to overcoming existing barriers to access for Dalit communities.
- Ensure that all training programmes are gender sensitive and based upon up-to date market analysis so that training results in sustainable livelihoods, imparts marketable skills, and includes ongoing support to participants until they have secured jobs or established a functioning business.
- Coordinate action to advance social and economic rights for Dalit communities between all concerned ministries and government stakeholders, including but not limited to the Ministries of Social Justice and Empowerment, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Urban Development, Women and Child Development and Labor.
- Serious human rights violations like manual scavenging bonded labour, child labour to be eliminated with time bound national action plan including stringent implementation of the existing legal mechanisms, relief & rehabilitation and development measures.
- Ensure Central legislation on SCSP and TSP be brought in clearly spelling out the duties and responsibilities of the Union and State governments.
- The existing affirmative policies related to employment shall be extended to private sector, with a special emphasis in those private spheres so far left out of the ambit of reservation policy.

11. Conclusion

In contravention of both national laws and international human rights standards that prohibit any physical, sexual or psychological violence against women, varying forms of violent acts specifically targeting Dalit women are occurring on a large scale across India today. That physical (affecting bodily integrity), verbal (affecting the psyche), and sexual (affecting bodily/sexual integrity) violence are the most common, and often combined, forms of violence suggests that at every level Dalit women's personae is being attacked. Moreover, given that most of this violence is occurring in public spaces, the additional humiliation of being violated in public drives home a message not only to each Dalit woman, but also to her family and community, that she is not considered worthy of being treated with honour, respect or human dignity. The social welfare schemes of the Government must be accessible by these women to find themselves in the mainstream.

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¹⁰ www.counterview.org