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## EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Indian history is honest and does not hide the pathetic saga of the Dalits and, more particularly that of the ex-untouchable communities. It is honest as far as in recording the limbo status accorded to Harijans and the way they were treated by the Hindu society. The literature is very rich but, its reading is painful. Empowerment is the expansion of asserts and capabilities of poor people to participate in negotiate with influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Education is one of the important sources of empowering women with the knowledge, skill and self confidence necessary to participate fully in development process. It enhances better socio-economic development. Women empowerment in India is highly dependent on several variables that include caste, class, family background and culture, Geographical location it may be urban or rural and age. The barriers of dalith women empowerment are discrimination in the society, economic disadvantages, religious practices, social believes and violence against women. They are unable to access health and educational services, lack decision making power and face higher level of violence. There is an immediate need for empowering dalith women in present scenario.

**Keywords:** Dalith women empowerment

### INTRODUCTION

The major goal of this study is to comprehend the challenges and opportunities of empowering Dalit women while also evaluating the contribution of education to their efforts. Understanding the significance and range of empowerment appears to be crucial given the concept's and ideologies complicated and shaky character. Similarly, we must describe the function and reach of education in promoting the process of empowerment given the history, complexity, volume, and severity of the issues faced by rural Dalit women in their unwelcoming environment. 2 Therefore, it is assumed right away that having a grasp of the idea of empowerment as well as the social situation of Dalit women in rural India in relation to the function of education would serve as the required context for the analysis that will take place in the future study. This paper opens with a brief mention of the position given to women in India generally, and more specifically that of rural Dalit women. This is necessary given the setting.3 Everyone agrees that women are "the mother of the human race and the foundation of its society." She is revered as one of Nature's exceptional creations and a priceless gift that she has given to humankind. Even now, women are still exalted as man's better half. She is an equal collaborator in all human undertakings and a devoted steward of society's culture and customs, despite the fact that males view her as the weaker sex. 4 By virtue of their unwavering commitment and sacrifice, they stand in for our past in all its beauty and suffering, in terms of time and geography, social upheavals, political enslavement, and freedom. Ever since the dawn of human history; they have been playing a vital role in the life of mankind in general and in the making the development and conservation of human civilization. Human civilization would not have been possible without their service, dedication and sacrifice.

Since time immemorial folklores have eulogized mother as the first teacher's for every child. In fact every human child in every country receives its earliest social training from its mother.<sup>5</sup> There is no alternative to mother in upbringing of the young and transmitting to them the socio- cultural heritage. Therefore the importance of the role of woman as an educator and an efficient custodian of culture cannot be over emphasized. The contribution of women to human development, its economy, polity and culture is well known. No society can envision its development without women playing varied and versatile roles in it. Women's active engagement has made human economy feasible at all phases of its history and development. In a same vein, women have made substantial contributions to politics, administration, and state formation. <sup>6</sup> In truth, Gandhi correctly stated that "Woman is the partner of man, given with equal mental powers," and that she has the right to take part in all aspects of male activity and is legitimately entitled to equal rights, independence, and liberty.

However, it is indisputable that a woman can only properly fulfil her function as an equal partner in a man's life in general and as the primary educator of her children in particular when she has received a sufficient education herself.<sup>7</sup> It has been noted that "The laborious and vital responsibilities of a wife and mother cannot be properly handled while a woman is left in a state of ignorance and depravity, and no significant advancement in general culture and morals can be realistically anticipated. Leaving women ignorant would so totally immobilise one half of society and weaken the other half by allowing the unsound fraction to hover over it and divert its attention."

Despite the conflicts and controversies, women have played a significant role in India's social awareness for a very long time. She has been called the "ultimate gift from God to man," in fact. Manu, a well-known Hindu law giver who is also notorious for being misogynistic, says that when women are respected, the gods themselves are happy, but where they are not respected, no holy ceremony can even produce results.

The guiding ideals of our constitution are liberty, equality, and fraternity. Evidently, women have the same right to the highest position in their respective fields of endeavour as men have. The state works hard to guarantee that everyone has access to political, social, and economic equality. Unfortunately, while we have achieved political justice, social and economic fairness have not. Inequality is pervasive in many aspects of life in the nation. The moment has come to put an end to inequality since it fosters a variety of socioeconomic.

Strangely enough, the civil society, which has historically been predominately patriarchal, does not appear to have granted the dignified space, status, advantages, rights, and opportunities she wonderfully and correctly also deserved. Despite the magnificent eulogies and a fantastic portrayal of woman. Generally speaking, Indians' patriarchal attitude and mentality have not evolved much throughout the years. Even a cursory look at the socioeconomic and cultural history of the globe in general and of our nation in particular would reveal the persistent prejudice against women and the dominance of males in all walks of life.<sup>10</sup> Although women have the same right to the highest position in their chosen field of endeavour as men have, they have instead been sidelined, discouraged, and worst of all, treated like animals in cages. They have indeed been acclaimed as "fair sex" without receiving a "fair-deal" in terms of access to the benefits of progress. With merely a superficial improvement, our nation's policies, programmes, and development process continue to exhibit an excessive "male bias." Therefore, it is obvious that our woman has been leading a difficult socioeconomic and stifling social life.

Nowhere is this masculine bias in growth more strong and disturbing as in the field of education, and nowhere is the appalling disregard of women that results from it as alarming. In reality, two-fourths of the women in our nation, or the vast majority (58 percent), are illiterate today. <sup>11</sup> The democratic Indian conscience ought to be shocked by this. The education of women in India is plagued by such a complex web of issues that it is more accurately said to be in a crisis. Women's liberation from the confines of the house would only benefit humankind and mankind by bringing more pleasure, wealth, advancement, and relief. True societal advancement is impossible without promoting women's emancipation. Our developmental priorities need to lay emphasis on welfare of women in order to provide them a pride of place in our society. The idea of a woman's individuality has experienced unimaginable change over time. Today, she is not a caged pet bird. Through pure cunning, she has demonstrated her skill and ability to contribute equally to the initiatives and procedures designed to further

human evolution. It is time for Indian society to realise the gravity of the issue and undo the historical error. The society has to let go of its long-held misconceptions and biases about women in general and their Dalit counterparts in particular.

Women undoubtedly make up over half of the population in our nation in terms of demographics. They are not, however, a uniform class or category in terms of their physical characteristics, social structures, cultural practises, or economic standing. They belong to many strata and are diverse in terms of caste, religion, education, employment, and class. As a result, they belong to several social and economic classes rather than one homogeneous class. We cannot attempt to generalise on any topic due to the socioeconomic and cultural inequalities. <sup>12</sup> It is generally known that the caste system in India continues to play a significant role in social discrimination as well as stratification, if not officially or even openly. Additionally, the caste system was what established a person's standing and the advantages they were entitled to. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct sociological assessments of the issues and future prospects for the development of women in India within the framework of the caste system. As is generally known, the caste system divides women into upper and lower castes, Dalit or non-Dalit women. In actuality, there are significant differences between Dalit women and non-Dalit women in terms of their social standing, privileges, and difficulties. Caste as a social variable has to be considered in the sociological assessments of their lives. Ambedkar did link the caste issue with the issue of women, regarding both as vital. This paper on caste in Indian is not only a critic of the caste system but also a candid analysis of women's problems. Considering that Dalit women constitute the main focus of this paper, a brief attempt is made here to understand the social status accorded of Dalit women both within and outside her family.

## **THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT**

Empowerment is more than simply a theoretical idea or a planning model. There doesn't have to be a lot of intellectual trickery. Essentially, it is seen as a procedure that gives one the ability to obtain control over other people, institutions, or society. The ability to exercise assertiveness in group decision-making, having positive thinking about the ability to effect change, being able to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power, being able to change others' perceptions through democratic means, increasing one's positive self-image, and having decision-making power are likely the entirety of the following or similar capabilities.

The aforementioned account gave readers a sense of the scope of women's issues—in particular, Dalit women's issues—in rural India. An understanding of the meaning and dimensions of empowerment as well as the type and nature of activities involved in the entire process was deemed necessary in light of the fact that the Government of India and her State Governments have accepted "empowerment" as a tool of amelioration for Dalit women. The investigation showed that the procedure is not straightforward and unilateral and that it must be a drawn-out, multifaceted, complicated process.

The description presented above paints a deplorable image of Dalit women in rural India. It is quite clear for a Dalit man to dominate his lady in a culture where men predominate. After fifty years of freedom, she still has to deal with her husband's abuse of her and defend herself from the people she works with. She is the only one who can stop the exploitation. Her life has become much worse due to poverty. Due to the caste system, she must contend with two conflicts: one inside her own home and the other outside. There aren't many ways for her to express her suffering, and the ones that do tend to be unsuccessful limit Dalit women's socioeconomic conditions. The subjugation perpetrated by civil society is abhorrent, which is even worse. The nature of the government's reaction to the issues facing Dalit women is the important question that now before us. What is the government's response? What programmes has it started? What are the Dalit women saying in response? We'll look for the solutions.

## **EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN THROUGH LOCAL SELF- OVERNANCE**

Even if there are problems and issues linked with them (such as a lack of expertise, political influence, corruption, and gender insensitivity), there is also a very clear message coming from the field that excellent practices of

efficient and effective functioning of local self-governance do exist. This is despite the fact that there are problems and issues related with them. People's social accomplishment, economic involvement, and political engagement are all related to the idea of empowerment, which is a term that encompasses several dimensions. In addition, since empowerment is a process that never ends, there is no destination point for it. One never quite reaches the point where they are empowered in the manner that is being discussed here.

The real role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), also known as institutions of rural local self-governance, is of more relevance now than it ever has been before. This is because PRIs are more prevalent than ever before. In the process of carrying out various development duties, the Central Government and State Governments view the institutions of rural local governance as partners in the endeavor. Article 243-G, which was added to the Constitution as part of the 73rd Amendment, gives state governments the authority to delegate powers and responsibilities to village panchayats in order to facilitate the preparation of plans for the socio-economic development of their communities and the promotion of social justice among the populace through the implementation of various programs with the participation of those communities.

is just another significant step that has been taken with the overarching goal of expanding the political space available to women and ensuring their full involvement in the process of development. The actual problem is to guarantee that women are participating in the decision-making process at home as well as in society as a whole. While it is vital to make reservations for women in panchayats or in Parliament, the real challenge is to do so.

As a result of their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Indian culture, women who belong to Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes are subjected to several types of discrimination. These include a lack of education, economic disadvantages, social disempowerment, domestic abuse, political invisibility, and sexual oppression. Panchayats need to have their decision-making procedures more clearly defined in order to reduce the likelihood of elite capture, proxy involvement, and single-point decisions being made. Because of their social status, the Dalit women are in a more precarious position than other women. Casteism and male chauvinism have both contributed to the degeneration of Indian society. If caste is responsible for the division of Indian society into four primary divisions and a thousand more sub-categories, then patriarchy is responsible for the exploitation of women. Women have historically been oppressed and viewed as objects because to patriarchal traditions, caste systems, and religious beliefs. The process of Hinduization of Indian culture resulted in women progressively losing all of their privileges and being subject to male rule and hegemony. This occurred despite the fact that women did have equal status in the primitive society. There was no opportunity to inhabit an area that was completely independent.

A democracy that is still in the process of maturing, like India's, requires a greater level of engagement from the people in its political process, regardless of factors such as caste, color, race, sex, and so on. In our nation, the process of democratic decentralization, also known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), has been in place for quite some time now in order to make this option available. Due to the fact that women make up a sizable proportion of India's overall population, it is imperative that they take part in politics on the local level if democratic rule is to be maintained. The fact that their long-standing social status in the male-dominated Indian culture has been disregarded raises the question of whether or not they should be allowed to participate. Instantaneously following the drafting of the Indian Constitution, constitutional safeguards together with the provision of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, public posts, and public educational institutions were, thus, offered to them for the purpose of elevating the overall population of India. The situation of women is not in a particularly favorable light, despite the existence of some traditional values and rituals that are positive as well as the rise of influential women personalities. However, their socioeconomic level is quite poor, and they face discrimination in every aspect of their lives because of this. Since the dawn of civilization, women have been relegated to the domestic sphere, where they are subjected to oppression and denied the rights to which they are legally entitled in male-dominated societies. As a result, empowering women has become one of the most pressing concerns in Odisha, which has led to a gradual shift in the state's approach to policymaking, which now



emphasizes gender equality and development rather than women's issues specifically. Policies based on affirmative action are designed with the intention of achieving the aim of inclusive democracy as well as sustainable development. development and empowerment on the state level. These shifts in knowledge, skill, and the combined efforts of a large number of players. However, interpreting them is of utmost importance at the grassroots level.

## **THE IDEA OF EMPOWERMENT AND ITS DEFINITION**

The history of the idea of empowerment is really very intriguing. It is possible to trace its roots and connotations all the way back to the Protestant Reformation in Europe, which had repercussions throughout the ages in Europe and North America, including Quakerism, Jeffersonian democracy, early capitalism, and the black power struggle. In our own country of India, for instance, the Veera Shaiva movement against caste and gender repression in the 12th and 13th centuries in the state of Karnataka advocated for the relocation of power and access to spiritual knowledge through the demolition of the existing forms of social stratification. This was one of many significant struggles for social justice that provided the concept with its foundation. However, throughout the second half of the 20th century, the word gained a distinctly political overtone when it was adopted by the liberation theorists, the black movement, feminists, and other fights for more inclusive and just forms of social change and development. The decade of the 1990s was marked by a widespread co-option of the phrase "corporate management" by political organizations, consumer-rights initiatives, and corporate management.

The process of empowering individuals focuses on increasing the variety of options available to them so that they have more control over their lives. Because of this, it cannot be interpreted as a formula for change that is only one dimension, either in terms of the process or the consequence. It needs to be interpreted in various situations, taking into account the special requirements of the individuals who are supposed to be empowered (Kabeer 1998). Providing what is very probably the most all-encompassing perspective on power, which is the fundamental idea behind empowerment, Rowland (1997) identifies four distinct channels via which power might be exercised: Transfer of power: It entails exercising power or influence over other people, both of which are tools for establishing dominance. It entails the formation of straightforward dichotomies, the use of intimidation and threats of violence, as well as both active and passive forms of resistance.

The power that: It is a sort of collective power in which people feel empowered as a result of organizing and uniting around a shared goal or idea, and it entails a sense of whole that is bigger than the sum of the individuals involved.

Internalized power It involves the spiritual fortitude and one-of-a-kindness that is innate to everyone of us and is what distinguishes us as truly human beings. Self-respect and self-acceptance serve as its foundation; these, in turn, pave the way for extending respect to others and accepting them as equals.

Power-to is considered the embodiment of individual empowerment since it is creative, productive, and supportive all at the same time. The ability to create capacity, the authority to make decisions, leadership, the power to comprehend how things function, and the ability to solve problems are all necessary components.

According to the aforementioned paradigm, the power-over conceptualization is the most prevalent, but also the most detrimental to progress. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate several other types of power within the context of development in order to produce constructive forms of empowerment. It is a form of empowerment that comes with the opportunity to play different roles and to exist in a society that is more egalitarian. The theoretical foundation for this study is comprised of this framework, which encourages a change away from the hierarchical power-over conceptualization and toward equal individual power-within and power-to conceptualizations of empowerment. This framework also forms the basis for this study's methodology. Nevertheless, knowing the idea of power-with is particularly crucial when it comes to comprehending communal forms of empowerment, which is something else that this study explores.

## **THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

When feminists, particularly in the Third World, became increasingly dissatisfied with the generally apolitical and economic 'WID', 'WAD', and 'GAD' models in existing development interventions, several important analyses and critiques engendered by the women's movement throughout the world during the 1980s gave rise to the concept of women empowerment. These analyses and critiques were engendered by the women's movement throughout the world. Not only did it fight patriarchy, but it also questioned the enabling structures of class, race, ethnicity, and, in India, caste and religion, which governed the nature of women's position and function in developing societies. In other words, it was a challenge to the structures that regulated the nature of women's status and role. At the beginning of the 1990s, the concept of empowerment assumed a prominent position in the language of development. And despite the fact that it was implemented in a wide range of social-change processes, the phrase was most frequently employed in connection with solely women and the concept of gender equality. Because empowerment is a process and not something that can be given to people, and because the empowerment process can be both individual and collective, and because it is through involvement in group that people most often begin to develop their awareness and their ability to organize to take action and bring about change, women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum that consists of several interested and mutually reinforcing components.

### **These are as under:**

- opportunities as a step towards gender equality
- collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group.
- Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organize, manage and carryout activities, to deal with people and institutions in the world around them.
- Participation and greater control and decision-making power in the home, community and society.

Action to bring about greater equality between men and women. personal or household welfare, but also the wellbeing of the entire society as women are seen to be the primary guardians responsible for altering the quality and quantity of human resources available in a country to promote sustainable development in the coming generations.

### **EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN**

The term "empowerment" refers to a multifaceted societal process that enables individuals to exert more influence over their own lives. It is a process that promotes power (that is, the ability to implement) in people for use in their own lives, their own communities, and in their own society, by acting on problems that they define as being essential. This power may then be used in the people's own lives, in their own communities, and in their own society. Participation in decision-making, in which women obtain proper recognition on par with men, enables women to engage in the development process through political institutions as a partner with dignity. Participation in decision-making is the most important factor in empowering women. Due to the dominance of tribal culture in Kandhamal, prejudice against women is less prevalent in this region. The term "women empowerment" refers to the process of gaining autonomy in social, economic, political, and legal spheres, both individually and collectively. There are a number of critical factors that may be used to determine the extent of women's empowerment, including decision making, connectivity, mobility, voice, and involvement. During our Focus Group Discussions, we observed that there was a good involvement of women, and our qualitative findings imply that women in tribal societies participate in activities that contribute to their means of subsistence, and they are granted some degree of independence.

### **EMPOWERMENT IN POLITICS AND SOCIETY**

Odisha has a relatively low percentage of dalit women serving in elected bodies compared to other states. There is not a single woman who identifies as a Dalit serving as a legislator for Kandhal in the Odisha legislature. Reservations for women in the institutions that make up the Panchayati Raj have made it easier for them to participate in decision making. In the PRI system, women candidates are guaranteed a third of the available seats. The percentage of reserved seats for women in the SC category is 46.72 percent, while the percentage of reserved

seats for ST is 39.51 percent. According to the Odisha Panchayat Act of 1994, one of the two top office bearers at each level of PRI—general practitioner, block, and district—must be a woman. This requirement applies to all three levels. 75 percent of Dalits Women who served in the Panchayat did so primarily in the capacity of proxies for their husbands, and they encountered significant obstacles in their efforts to advance the interests of their community. Only one third of the 300 Dalit women who have been elected president are able to fulfill their duties as president with the freedom and independence they deserve. Dalit women are either not taken seriously or are treated disrespectfully. In point of fact, if dalit women bring up problems at the Panchayat meetings, those topics are almost never approved upon or considered. The Constitution of India acknowledges the political rights of women, which include the ability to participate in the process of decision-making at all levels, without being subject to any kind of discrimination, distinction, or qualification. After fifty years of significant advances in democratic governance and economic growth.

## CONCLUSION

Dalit women make up a smaller portion of Indian society and have multiple disadvantages due to being both female and Dalit. 48 percent of all Dalit people are women, who make up over 66 million Dalits in total. 81.4 percent of India's 16.3 percent population of Dalit women reside in rural regions. They make up a sizable social group that still experiences prejudice based on descent that results from the caste system, along with their male counterparts. People from Dalit castes are forced into social exclusion as a result of castebased discrimination, which also separates them physically from the dominant castes in housing patterns strictly enforces the ban on intermingling in public spaces, and compels them to work in demeaning jobs like manual scavenging. Dalit women have historically experienced subjugation and gender-based discrimination since they belong to a socially, economically, and culturally oppressed community. The lives of Dalit women are terrible because of patriarchal social standards that are prevalent in Dalit households. They are the most oppressed people in the world. Even someone with a little level of human sensibility is astounded by the realistic and accurate stories of the Dalit women's living situations, including their exploitation, humiliation, and repression.

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