

# Status of Scheduled Caste Women in India

## Abstract

The Indian society is based on a unique socio cultural phenomenon the caste system, which is essential a religious system, sanctioned & sustained by Hinduism. Indian Society has undergone many rapid changes in the post Independence era. These changes have created their own pulls and pressures but one segment of Indian society that has been least affected is women.

The social status of women in India is a typical example of the gap between position and roles accorded to them by the law and those imposed on them by social traditions.

**Keywords:** Phenomenon, Hinduism, Era, Pulls & Pressures, Segment, Investigate

## Introduction

Gandhiji was the first who effectively championed the course of Shudras and women. "Among the various items of constructive programmes of Gandhiji, one was of the uplift of women and we are told that Gandhiji often used to say that he would like to be born either as an untouchable or a woman.

The Indian Constitution puts all the Shudras in one category and designates them as the scheduled castes. The constitution denies all sorts of discrimination on the basis of caste and sex but it is more or less theoretical. In fact, the social status of women in India is a typical example of the gap between position and roles accorded to them by law and those imposed on them by social tradition. What is possible for women in theory is seldom within their reach in fact.

In 1971, the Indian government appointed a Committee on the Status of Women under the chairmanship of Smt. Phuel Rani Guha. The committee felt that scheduled caste women, especially in rural areas, did not witness any concrete change. Sri Jiwan Lal Jai Ram Das, the then Secretary of All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, was approached to draw a scheme to study the special problems of scheduled caste women. He stressed that though most women in India were backward in general, the scheduled caste women were backward amongst the backwards and therefore deserved special attention. These women were the last affected in the process of social change and their plight was far from satisfactory.

The word 'Shudra' which signifies the lowest rung of the caste stratification of the Indian society occurs in the Rigveda at one place in the Purushasukta. The varna system hierarchy in the caste system was established in the Vedic period along with the then existing dasa pratha but it was then in its fontal stage.

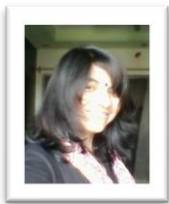
In the later text the shudra denoted a slave. Therefore, the slaves may reasonably be supposed to represent the Shudras of the later texts. Fick denies that the Shudras ever formed a single caste and regards the term as covering the numerous inferior races and tribes defeated by the Aryan invaders originally denoting only a special tribe.

The shudras were divided into numerous sub – castes. But their were two main divisions one was Anirvasita Shudras (such as the carpenter and the blacksmiths) and the other Nirvasita Shudras (like the Chandals). Another division of the Shudras was into those who were the Bhojyanna that is food prepared by whom could be partaken of by the Brahmanas and Abhojyanna (whose cooked food was forbidden to be taken).

## Aim of the Study

The present study is an attempt to investigate the broad pattern and process of social change and the emerging pattern of status of scheduled caste women as person as a family member and as a member of the society.

In the Rigvedic Aryan society, Shudras were not considered impure or polluted. The status and nomenclature underwent considerable changes during the period of Samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas. Various crafts



**Meenakshi Sharma**

Associate Professor,  
Deptt. of Political Science,  
Gokul Das Hindu Girls Degree  
College,  
Moradabad

## Shrinkhla Ek Shodhparak Vaicharik Patrika

and occupation became castes and came down the social ladder as manual labour was not considered dignified. In course of time, when some of the artisan classes lost their original status and were treated like Shudras, they were reduced to the rank of the impure. Despite all this, the caste system had not yet become a rigid system as three peculiar features of the caste system-prohibition of interdining, inter marriage and determination of status by hereditary were yet to be established on a secure basis.

With the passage of time there was gradual hardening of the caste system in general and the deterioration of the position of the Shudras in particular. In course of time, they were further degraded. More and more restrictions were imposed on the higher caste not to mix with them. However, the caste system, even in that period, had not become as exclusive as it is now.

During the Mauryan and Gupta periods, despite their being of utmost importance and usefulness economically, shudras came to be socially degraded. They were assigned a low status. They were excluded from all rights and strict rules were laid down for preventing pollution by these groups by contact. Since the practice of untouchability was in vogue by now, the life of these groups of the shudras who were designed as untouchables became miserable and hardens than before. The advent of the Muslims influenced the Indian society. The chief result of the political domination of the Muslims was that the Brahmins, who had been exempted from all sorts of taxes in the previous regimes, lost their privilege. The lower castes, which wholeheartedly cooperated with the newcomers, got an opportunity to elevate their material position. Some of them embraced Islam as it gave them a higher status. The lowest strata of the Muslims society comprised peasant and cultivators, workmen, artisans and domestic servants. The Muslim rule in India offered a structural outlet for deprived Hindu castes for social, economic and cultural mobility.

The traditional social structure of the Indian society which perpetuated social inequality among the castes and between the sexes received a big jolt at the emergence of the British rule in India. British rule brought into the Indian society a new industrial technology, Christianity and the system of universal secular liberal education. These changes shook the very foundation of the traditional Indian society structure.

This study seeks to describe the salient features of the social change that came among the scheduled caste women, and their socio-cultural aspirations. In the contemporary Indian society, the number of educated scheduled caste women is gradually increasing. Coming as they do from disadvantaged and deprived sections of the society, suffering from the age – old stigma of untouchability with all its disabilities, their problems and patterns of adjustment to the new situation are likely to be characteristically different from those of the educated women belonging to the caste Hindus.

It is well known that the structure of the traditional Indian society is characterized by the spirit

of social inequality. The caste system and the joint family are the two main institutions crystallizing social inequality on the principal of birth and sex respectively. For a proper understanding of the position of educated scheduled caste women, it is necessary to have a fresh look at the caste system and the patriarchal joint family system. Hence, a brief review of the relevant features of the caste system and the joint family is attempted below.

### Caste System

According to Ghurye, the following are the salient features of the caste system:

#### Segmental Division of the Society

Each caste is more or less an autonomous unit of society with distinctive social, cultural and religious patterns. There were groups with a well developed life of their own, the membership of which unlike that of voluntary associations and of classes, was determined not by selection but by birth. This created distinctions which were neither alienable and acquirable nor transferable, and thus drew permanent lines of cleavage. This led the society to be horizontally divided into unbridgeable compartments.

#### Hierarchy

Another principal characteristic of the caste society is the hierarchy of the groups. There is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst the castes, with the Brahmins at the apex, followed by the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The panchamas of the untouchables occupied the lowest rung of the ritual purity and socio-economics factors play a secondary role.

#### Restrictions on feeding and Social Intercourse

There were minute rules about what sort of food or drink could be accepted by a person and from which caste. Social intercourse was restricted and definite rules were followed. The idea that impurity can be transmitted by mere touch of an untouchable or by his approach within a certain distance, prevailed throughout India and was followed vigorously and religiously, especially in South India. The Hindus were thus divided into 'Sawarnas' and the untouchables and no caste Hindu could touch an untouchable for it would pollute the former.

#### Civil and Religious Disabilities and Privileges of the Different Section

Superior castes like the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas enjoyed various privileges while the lower caste suffered from various types of social and religious disabilities. The untouchables were not allowed to acquire knowledge nor were they allowed to acquire wealth. They were not allowed to enter temples. Access to various facilities such as the village wells were denied to them. The priests of the upper castes would not perform the religious ceremonies of the panchams of the untouchables. The schools, maintained at public cost, were practically closed to such impure castes. Both the teachers and the pupils in schools made it almost impossible for low caste boys to sit with others in classrooms.

#### Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation

Generally a caste or a group of allied castes considered some of the callings its hereditary

occupation, to abandon which in pursuit of another, though it might be more lucrative, was thought not to be correct. The upper castes followed occupations which were prestigious and the untouchables were confined to occupations like scavenging, removing night soil, curing hides, preparing shoes and removing the bodies of dead animals. Therefore the untouchables had to be content with only such occupations as were of low social status and were considered impure and pollutant.

#### **Restriction of Marriage**

Most of the groups were further divided into sub-castes in which strict rules of endogamy were followed. No person was allowed to marry outside his caste. These features of the caste system were strictly practiced. They were backed by religious belief and social and economic sanctions. Non-conformity to caste rules was punished by the caste and the Village Panchayats. The result of the caste system was the creation of a group of disadvantaged and deprived people, traditionally known as the untouchables. People from these groups had to practice only the lowest of occupations; they could stay only on the outskirts, could have religious ceremonies performed only by their own caste priests and could not get education in public schools. They were not allowed to draw water from the common wells and could not enter the temples of the Hindus. Untouchability became the bane of the Hindu society which continues to be even to this day.

#### **Joint Family System**

The joint family system which is the other major social institution of the Indian society, emphasize inequality between the males and the females. The females in the Hindu society were equated with the Shudras, having no rights. This idea of inequality is the basis of the joint family system. The manager of the family property or the head of the family made all the decisions as consequence, of which women were the worst sufferers, because here as in all societies the rigors of a conventional community fell most heavily on women. Thus the necessity for effecting changes in the conditions of women came to be felt long before nay inroads were made into the joint family system. Subjugated to the males of the family, women had very little freedom of any kind whatsoever. They had no option but to follow the dictates of the male members, father, husband or even the son, without raising any question.

Thus, the patriarchal joint family system prevalent in most parts of the country gave unlimited powers to the head of the family who was always a male. This organizational structure resulted in giving an inferior position to women in the family. Women were only required to act at the bidding of their male partners, and were confined to hearth and home.

Although women form the lower strata enjoyed greater freedom as compared to women from the upper strata, yet the lower caste women had to live a life subject to the authority of the males of the family. The scheduled caste women were required to perform all the menial and impure duties for the upper class women during menstruation, child birth etc., and therefore they were considered all the more impure

and defiling. At the time of birth, a low caste woman was asked to look after the cleanliness of the place where a woman was kept in confinement. Even today, the indigenous day or midwife in rural areas belongs to a scheduled caste. At the time of marriage also, the low caste women were called upon to perform certain menial services of carrying and disposing of the waste. At the time of some one's death, the message was conveyed to relations only by a messenger who was an untouchable, because the very idea of death was looked upon as impure. Thus, we find that in the social structure and in their functions, the scheduled caste women were considered much inferior not only in the society but also in their own families.

Thus we may say in brief that the traditional Indian society governed by the caste system, and the patriarchal joint family system accorded the lowest position to the scheduled castes and a far inferior position to their women in society. Functionally also they had to perform such functions in the society which were considered impure and pollutant and certain periods of their lives such as the period of menstruation and child birth were also considered pollutant and defiling. Dube, the noted sociologist, observes that 'the superiority of the male' theme has many latent and manifest dimensions. Woman is regarded as more susceptible to pollution; her defilement is easy, purification is difficult. Man, on the contrary, is not so easily defiled, and when defiled the removal of his pollution is not as difficult as it is in the case of a woman. Therefore, in a pollution-purity conscious society, the significance of such a view becomes crucial indeed. It is perhaps at the root of the prevailing double standards of morality. Hence, structurally and functionally, the scheduled caste women suffered from double disabilities-they were deprived members in the society because of their caste status and were deprived members in the family because of their sex status.

Amongst the social and religious reformers, the place of pride must be given to Buddha, Mahavir, saints like Gyaneshwar, Tukaram and Kabir who made a valiant efforts to modify the strictness of the old spirit of caste exclusiveness, sought to raise the untouchable classes to a position of spiritual power and social importance almost equal to that of the Brahmins. They gave sanctity to the family relations and raised the status of women.

These social and religious leaders spoke in the language spoken and understood by the masses; hence their appeal considerably attracted them. This had a gradual effect and in the long run distinctly improving their condition. But saints and philosophers in India seldom concern themselves with the reform of social institutions hence the position of the scheduled castes and their women continued to be socially inferior in the society, till the new awakening among the English educated young Indians started a period of social renaissance in the country.

The traditional social structure of the Indian society which perpetuated social inequality among the castes and between the sexes received a big jolt at the emergence of the British rule in India. The

## Shrinkhla Ek Shodhparak Vaicharik Patrika

British rule in India brought, besides technology, a liberal, modern scientific world view through the introduction of humanistic studies laying emphasis on freedom and equality. This led to the social reform movements pioneered by Raja Ram Mohan Roy who had a passionate desire to revitalize Indian society on the lines of western societies.

The Christian missions have also played a great role in introducing in India the humanistic side of western civilization. Concern with social service, upliftment of the downtrodden sections of the society including their women, became important parts of the socio-religious reform movements which took their inspiration from Christianity.

The spread of liberal education and the work of the missionaries in India were facilitated by industrialization and the technological changes introduced by the British in the Indian society. The British brought some important changes such as the introduction of the postal services, the railways, the bus services and above all opened up modern industries. With better means of communication, trade and industry flourished, urban centers grew up bringing the people together in industrial areas, where the barriers of caste were not recognized. With the growth of urbanization, women started to take up education and began going to school and took up other such activities. This had its inevitable effect on lessening the rigidities of castes and brought about an awakening in the women folk of India, turning them into new individuals in thought and action.

The scheduled castes got an opportunity to work in the army, the dockyards and the railways. They were also appointed as menial servants such as peons and sweepers in the British services. This inspired them in a way to give up their hereditary occupations and to take to education.

Although British government did not interfere with the religious affairs of the Indian or their social customs, they laid the foundation of modern India which took away the powers of caste to a great extent. The conversion of the scheduled castes to Christianity also helped to shed untouchability but it did not however improve their social status. It was the impact of English education that inspired the Indians with democratic ideals and made them start a strong movement against the social institution of caste, and to improve the position of women in India.

The development of the Hindu opinion on the subject of untouchability and the inferior position of women in the society is distinctly due to the influence of western ideas imbibed by individual Hindus. The western educated Hindus started a period of social renaissance in India, pioneered by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who established the Brahma Samaj in Bengal. Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought very hard against the custom of 'sati' and sought to improve the conditions of the widow. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked for improving the lot of widows and campaigned for widow re-marriage. The influence of the Brahma samaj was India wide, but its impact was felt most in Bengal.

Dayanand Saraswati then came on the scene and founded the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj

opposed the rigidity of caste distinctions based on birth, but did not oppose the four-fold caste classification. It did pioneering work of great value by starting several educational institutions, especially for women. The credit of improving the conditions of Harijans can rightly be given to the Arya samaj.

Sri Ram Krishna and his disciple Vivekanand awakened the Hindu society and appealed to follow the true religious injunctions in maintaining a corporate social life in true sense of the term. He considered the ritualistic disabilities of caste and social disabilities of women as being on misunderstanding of the Hindu tradition and strongly pleaded for their rejection.

The Prathana Samaj carried on the same work in Bombay as the Brahma samaj did in Bengal. In Maharashtra, Agarkar, Phule and Karve played a major part in furthering the movement of social reform. Agarkar pleaded to educated classes to give up superstition and put their faith in reason. Phule was an active reformer who genuinely believed in securing social equality. Karve devoted himself exclusively to the cause of female education and widow remarriage. Ranade, the great prophet of modern India, guided the movement of social reform during his life in the sphere of women's education and established many educational institutions for women.

V.R. Shinde followed Phule to improve the conditions and secure social equality for the untouchables and the depressed classes. He started the Depressed Classes Mission and opened educational institution for their progress.

Gakewada of Baroda, and the Depressed Classes Mission Society of Madras which was established in 1909, took up the task of educating these classes. Moreover, the Depressed Classes themselves now held conference to ventilate their grievances and demand their rightful place in the Hindu society under the auspices of the Bombay Presidency Social Reform Association in 1910. The All India Depressed Classes Federation and all Indian Depressed Classes Association were the two chief organizations of the community. By this time the Indian National Congress found itself constrained to make a bid to win the sympathy and support of the depressed classes by espousing their cause.

At a meeting held in November 11, 1917 and presided over by Chandavarkar, the Depressed Classes Mission Society supported the Congress League Scheme of reform and passed a resolution. After a week a second meeting of depressed classes, held in Bombay passed another resolution, The Indian National Congress accordingly passed a resolution in Calcutta in 1917 which was almost a Verbatim repetition of the resolution passed by the Depressed Classes Mission Society.

The first All India Depressed Classes Conference was held on March 23-24, 1918, attended by eminent political leaders. It issued an All India Anti-Untouchability Manifesto to the effect that it would not observe untouchability in their everyday life. Tilak denounced untouchability and said that it must be removed but he did not sign the manifesto. The activities of the Congress in this field was not so

## Shrinkhla Ek Shodhparak Vaicharik Patrika

much inspired by a spirit justice but by the less landable motive of gaining political power. Gandhiji made the removal of untouchability an important and integral part of Indian National Movement but he valued it mainly as necessity for attaining Swaraj than as a purely social reform based on humanitarian grounds, when he put it in his presidential address at the Belgaum Congress in 1924. The right of entry into temples by these people, for which Gandhiji is given sole credit, was in fact advocated by social reformers much before him.

It is believed that Gandhi ushered a new era in the history of the removal of untouchability. He no doubt played a notable part in removing untouchability. Gandhi got a resolution passed in 1921, appealing to the Hindus to bring about the removal of untouchability and help in the improvement of the condition of the submerged classes. Next year, the Congress appointed a committee "to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition of the so called intouchables throughout the country". In May 1923, it passed a resolution requesting the All India Hindu Mahasabha also to take up this matter. In August 1923, from the platform of the Hindu Mahasabha, Madan Mohan Malviya made a powerful appeal for the removal of untouchability but the resolution moved for this purpose was dropped owing to the opposition of the orthodox section.

The problem of the depressed classes entered a new phase after the historic fast of Gandhi, followed by the Poona Pact signed on September 24, 1932. The very next day a resolution in the same direction was adopted in a conference of the Hindu at Bombay. The movement of temple entry began with a great fanfare in 1932-33. The weekly reports in the Harijan of the number of temples and wells thrown open to untouchables and of other concessions made to them became gradually shorter and ultimately vanished altogether. But Ambedkar did not agree. He said: "As a matter of fact, a large part of the news that appeared week to week was faked and was nothing but a lying propaganda engineered by Congressmen to deceive the world that the Hindus were determined to remove untouchability. Few temples if any, were really opened and of those that were reported to have been opened most were deserted temples that were used by none dogs and donkeys."

Gandhi founded the Harijan Sevak Sangh whose branches were opened in every province and each province was divided into a number of units, each of which was to be placed in the charge of paid workers. The Sangh did a lot of useful work. It set up separate primary schools, where scholarship were instituted for high school students and trainees in arts, technical and profession course and maintained works for untouchables students. The Sangh maintained a few dispensaries for the use of untouchables and also facilitated water supply to the untouchables.

The main credit for invaluable welfare work done by the Sangh is undoubtedly due to Gandhi. He was not only the guiding genius of the whole

movement, but actually collected a sum of rupees eight lakhs through an all India tour, mostly on foot, for about nine months.

While the Sangh did not a lot of welfare work, it did practically nothing to remove untouchability from the Hindu society which was its chief objective. G.D. Birla and A.V. Thakkar issued a statement on November 3, 1932 only two months after its inauguration of the Sangh that its main line of work would be constructive such as the uplift of the depressed classes both educationally and the removal of untouchability. This clearly indicated a departure from the original resolution, But as if this was not enough to irritate the depressed classes the statement added "with such a work even staunch sanatanist can have nothing but sympathy and it is for such work mainly that the League has been established." The depressed classes cannot be blamed if they infer from all this that the Sangh was not anxious to remove untouchability.

But whatever might have been the achievement for the Harijan Sevak Sangh or the organization of the Harijan themselves, there is no denying the fact that the most important factor that contributed to the amelioration of the depressed classes was the new spirit of the engendered by the world war, the national struggle for freedom and the great economic and other changes that were sweeping the country. Modern systems of transport-railways, buses, trams-where all had to sit together, modern factories where orthodox Hindus and depressed class labourers had to work, live and fight (during strike) side by side, the great national struggle where all classes mingled together to fight for a noble and inspiring cause bright all classes and creeds together in close physical touch and spelt the doom to untouchability, both in theory and practice. The value of equality as enshrined in the Indian Constitution gave a mortal blow to the deep-rooted sense of superiority inherent in the orthodox Hindus.

The Constitution of India contains a number of provisions aimed at the eradications and social taboos. Article 17 forbids observance of untouchability in any form. Article 25 throws open the Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and section of the Hindus. Likewise Articles 15, 19 (5) and 29 hold guarantees against discriminatory treatment of the members of the scheduled castes and tribes. In 1955, the Government of India passed the Untouchability Act providing penalties for those found guilty of practicing untouchability or of discriminating publicity against those who for ages had been regarded as untouchables. Since 1954, the Government of India has been giving financial support to the movement to eradicate untouchability. This campaign is carried out through official machinery and publicity media. There is a commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who keeps an eye on working of special safeguards provided in the constitution for the members of scheduled castes and tribes.

In April 1963, the Government of India appointed a committee under the chairmanship of L. Elyaperumal to go into the practice of untouchability

in the country, the problem faced by the practice of untouchability in the country, the problem faced by the scheduled caste in the education and the obstacles in the way of their economic upliftment. The report submitted in January 1969 dealt with the working of Untouchability (Offences) Act and made a number of suggestions for its educational interests of the scheduled castes.

The scheduled castes have been given special representation in parliament and state legislature under Articles 330, 332 and 334. These provisions were made for the period of ten years from January 26, 1950. Unfortunately, the goal could not be achieved. The government has, therefore, been extending this ten-year period.

In the early fifties, Vinoba Bhave led a group of Harijans for the entry into the Vishwanath temple at Varanasi. They were beaten up by the 'Savaranas'. After that the entry of the Harijans into the Vishwanath temple was allowed. In the same decade many Harijans embraced Buddhism and were called as New Buddhists.

The Government is much concerned with education these classes and as a result of job reservation, a substantial number of Harijans now enter IAS, IFS, IPS, allied services, engineering and mechanical services, railways, roadways, postal services, mostly in government jobs, while in the private sector their number is limited because their appointment are in the hands of private agencies.

These educated and government employed Harijans from class IV employees to top bureaucrats became urbanized and alienated from their rural background and also form their own caste and class. As a matter of fact they form an altogether separate and distinct class differing from their rural brethren.

The work of the missionaries in educating the scheduled castes men and women needs special mention. They were able to create in scheduled caste women a consciousness of their individual's worth as human beings.

Industrialization also brought women and the people belonging to the weaker sections out of their homes providing them with an opportunity for inter – mixing with people belonging to different castes.

A historical review of the positions of the scheduled caste women in the Hindu society, from the early times, has revealed to us that they have been led to accept such concepts as have made the scheduled castes women remain in their present inferior and lower state in the Indian society.

The achievement of independence and formation of a constitutional mandate for removing the social inequalities of the country based on the caste system and in improving the position of women also contributed a lot to the fate of these people. The constitution accepted social equality as its ideal. It provided equal status to all its citizens irrespective of sex, castes, colour or creed. This commitment is the basis of various measures which the Indian government is adopting from time to time to improve the position of the backward caste and the women in the Indian society.

As a result of the attention of the reformers and the progressive views on the status of women, social laws have been enacted after Independence to improve the position of women in general. These acts have established monogamy and given women the right to divorce, adoption and maintenance. Besides this, women have been given rights in the property of their father, husband and their children are provided with special facilities for receiving education.

Untouchability has been abolished by law and women have been given a legal status equal to that of men in all spheres of life. Though untouchability has been legally abolished, the custom continues to be a part of the caste structure of the Hindus, Untouchability still persists and law cannot supersede customs.

As a result of the political, social and religious awakening of the scheduled caste groups have become very restive to improve their degraded social position. Due to the social awakening created by Dr. Ambedkar, men and women of the depressed classes are concentrating on obtaining education, still at present a large section of scheduled castes, especially women, remain uneducated and backward. It is necessary, therefore, to see whether education and the process of modernization attempted in India, since independence, has made any impact on the traditionally bound status of the scheduled caste women in India. Scheduled caste women have lagged behind in educational attainments and consequently in the process of modern change.

Though the educated scheduled caste and egalitarian values to which women form the advanced communities are exposed, there is, however, a difference in the social situations of the educated women belonging to the upper and middle classes and the educated scheduled caste women.

In view of the general educational backwardness of the scheduled caste groups one may not expect the same kind of enlightened family and community atmosphere in the case of scheduled caste women. These attitudes of the parents, husbands, and in laws of the scheduled caste women have by and large remained traditional, orthodox and conventional. There is likely to be a similarity in the culture aspersions of the middle class educated women and family environment are certainly different from others.

### **Conclusion**

It is also true that the attitude of the caste Hindus towards the scheduled castes has not radically changed. Cases of atrocities on Harijans are still reported quite often in the press. The caste Hindus even today, have not been able to overcome the nation of untouchability and the scheduled castes are even today regarded as belonging to an inferior social status. This places the scheduled caste women in a conflicting situation where we find that on the one hand the aspirations of the scheduled caste women have changed, on the other hand the social setting continues to be traditional. This poses a problem for a sociological investigation.

Lastly I will like to say that the present study has to be viewed in the perspective of wider

processes of social change in the country. It is a well accepted fact that many forces of social change are at work in the country since independence. These social factors are bringing forth structural changes in many areas of the Indian social system. The woman, whose status traditionally was well defined and almost fixed in the family situation, is now experiencing the impact of change. Scheduled castes have experienced this change but their women are not much affected by it. The present study has tried to find out what changes have occurred in the status of scheduled caste women and what are the constraints which create obstacles in the way of her progress .

It is descriptive study delimited by its research design and basically does not aim at diagnostic explanation of factors of change in the status of scheduled caste women.

In traditional India, mass illiteracy, social conservatism, geographical distances, extreme localism and a fairly rigid social structure cut off a great majority of the people from effective participation in the political life of the country. In case of scheduled caste women, illiterate or less educated and low income group took sufficient interest in politics. In spite of the fact that her voting behaviours is conditioned. Her vote is mostly preordained and a calculated one. A majority of the women advocated franchise for a calculated one. A majority of the women advocated franchise for women. They felt that voting rights to them is an avenue of self assertion and gives them a chance to participate in the national life of country.

Today scheduled castes have achieved a great political importance. All the political leaders like to enroll them in their parties. More than half of the respondents were members of political parties. Chamar respondents admitted that they could gain an improved status. Panchayat raj and adult franchise have brought considerable awakening among the scheduled caste women under study. They are becoming conscious of their democratic rights. In the last elections 82.5% of women in Uttar Pradesh exercised their franchise.

The only area where maximum change has taken place is the school where, the traditional social restrictions placed on the scheduled castes have almost disappeared. There is a significant change in the relationship between the caste Hindu teachers and the scheduled caste employees. They are now being governed by contractual relationship. There is a lot of awareness among the scheduled caste employees. However, servitude is widely practiced even now because of economic reasons.

In short, the scheduled caste women as a whole are found to be still inclined to the traditional pattern of caste order in society. However, it was observed that by the attainment of higher education by these women and by better economic status these respondents in the enquiry were found to developing new and quite a different attitudes towards marriage customs, particularly endogamous marriage, marriageable age, consultation before marriage, inter-caste marriage, social customs, social restrictions, change in ritual and status and in their relation to their

husbands etc. There is a definite indication of social change though it may be slow.

Our government since independence has pledged to reform the socio-economic condition of this community and to provide them social justice. Various programmes such as scholarships, reservations in educational institutions government jobs and elsewhere etc., have been launched but they have as yet touched only the fringes of the problem.

#### References

1. Abbasayulu, Y.S., Scheduled Caste Elite, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1978.
2. Altekar, A.S., Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, Delhi, 1962.
3. Ambedkar, B.R., The Untouchables, New Delhi, 1943; What Congress and Gandhiji Have Done to Untouchability, Bombay, 1946 .
4. Anshen, Ruth Nanda, The Family: Its Function and Destiny, New York, Revised Edition.
5. Apte, V.S., Social and Religious Life in the Orinaya Sutras, Bombay, 1954.
6. Baber, Ray E., "Marriage and the Family" in Suneila Malik, Social Intergration of Scheduled Caste, New Delhi, 1979.
7. Betille, Andre, Castes Class and Power, London, 1971.
8. Bhai, Nirmala P., Harijan Women in Independent India, New Delhi, B.R. Publishing House, 1989.
9. Boars and Ball, The Sociology of Child Development, New York, 1954.
10. Bose, A.B., Educational Development among the Scheduled Caste in India, 1970.
11. Bose, A.N., Social and Rural Economy of Northern India, 2 Vols. Calcutta, 1945.
12. Chanana, D.R., Slavery in Ancient India, Delhi, 1960.
13. Chandara, R.C., Spatial Dimensions of Scheduled castes in India, Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1988.
14. Chatterji, Skoma A., The Indian Women's Search for an Identity, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1988.
15. Chauhan, S.K., Class, Status and Powers: Social Stratification in Assam, New Delhi, 1980.
16. Cormack, Margaret, The Hindu Woman, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1963.
17. Crook, W., the Popular Religion and Folk Lore of North India, Delhi, S. Chand and Co., 1968.
18. Darling, Carl, A Dictionary Of Selected Synonyms In The Principal Indo European Language.
19. S.N. Srivastava, Harijans in the India Society.
20. Chauhan, B.R., "Recent Trands among Depressed Classes in Rajashthan", Agra University Journal of Research, 1955.
21. D'Souza, V.S., "Changing Status of S.C." The Economic Weekly, 14, 19, 1962.
22. Gabarwal Satish, "Blacks, Harijans and Muslims", Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Review, February, 1962.
23. Ghurye, G.S., Caste, Class and Occupation, Bombay, 1961.
24. Harold, R.I., India's Ex Untouchables, Bombay, 1966.

P: ISSN NO.: 2321-290X

RNI : UPBIL/2013/55327

VOL-IV\* ISSUE-III\*November-2016

E: ISSN NO.: 2349-980X

## **Shrinkhla Ek Shodhparak Vaicharik Patrika**

25. Rai, Jaimal, the Rural-Urban Economy of Social Change in Ancient India.
26. Jain Shashi, Status and Role Preception of Middle Class Women, New Delhi, Puja Publishers, 1988.
27. Jayal, Shahambri, the Status of Women in Epic, Delhi, 1966.
28. Kane, P.V., Hosity of Dharm Shastra Vol II, part I and Vol. IV, poona 1941 and 1913.