

Economic Empowerment and Dalit Women

Abstract

The Aim of the present study is to examine the status of women, privileges provided under the Constitution, legislative provisions through various Acts, Government based initiatives, programmes and special schemes related to women empowerment followed by some effective measures which will definitely be a landmark in filling the gap between needs and deeds

Keywords: Empowerment, Globalization, Sensitization, Policy-Making, Increasingly, Safeguard, Harmonization, Stabilization Measures, Manmohanomics, Populonomics, Emancipation, Liberalization, Vulnerability, Entrepreneurs, Witchcraft, Suppression, Marginalized, Fraternity

Introduction

It is also important that economic empowerment of women is the most important way of emancipation of women folk everywhere in the world. Empowerment in other spheres of life would more or less automatically follow economic empowerment. Poverty has remained an intractable problem with inevitable consequences for human rights, especially for rural women who are among the poorest of the poor and discriminated in terms of access to education, health, water, sanitation, food, globalization and information and communication technology. Much effort is still required in order to increase the number of women in decision-making at all levels, along with gender sensitization of leaders and politicians and to study the importance of electoral systems for women's participation in politics. Lack of women's participation in politics. Lack of women's participation in policy-making is said to be one of the factors in countries currently having "hundreds of laws discriminating against women" (Jafri, 2001). Therefore, women's legal literacy and legal aid should be strengthened.

It may be suggested, that since women constitute a disproportionate number of poor and have increasingly been obliged to undertake agricultural activities for a livelihood, equal access to land and other resources for women, including by suitable changes in inheritance law, where possible, is necessary (Das, 1998). In some states in India, inheritance laws do not discriminate against women, but in some other states, poor women have few legal safeguards, and sometimes face legal obstacles, with regard to access to land.

The major approach for the future should be to bring in holistic approach for women's development. This under scores harmonization of various efforts in different fronts-social, economic, legal, political and cultural. This calls for consolidation of various programmes and efforts in different sectors of the Government and their integration in logical fashion to converge various services and facilities required by women.

Employment has many facets. It allows for political empowerment, economic empowerment, legal empowerment, human resource development or capacity building and beyond.

The structural adjustment reforms (economically called "New Economic Policy") encompassing both macro-economic stabilization measures and the measures to restructure several sectors of the economy are being undertaken in India since July, 1991 on an evolving and ongoing basis, with experience based modifications being made periodically. These reforms have been announced mainly in the Budgets of the Central Government. These have been supplemented by the periodic policy documents of the concerned wings of the government for the relevant sectors (such as: for foreign trade; industry; banks; financial institutions; and the capital markets). The macro economic stabilization measures have been announced by the Finance Ministry mainly including the fiscal policy



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measures and the Reserve Bank of India monetary policy and exchange rate policy measures (Charan D. Wadhava, 1994).

The Policy of Economic Reforms, undertaken by the Government of India in 1991 is being called by different names. Some people call it as 'Manmohanomics' some as 'Raonomics' and some others as 'Rao Mohanomics'. There is one more category of persons, particularly of political arena, who try to pit it against 'populonomics'. (G.S. Batra and R.C. Dangwal, 2004) Whatever names, the economists and politicians may give to the policy of economic reforms, the fact is that it has become since qua non for the economy and the Indian economy has to go ahead with the policies of economic reforms.

In the Patriarchal Indian society, women have been subjected to exploitation atrocities, male-dominance and gender-bias. The international organisation have been highlighting the empowerment of women as the surest way of making them partners of development. There have been governmental interventions but much has to be done in this direction. For this, quantitative as well as qualitative education, Panchayati Raj Institutions, economic independence of women and self-help groups should be promoted. It is clear that three indices-education, employment and health determine the status of women in the society. But of all the three, employment and health determine the status of women in the society. But of all the three, employment contributes a greater degree of empowerment to women in the family. Educated but dependent women are in a very critical position. Hence, the women empowerment requires her emancipation from dependency. The implementation of liberalization policies lead to the continuous decline in the implementation of liberalization specially in the organized sector. This causes the displacement of women. They are compelled to depend upon informal sector where women are exploited in many respects. Decline in the educational opportunities naturally prevents women to enter into better jobs. Women will not have any opportunity to utilize their intellectual creative abilities. Similarly, deterioration in the health facilities make the women's lives more critical. Women, in the patriarchal society are already subjected to dependence. The factors that determine the status of women should be strengthened, so as to improve the quality of life of women. What will happen in the years to come? But the present situation is sufficient enough to confirm that the implementation of liberalization policies has weakened all the three indices-education, employment and health. Thus, the liberalization process which forms the most important part of our economics reform policies clearly move in the opposite direction in the attainment of women empowerment.

The above analysis amply describes that the dream of empowerment of women is still cry. It can be achieved only after the women themselves develop positive self-image, self confidence, and knowledge of human values, rights and privileges. Only this would enable them to take part in decision making and to have access to information and resources.

Sustainable development can be achieved only if women's potential is also utilized. In short, we can say that women can be empowered through four processes i.e.,

1. Access,
2. Conscientisation,
3. Participation, and
4. Decision-Making

The majority of Indian women residing in rural areas and urban slums are leading a hand to mouth existence and for this they diped on agriculture and they form the informal sector with little or no legislative protection and trade union support.

Rural women in our country suffer from being both economically and socially invisible. Economic invisibility comes from the perception that women are irrelevant to the wage and market economy. Social invisibility is the result of the general status of second-class citizens. The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) made on objective analysis of the impact of developmental plans and programmes for the Indian women with special reference to rural women.

There exists continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors-economic, social, political, educational, legal, health care and nutrition. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life. Women need to be empowered for gaining collective strength. Collective strength is necessary for building solidarity and support among themselves to achieve empowerment. The solutions to overcome women's poverty can only come from steps taken by women's groups and such other organizations. Individuals cannot solve the problem of their powerlessness. This can only be done through action.

In the society, we are mutually dependent on each other. Only an interaction society can improve the quality of one's life. Women as a group can establish their identity and face the challenges in this social system. Women identify their common interest and establish their worth and change their roles with men. When a poor woman is influenced to participate, she gains a new sense of dignity and confidence to overcome her problems. Hence, they move towards economic independence.

Without economic empowerment, the development of women would be at its lowest level. Plans, policies and legislation provide only the blue print for directing the progress of society. These plans would be successful only when women receive economic powers. Once they get economic powers, the status of women would be uplifted immediately with economic independence.

The main reason for a woman's subordination is her economic dependence. This condition brings them to a social crisis where a woman is unable to express or decide for herself mainly because she has no means to support herself and her children. It is precisely because of this that many women development programmes emphasize on the income generating activity so that there is money available for her and she can move towards

economic independence. This makes her first step towards her empowerment.

Rural women in a state of acute poverty have become one of the important areas considered as consumers and not producers. They have no occupation, property, education, or skill. A majority of women are at a disadvantage in gaining professional training because of unequal access to education at preparatory levels. As a result, they hardly get into the formal sector of employment. To uplift the status of poor women, some of the self employment schemes are introduced by the Social Welfare Department giving them training in cottage industries such as a sericulture, plantation of medicinal herbs, making candles, palm leaf articles, bamboo, Madhubani Painting, applic work, soft toys, craft and coir products.

If women have to become successful entrepreneurs, the programmes would also include women to develop self-confidence, assurance and strength. They should be encouraged to believe in their own capabilities.

Initially women's welfare was a part of the government programmes to improve the status of women in India. Later on, the emphasis shifted onto women development, and subsequently in recent years, the attitude of the government towards women has undergone a major change where women empowerment is made an objective in the programmes of the government. recent UN report notes that India has improved its position in education, employment and per capita income of women, but it has however not achieved two third representation of women in parliament, removed their unequal wages or lessened their debt burden. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report on Human Development 2003 reveals that India's position is 127 out of 174 nation as per the Index of Human Development (HD). If it is viewed on the basis of 'Gender Development Related Index (GDI), ours is 99th place out of 130 nations. The data collected for selected countries with regards to CDI reveals that near gender equality exists in Norway, Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Malaysia, Venezuela, Philippines, Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Countries with higher gender inequality are Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, India, Egypt, and Nigeria. This clearly indicates how the women are subjected to discrimination all over the world. India's position is worse than many countries.

Though India has improved its position from 138 in 1994 to 127 in 2001 (UNDP, HD Report, 2003) in HDI, still it is far behind as far as the status of woman is concerned. Atrocities on women, wife beating, bride burning for have become very common in India. A very startling fact is that women belonging to Scheduled Tribes, Dalits and downtrodden are alleged to be practitioners of witchcraft, and they are paraded naked and beaten by men and they are compelled to drink either urine or swallow. Several cases have come to the notice in S.P. Division of Jharkhand. This clearly shows that women are being

subjected to suppression and exploitation and being marginalized in every respect.

Aim of the Study

Dalit women are basically deprived of social, economic and political rights, though they are culturally strong, The fact is that economy is sub structure where as religion, polity, society are Superstructure. Aim of my paper is to focus on the initiation of Government and Non-Government plans and programmes and to implement them so that economic conditions of this deprived group or section of the society could be improved irrespective of any caste or class. To bring them into the mainstream of our society to lessen the wider gap (economic) between rich and poor section of our society.

Conclusion

The Preamble to the Constitution of India promises, "to secure to all its citizens, justice-social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation". While improvement in the status of the women was a pledge made by the Constitution-makers and admitted by the national Government at the very outset as one of the major tasks (acing the country, no comprehensive review of the achievements in this direction has been undertaken thus far (Prabhakar, 2004). Some laws, attempting to embody the principles underlying the Constitution had, from time to time, passed through the Legislature. Attempts were made to introduce the programmes of development, aimed at enabling women to play their role in our national life in an effective manner. Partly as a result of these various measures and partly because of the general processes of social change, which have speeded up since independence, the status of women in our country has undoubtedly undergone considerable change. It is felt that while these changes have been considerable in the urban areas, problems continue to remain virtually unchanged in most of the rural areas. Further, with the changing social and economic conditions in the country, various new problems relating to the advancement of women, which had not been visualized by the Constitution-makers and the Government in its earlier days have manifested themselves.

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