

Education and Dalit Women in Contemporary India: Changes and Challenges

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Abstract

Education is considered as one of the most powerful instruments of the social transformation and human emancipation. It ensures human resources and intellectual endeavor. Indian education system upheld with the vision and value of uniform participation for all sections of the society. However, the educational pace and presentation is not aspirational for Dalit women as they are one of the most marginalized and segregated groups in the society who face social discrimination, economic exploitation and political powerlessness. Gender stereo-typing and caste discrimination in the educational field are key impediments of their development as they experience lack of accessibility and affordability of quality education caused by structural and cultural barriers.

In spite of several policy efforts from the state, educational disparity of Dalit women continue to persist. Their educational exclusion mirrors the real pictures of the unequal society. Against this backdrop, the present paper attempts to provide a brief profile of educational status of Dalit women in India. It also intends to understand changes and challenges as they face in contemporary India. This task would be done by secondary data analysis.

Keywords: Changes, Challenges, Dalit, Education, Status.

Introduction

Caste is a fundamental and distinctive feature of the traditional Hindu social structure. Historically, Dalit occupied lowest position in this structure. Dalit are known as down trodden and broken people of the society. The term Dalit as propounded by Dalit panther was based on the class definition, and it included SC, ST, landless, poor peasant and women, those who were exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion (Omvedt, 1995). The term also first used by British in the Government of India Act-1985. After independence, the government of India introduced Dalit as a scheduled caste in article-341. This group has been socially oppressed, culturally humiliated, economically exploited and politically powerless. Beside above mentioned characteristics they are addressed by different nomenclatures such as *Untouchables*, *Acchuts*, *Chandals*, *Avarnas*, *Punchama*, *Out Caste*, *Harijans* etc.

Traditionally, in the Hindu social structure, Dalit women are placed at the lowest strata of the society. Dalit women are one of the most marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of the society. They face dual oppression as being 'women' and 'Dalit'. Since the origin of the rigid caste system, the education was monopoly of the Brahmins and Dalit women were restricted from it entirely. Dalit were excluded from the right of freedom, choice, socialization, selection and equal accessibility of education. Their only duty was to serve the *chaturvarna* people. Dalit were denied to access education in the name of caste, gender and patriarchy. Therefore, their social-cultural, economical and political status in the society is not uniform as a whole society.

India has one of the largest systems of education. Education is the most powerful indicator of social mobility and development of the individual in the caste based stratified society. Additionally, it is positively correlated with economic development, and ensures nation building in the society. However, Dalit women were experiencing educational discrimination and disparities throughout Indian history. Moreover, they are also facing participation problems, lack of quality education, drop-out-rates,

and the prejudices in the educational field. It leads to their powerlessness and poverty.

As per 2011 national census, Dalit women constituted about 16.6 percent of Indian population. Simultaneously, during the period (2001-2011), SC women made the most rapid progress. The literacy rate of SC women is about 42 percent in 2001 which increased to 56 percent in 2011. Spread of literacy is associated with important traits of modern civilization such as commercialization, industrialization, urbanization and modernization of the society. In order to change the condition and status of Dalit women in the educational field, government of India has made many provisions. This safeguards change their educational statuses and roles in the society. Apart from these upliftment programs, their educational participation is not aspiration and inspirational with the whole society. Hence, the educational condition of Dalit women in contemporary India must be a serious concern. Against this background, it is necessary to evaluate present status of Dalit women's education in India. This paper provides on understanding of educational transformations among Dalit women in the India context.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the overall educational status of Dalit women in contemporary India through an overview.
2. To outline situational hindrances in their educational prospects.
3. To evaluate transformations in their educational status by assessing the policy efforts.

Changing Educational Status of Dalit Women

This part focuses educational changes of Dalit women. Some key changes are following.

Traditionally, Dalits were entirely denied for accessing education. They had no freedom, right and choices of education. Education was the monopoly in the hands of the Brahmins. Over time, the transformative processes of industrialization and urbanization break this shackle. The establishment of the British rule in India came with the modern state, economy and education, this break the negative correlation between caste and education. Meanwhile they started separate schools and colleges also. In the post-independence period the government of India enacted various programs and provisions for the weaker sections of the society. Some significant provisions include abolition of caste atrocities act, reservation policy, improvement in Dalit women literacy, and new educational policy. These provisions and safeguards help in the upliftment by providing new opportunities for Dalit women in various fields.

Specially, In the field of education, government took measures to increase literacy through the improvement in gross enrollment ratios, elementary education, scholarships of various kinds, book bank, uniform, bicycle, mid-day-meal, free coaching, tuition, fee-concession, schools, colleges, universities, girl hostels and time-to-time educational policies also.

Due to these upliftment and safeguards, Dalit women become more literate and acceptable in the

society. This improved their socio-economic and political statuses in the society. They also experience educational mobility in the society. They are also aware and asserts their rights and identity.

Educational Challenges among Dalit Women

This part focuses and examines some key challenges faced by Dalit women in the field of education. The key challenges are following.

If we look into the history, Dalit women were denied and excluded from accessing education in the name of caste and gender. They had no freedom rights and choices of education. These structural and systemic problems made them vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society. Their socio-economic condition in the society is not well and uniform with other sections of the society. They become more poor, illiterate and powerless in the society.

In the educational institutions, their gross enrollment ratio and drop-out-rates are very low and high as compared to the other sections of the society. There are many reasons behind this such as lack of motivation, Teachers behavior, poor economic condition, state behavior, and class situation followed by attitudinal barriers which also play crucial role in this context. In general, finance and funding also erect barriers.

Quality of education and privatization of education are further issues. No wonder, they cannot afford and access quality education because of their poor economic condition. Government also fails to ensure for them quality and uniformity of education. In this way pedagogies and curriculum issues too reflect with them.

Review of Literature

As per 2011 census the literacy rate of SC's in India is very miserable. Their participation in higher education is very limited. They are subjected to educational deprivation and inequality caused by historical and cumulative factors. They are facing poor quality education, high drop-out-rates, low enrollment ratio due to their poor, discrimination, Socio-economic and structural barriers (Thorat, 2009).

However policy is a central subject of education. But socio-economic disadvantaged groups will face neglect due to inadequacy of forceful education, privatization of education for elites and informal alternatives to education (Nambissan, 1996).

The politics of Dalit emerged from their day to day struggle for power, education, equity and social justice. Some Brahmins and Dalit radicals were feminists who pioneer the struggle of women's education rights and status both within the community and wider society. In the process, they attempted to release women from strict subordination, rigid gender hierarchies and created new political possibilities and power for women self development. This new self development brought about profound sense of enlargement of capacities and emotions; yet they committed also gave rise to frustration and despair (Paik, 2016).

It thus transpire that in India has two crucial aspects of livelihood-education and labor market have without disparity across social groups based on caste.

There are sign of continuity and stagnation rather than dynamic changes and social hierarchy along caste lines have remained more orals unchanged even being reinforced on occasions, creating wide divide between the lagging social classes and advanced classes (Majumdar, 2013).

The norms related to region, caste and family strongly influence students and manifested through informal interaction. During any crisis in the institution the students form informal networks. Students who are pursuing their Ph.D. in different departments and disciplines have an almost equal level of academic achievements and motivations irrespective of their economic and social background. However, the students Coming from the underprivileged sections of the society face different problems during their doctoral program. They do suffer from subtle and overt form of discrimination and prejudices in their day-to-day life in the educational institutions (Govind, 2019).

Traditionally, Sudras and Ati-sudras were denied access to formal education of all kinds ranging from the ability to read and write to specialized technical training of all kinds. All over the sub-continent there are several legends that illustrate this fact and speak of this aspiring. Dalit students being excluded and discriminated from education purely on grounds of their caste identity. The most famous of this legends is that of Eklavya (Shah, 2006).

The spread of education among the weaker section has been a major part of the government programs since the early 1950's. Some of the special programs, which have had a significant impact on improving the educational status of Dalit include elementary education, post-metric scholarship, book banks, hostel for boys and girls, ashram school in tribal areas, national overseas scholarship, coaching classes and allied schemes. Admittedly, these schemes have contributed significantly in raising educational status of Dalit students. However the problematic features are illiteracy, massive drop-out-rates and limited access to higher education (Jogdand, 2007).

Even after nearly four decades of development and planning many weaker sections of the society are left untouched by the vast educational network, as education, particularly higher education still remains elitist in nature, being accessibility mainly to the blessing of the middle and upper classes. Differences in the rate of literacy and in the enrolment ration between the rural and urban population, between the man and women, between the backward castes and non-backward castes are quite high (Tilak, 2018).

Social exclusion/inclusion of Dalit students operates in conjunction with the rapid privatization of education. Thus the question of alternative action for Dalit students is challenged as a threat to the 'merit' of non-Dalit students who do not have access to affirmative action. The experiences of Dalit individuals shows us the diverse dimension of social space of higher education in India- the ideology of caste acquires new forms and strengthens the exclusion of Dalit in general and Dalit students in particular (Nealakanandan, Malika, 2012).

The Government policy and program has not benefited Dalits in education and workforce. The attitudes, perception and treatment that the Dalit confronts in his everyday life requires a lot more preparation on the part of the state and educational institutions. It is rest not sufficient to wash off responsibility- Major making policies and program for upliftment of the disadvantaged sections, but it necessitates the education of those not disadvantaged and at the other end of the fence (Rao, 2002).

The Chamar self and community engineering process does not beginning in the present, but encompasses & re-ranking of the past too. The contours of this process are highly political, and reflect the crucial nexus between literacy and education as ideological resources, context in particular political mobilization and social functioning of the community analysed the democratization of the concept of the person substituted by the notion of literacy and education (Ciotti, 2006).

Girl's education positively impacted their reproductive health and environmental sustainability. Education is a great leveler as illiteracy being one of the strongest predictors of poverty. Primarily, education plays as a crucial catalyst for weaker sections such as Dalit women, poor, ethnic minorities, disabled people and rural families (Basu, 2001).

Conclusion

To conclude, the educational status of Dalit women is increasing and enhancing in a gradual manner. Not only sociological studies, but census data also confirms the improvement and mobility. Since the independence of the country, their situation has been improved due to state sponsored welfare oriented policies and programmatic actions driven by the vision to ensure equal access, opportunity and quality education. As a corollary, their participation is growing in educational institutions followed by positive improvement in their literacy rate and gross enrolment ratio. However, these transformations are still low to conclude any groundbreaking changes. As contemporary India is going through large scale changes powered by macro level processes such as globalization, urbanization and far reaching technological impacts, Dalit women are still experiencing deprivation, disparities, discrimination and living in state of marginality. These challenges are mirrored in the educational sphere where they face the illiteracy, scarcity of quality of education, high drop-out-rates under the shackle of discriminatory cultural values. It leads to their socio-economic status in a vulnerable and disadvantaged position. Their participation in schools, colleges and university is not much better in comparison to the other sections of the society. Therefore, there is a need to enhance, increase and strengthen the educational situation of Dalit women of India.

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