

# Empowerment of Dalit Women Through Reservation Policy

Pinki Maurya

Lakshmibai College University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

Corresponding author: pinkimaurya7@yahoo.com

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## Abstract

In the post independence era many programmes and policies have been launched for the welfare of women. According to studies among the women, dalit women are exploited more in Indian society. Further the proportion of dalit women below poverty line is comparatively higher in comparison to upper caste women. There are high incidences of poverty, lack of access of resources, illiteracy, unemployment and other related issues associated with dalit women. The affirmative action policy which is implemented through constitutional provisions has empowered the deprived sections including dalit women. Recently Government of India has launched many schemes related to women which would uplift their status in society by bringing them in mainstream.

**Keywords:** Dalit women, notion of purity and pollution, constitutional provisions, Impact of reservation, women welfare schemes

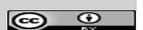
Indian caste system has assigned predetermined hierarchy of social groups which is exclusionary in nature. The notion of purity and pollution has segregated the SC/STs from mainstream and deprived them from individual rights. Due to inequality and social exclusion marginalized sections have suffered a lot in the existing social structure. Over the years, they have been denied social, political and cultural rights in society. According to the various reports this cumulative deprivation has resulted in the high incidences of poverty, lack of access of resources, illiteracy, unemployment and other related issues.

The position of dalits in the context of social reality has been subjected to various sorts of discrimination. Caste discrimination with the gender discrimination becomes a dubial issue to and a major challenge towards social equality. Dalit women as representing the most marginalized segment of the society has suffered caste based discrimination with gender

inequalities and subordination. According to studies due to poverty and illiteracy dalit women are exploited more than other caste women. Proggya Ghatak observes that issues of dalit women are different from other Indian women. They have been deprived of all kinds of human rights, education, income, dignity, social status, religious rights etc. They have to face outside world necessitated by economic deprivation and an urgent need to earn livelihood. Further the proportion of dalit women below poverty line is comparatively higher in comparison to upper caste women (Ghatak P 2011). Due to lack of ownership of assets more than 60 % of the SC households depend on wage labour which is much higher than the one fourths for others. High

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poverty among SCs leads to high infant and child mortality rate. Most of the SC women suffer from anaemia and children from malnutrition. These all factors have impact on the literacy rate among the SC population.

In the past social reformers like Swami Dayanand had set up the branches of Aryasamaj in all over India to eradicate social evils. He advocated against untouchability and condemned caste based discrimination. His analysis of vedic culture established that vedic culture and vedic education never propagated caste discrimination. Arya samaj worked for the upliftment of lower castes and provided them access to education. Dalit women were also accorded education and special training for specific occupations. Due to lack of access to education, socio economic condition of the dalit women has been quite backward as still a large number of section is uneducated. Poor socio-economic conditions result in the heavy dropout of SC women from school and colleges.

In the post independence era many programmes and policies were launched for women education specially dalit women. Many dalit women have been working as bonded labourers doing manual work and manual scavenging at village level. Most of the bonded labour comprises Scheduled castes. The literacy level of SC is 66.1 % as compared to the All India level of 73% Literacy of SC women is as low as 56.5 % against the All India female literacy level of 64.6 % according to census report of 2011.

### **Constitutional provisions for safeguarding the interests of SC/STs**

The affirmative action policy which is implemented through provisions in the constitution has empowered the deprived sections. Constitution empowers the state to provide representation to SC/STs. There are provisions in constitution for the implementation of reservation policy in appointments. Article 16 provides the equality of opportunity for all citizens in the matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state. So it prohibits state from discrimination in any employment or appointment under the state on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them. It enables the state to make provisions for reservation in the promotion of SC, STs in services. Similarly Article 335 states that

claims of the members of the SC STs shall be taken into consideration in making of the appointment in the services and posts under the Union and the state. Article 17 abolished the untouchability by stating that: "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. Under the Directive principles of the state in constitution, state has been directed to ensure non discrimination and equal opportunity in practice. Article 46 states that state should promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Policy making at government level has followed these principles in government services, education and political representation etc.

Article 15 states that "nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of the citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Safeguards are provided in Article 29 too which provides protection in admission and non discrimination in any educational institution maintained or receiving aid from state on specific grounds. Under this Article the state has reserved seats for SC/ST students in the educational institutions. Colleges and Universities run by the Central and state governments including technical, engineering and medical colleges have reserved seats. There are provisions related to providing facilities like scholarships, special hostels for SC/ST students, concession in fees, grants for books, remedial coaching etc.

Reservation is provided in central and state legislatures for SC/STs under Articles 330, 332, 337 of the constitution. Even at the grassroot level Panchayats there is provision of reservation. Through Articles 243T and 243D there is reservation in municipalities and in panchayats. Constituencies are reserved for SC/STs for the seats in parliament and state Assemblies. So there are constitutional provisions for reservation in legislative bodies for the SC/STs to enhance political participation. Within the seats reserved for SCs, one third of the seats are further reserved for the SC women.

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## **Impact of the reservation policy on dalit women**

There have been changes in the status and position of the dalit women due to reservation policy. Due to reservation policy there is improvement in access of dalits to education and employment. According to reports due to reservation policy there is an increase in the college enrollment rates of the disadvantaged groups. Tejas observes in the survey of major states that affirmative action has increased the enrollment of men and women belonging to the disadvantaged groups or castes. 72 % of dalit women who are currently enrolled for higher education would not have attended the colleges without reservation.

Surendrakumar observes that reservation policy in education has reduced the social inequalities by bringing the dalits to the mainstream (Surendra Kumar, 2016). According to the findings of the socio-economic and caste census 2011 only about 4 percent of each of rural ST and SC households have a member in a government job. However, it varies according to region and among different segments. There is an increasing trend in the literacy rate among the SC population but it still remains quite below to national level as per census of India. Gender disparity is also very evident in education.

SC women who are mostly concentrated in the rural areas have faced more challenges due to lack of awareness and lack of access to education. Moreover most of these women are not aware of the schemes provided by the government for their welfare. Due to lack of education affirmative action policies have not been fully utilized. The job vacancies remain unfilled in the absence of suitable candidates. Due to economic backwardness, most of the dalit women have been confined to their traditional jobs specially in rural areas. Poverty, educational backwardness have limited the opportunity of reservation to dalit women. Despite various efforts by successive governments there remains a huge gap in the level of education of SC women.

According to the annual reports of the commission, there is little improvement in the socio-economic conditions of dalits in the past 50 years as compared to non dalits. Another observation has been that urban based dalits who are creamy layer have benefitted more than their poor rural dalits from affirmative action policy, as this section of dalits

have greater access to better education and facilities. Thirdly due to changes in economic policies and expansion of private sector, there is limited utility of affirmative policy. As per the research reservation in employment and educational institutions has not yet filled the several categories of technical and university jobs. Most of the lower category jobs are filled in services through reservation, while the target in high categories of jobs remain unfulfilled. Moreover filling of posts through reservation processes has been very slow due to technical issues. The problem of delay in filling up of posts is also a major impediment in effective implementation of reservation. In many cases despite of provision of reservation it is only accepted in theory.

According to studies there is an upward movement in the human development of SC/STs. Indicators of human development like income, employment, health have shown improvement over the period of time. The share of SC/ST employees in government sector has significantly improved. However, in comparison to non SC/STs groups this rate of employment is still low. Hence, the disparities between SC/STs and non SC/STs have not been reduced substantially to bridge the gap.

There are impediments in the implementation of reservation in employment, education and other spheres too. Studies mention that due to low access of the SC women from income and human resource capabilities there is low attainment of goals through reservation policy. Due to exclusion of SC women from mainstream and differential treatment in accessing public services and resources, they have not been able to utilize the affirmative action policy. Dalit women also experience atrocities and violence in different spheres as observed by the reports of SC/ST commission. Mostly in the rural areas due to issues of land, property and forced labour SC women are exploited more than other caste women. Social exclusion and discrimination of SC women are prevalent on a large scale in multiple spheres.

The major obstacle of affirmative action policy is that it is confined to the government sector only and the vast private sector is excluded from its jurisdiction. Although government has used some sort of an informal affirmative action policy in the private sector. Over the time there has been considerable improvement in the share of SC/ST reservation and representation in government employment

and educational institutions. According to studies reservation in government sector and informal affirmative policy in private sector has improved the human development of SC/STs.

Shri Thawar chand Gehlot, Minister of social justice and empowerment urged that senior officers of the state should take all steps to fill the backlog vacancies (Aditi Tandon 2017). For the socio-economic development of the SCs state should ensure that funds are allocated to schemes which directly benefit the SCs. Central government has developed administrative mechanisms for regulation, monitoring and implementation of the reservation policy and other affiliated programmes. Department of Personnel and Training regulates and monitors the reservation policy in government services. DOPT can enforce, modify and monitor the implementation of reservation in central government services. Even in ministries SC /ST cells with liaison officers ensure the implementation of reservation policy. Committee of Parliament on welfare of SC, ST is also entrusted with the task of examining the progress regarding the representation of SC/STs.

Government has adopted certain means for the effective implementation of reservation policy in jobs. Some safeguards like implementation of roster system for posts under reservation and provision of liaison officers to supervise the reservation policy have been adopted in government jobs. There are representatives of SC/STs in selection boards to safeguard the interests of reserved category people.

### **Schemes of Modi Government for the upliftment of SC women**

Government started Stand up India scheme to facilitate bank loans to SC/ST with special provision to women borrower. The stand –up India scheme is aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among SC/ST and women by giving loans in the range of ₹ 10 lakh to ₹ 1 Cr for setting up a new enterprise. SC/ST and women entrepreneurs would get comprehensive support like pre-loan training, facilitating loan, factoring and marketing.

Other schemes like *beti bachao beti padhao* is specifically aimed to address the sex ratio discrepancy in parts of the country by providing equal opportunities for education and participation to the girl child. *Sukanya Samridhi Yojna, Balika Samridhi Yojna,*

CBSE scholarship scheme for girl education. National scheme of incentives to girls for secondary education is particularly aimed for upliftment of girls from the SC/ST communities through monetary incentives for education.

As per census of 2011, literacy rate among SCs females in the age group of 7 and above is 56.46%. In order to improve literacy rate, *Saakshar Bharat* a centrally sponsored scheme for adult education and skill development is being implemented in rural areas of 410 districts in 26 states and one UT with special focus on women and other disadvantaged groups. In addition *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, a centrally sponsored scheme is also being implemented in conjunction with the right of children for free and compulsory education Act 2009 for universalisation of elementary education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14.

There is scheme of Grant in aid to voluntary organizations working for SC. The main objective behind the scheme is to involve the voluntary organizations and training institutions to improve educational and socio-economic conditions of the target group i.e., SC with a view to upgrade skills to enable them to start income generating schemes. National fellowship scheme for SC students is initiated to provide opportunities to SC students for pursuing higher education like M.phil, PhD degrees in various streams.

Similarly, there is provision of Pre matric scholarships for SC students studying in IX and X. There is specific scheme called Pre matric scholarship to children of those engaged in occupations involving cleaning and are prone to health hazards. Others schemes in education initiated are: Post matric scholarship for SC students, Central sector scholarship of top class education for SC students, National overseas scholarship, Free coaching schemes for SC students, *Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna* etc. Other schemes like credit enhancement guarantee scheme for SC, self-employment scheme for rehabilitation of manual scavengers etc.

There are devastating effects of the caste system on the educational, economic and social status of dalit women. Dalit women have been exploited due to poverty, lack of status and education. According to India's ministry of labour 85% of dalit women are engaged as agricultural labourers, scavengers,

sweepers and disposers of human waste. Many of these women work at minimal wages. Annual reports of 1999 and 2000 of SC commission show that dalits in general have very low participation in higher education. According to 2011 census, total literacy rate of dalit women is 56.5%. In rural areas it is 52.6% and in urban it is 68.6%.

These schemes would help in securing dalit women a place in society which would uplift their status and dignity in society by incorporating them in mainstream. Although despite of several measures and policies undertaken, situation has not improved at a faster rate. At the policy making level, a lot of challenges has to be dealt in order to make programmes successful. Government of India has been taking all measures including policy and budgetary measures to bring positive changes in the position and status of dalit women.

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