

Status of women in marginalized society

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Abstract:

Marginalized groups of people are particular group of people in our society like the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Dalit, Religious Minority, Migrant Labours etc. These marginalized groups of people are exposed to many problems due to economic, social and political backwardness. Among these marginalised groups of people it is the women who are the worst sufferers due to patriarchal patter of our society. Apart from experiencing gendered vulnerabilities the women folk of such communities have to face double discrimination for being a 'woman' and again for being a 'woman of the marginalized group'. Women forms more than half of the total population of these marginalized groups. So, it is necessary that the women population of these groups are being given the equal developmental opportunities with men and their development also should be given due importance. Without, equal development among both men and women population in these marginalized group development of the group as a whole is not possible. Thus, to make the people of these marginalized groups equally developed with the other section of the society the development of women should be given due importance. But on the contrary we can see that the disparity between men and women in these marginalized groups is found to be more compared to the other social groups in the society. This disparity is the result of some factors like lack of education, traditional way of life, superstitious believes etc. In this paper an attempt has being made to highlights the status of women in marginalized society.

Introduction:

Status of women differs in each society and community around the world. In every culture and tradition, the place and status of women differs. In today's world, in some society, women have reached the heights of both educational and corporate world. Where else, in some society women are treated as the domestic servant in her own house or like the

machinery for procuring off spring. Women in that society are oppressed by patriarchal hegemony.

Women of India constitute 50 per cent of the country's human resource and their contribution is vital for the nation's progress. Women's development is regarded as an important approach to break the vicious circle of poverty, for which better health and education of women is important. These not only improve the physical well being of the individual directly but it also enhances their productivity and capability to contribute to the 'National Income'.

In India, due to multiple socio-economic disadvantages experienced by some particular groups like the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Dalit, Religious Minority, Migrants labours etc. are regarded as marginalized groups. These marginalized groups are exposed to many problems due to economic, social and political backwardness. But again among these groups another inferior or vulnerable group of people can be identified or labelled out as 'women'. In this marginalized society or among the vulnerable groups it is always the women who are the worst sufferers in our patriarchal form of society. Women from this marginalized community have to suffer a double load of being a member of the marginalized group and again for being a woman. So, women in these marginalized groups are double marginalized.

Objective:

The paper will focus light on how women of different strata of lives are marginalized in our traditional society in the hands of the patriarchal hegemony. Further, the paper assuredly draws conclusion to show women as part of our mainstream society and there should be no gender disparity in order to make the underdeveloped as develop.

Methodology:

The required information was obtained from books, journals, pamphlets and other archival. The method of Historical analysis is employed to seek the answers to the question

raised. Observation and Data Analysis method is been employed for the data and information collection of the study.

Status of women in marginalized society:

In India, social norms and cultural practices are rooted in a highly patriarchal social order wherein women are expected to adhere to strict gender roles about what they can and cannot do. This kind of gendering of women and the gender based division of labour is found to be stricter among the marginal communities due to some factors like - lack of education, patriarchal tradition of marriage and dowry, religious superstition, social exclusion, lack of information relating to right and freedom, social atrocities etc.

Apart from experiencing gendered vulnerability, the women folk of such communities face double discrimination being member of the marginalized groups of specific caste, class or ethnic group in comparison to women of other communities in Indian society. They have little control over the family resources and can take on important decisions related to their lives. For example, in traditional Indian family even, women are not supposed to have food before the male members have taken their food. Women are also expected to be near the side of their husband providing for his needs till he is satisfied to his full. But in contrary, men in patriarchal society do not bother to see in the kitchen pots if there is any food left for the women in the house. In case of a well-to-do family that's not a problem but in case of a family in a marginalized society wherein the family income source is daily wages, it is the women who have to suffer double for the misfortune.

In India, early marriage and childbearing affect women's health adversely. According to data about 28 percentages of girls in India get married before attaining the legal age and also experience pregnancy. These have serious ill effect on the health of women. According to the National Health Survey Report, the average maternal mortality ratio at the national level is 540 per lakh.

In higher class society, a modern woman get married at the age of 28-35, where else in case of rural societies and among the marginalized groups girls are married off in the tender age of 15. Thus, when a modern Indian woman becomes mother, the rural and the

marginalized woman becomes grandmother by the age 30-35. This results in the growing number of population among the marginalized society which in turn leads to poverty. Here again, it is women who suffer both physical as well as mental torment for being a girl or a woman. During infancy and growing years a girl child faces different forms of difficulties and torment like neglect of nutrition need, education and healthcare. As adults they face violence due to unwanted pregnancies, domestic violence, and sexual violence including marital rape etc.

In this regard, the recent remark made by the union Minister of State of Health and Family Welfare, Smt. Panabakka Lakshmi may be cited to make authentication of the problems and issues of women discussed above. She mentioned that ‘we will agree that law alone will not be able to solve the problem and each one of us has to play our role to curb this practice – as parents, family members, siblings and friends. And as professionals whether teachers, doctor, lawyers, judges, administrators, law enforcement personnel, elected representative, journalist, writers, artist all of us have to work together to create a gender balanced society.’

The Indian Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh addressing a national conference on 'Role of Women in Nation Building' said that the unacceptable crime of female foeticide, being encouraged by the widespread misuse of modern technology and its mindless commercial exploitation must be stopped. We should come forward to put an end to this misuse of medical technology. Hazardous effect of this practice is already there for us to see in some of our most developed states like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi.

Again, in case of Dalits, Scheduled tribe and Scheduled caste society wherein among them, the majority people are economically dependent, politically powerless and culturally subjugated to the upper caste, the magnitude of the problems are very high. Usually, in Indian society, women are expected to do all the household works like fetching water and collecting firewood. But it is a matter of grave concern that the Dalits are not allowed to take water from the wells where from the upper caste people drink. Due to their poor economic condition, Dalits in rural India cannot mostly afford to dig their own wells. So, here again, it is the women who have to bear the double load of being a Dalit as well as women. It is

women who have to walk a long distance and fetch water and fire wood for domestic needs. Women are expected to do her gendered role of domestic work and to provide support for the family against all odds of heat and cold.

According to National commission Report for SC and ST, 2009, it is also seen that a large proportion of Dalit girls drop out of primary school in spite of reservation and academic aptitude only because of poverty, humiliation, isolation or bullying by teachers and class mates. The law alone cannot solve the problem each one of us has to play our role to curb this problem and create a gender balanced society.

As per population census of India 2011, the Literacy rate of India has shown an improvement of almost 9 percent in comparison to that of 2001. It has gone up to 74.04 percent in 2011 from 65.38 percent in 2001, thus showing an increase of 9 percent in last 10 years. But there is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India between male and female. Male literacy rate in 2011 census was 82.14 percent and female literacy rate was 65.46 percent, we can see almost 16.6 percent of difference between the male and female literacy rate.

Literacy rate in India: 1991 to 2011

YEAR	PERSONS	MALE	FEMALE	LITERACY GAP
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7	21.6
2011	74.0	82.1	65.5	16.6

Fig-1 literacy rate in India.

http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/paper_contentsetc.pdf

No doubt there is growth in female literacy rate but still we can find disparity in terms between the literacy rate of male and female population. These low literacy level of the women is the result of the socio-economic factors prevailing in our country. The factors can

be outlined as poverty, hierarchical social division, lack of awareness and infrastructure facilities and rigid adherence to conservative cultural values. The low female literacy rate has dramatically negative impact on Family Planning and Population stabilization efforts in India. Studies have indicated that female literacy is a strong predictor of the use of contraception among married Indian couples and health of the family.

In India, the ethnic tribes and scheduled tribes are also regarded as underprivileged section of people. They are socio-economically disadvantaged people. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural labourers, casual labourers, plantation labourers, industrial labourers etc. The low level of education and poor health resulted poverty in them wherein no poverty alleviation programme is seen breeding of successful outcome. In North east India, men from the marginalized society (ST/SC) usually go to Meghalaya Coal mines for labour work. Thus, women are left alone at home to support the family both physically and economically. Young girls are expected to help their mother in household works and they are also usually sent to work at other's house as domestic maid to help the mother to sustain rest of the family. Often girls from marginalized society are found falling in the traps of the bad hands and due to their ignorance they become easy prey of human trafficking and are also forced to prostitution.

The lower status of women led to their oppression in two ways:

- 1) Oppression outside the family,
- 2) Oppression inside the family.

Large number of women in rural areas belonging to marginalised communities depends upon their daily wages earned in agriculture without holding any type of assets to their credit. Due to the absence of skill they often restore to low skilled works. Thus their dependence on agriculture make the Landlords utilise freely their services. In this process of economic exploitation the female agricultural labourers become the targets of sexual harassment.

The sexual division of labour and the master-slave relationship of men and women form the structure of the family life. The factors like age old house hold drudgery, brining up of children, cooking, washing, and cleaning increases the burden of women in

general and the female workers in particular. Addition of the men to alcohol, beating wives further multiplies the hardships of the women. Hence, her oppression becomes total to her mental capacity, labour power, her body and finally on her own self. Women in comparison to men are even paid less amount of daily wages. In some parts of India it is observed that women working in the paddy fields are usually paid lesser amount of wages than to men for the same nature of work they do.

Among, the ethnic groups of North East India since independence, there have been political instability, autonomy movement, and ethnic clash which have often turned in violent nature. These clashes and movement often takes place due to socio-economic and political issues like unemployment, poor economic condition etc. In Assam, this problem of the ethnic groups resulted into different movement like the ethnic clash between the Bodos and the Adivasis, Garo-Rabha etc. In Manipur, the autonomy movement took a violent turns. Such kind of political unrest creates difficult and serious problem among the marginalized communities in this region.

Again, the people who are adversely affected by this political and ethnic unrest often are bound to leave their houses and live in relief camps for over the years together. For examples, the Bodos and Adivasis communities in Kokrajhar district after the ethnic clash in 1996 and 1998 mostly had become homeless and had to live in relief camps. The women folk have suffered untold miseries in this relief camps without having proper health care facility, food, drinking water, clothes etc. Thousands of women die due to lack of proper healthcare facilities, proper treatment and medicines. The disease like anaemia and dysentery etc created havoc in the form of epidemic. Young girls and women from these communities have also been unfortunately often trapped falling victim of women trafficking by the anti-social forces either in search of employment or to fill their empty stomach.

The problems of the marginalized groups are further complicated by the geographical isolation which is again magnified due to lack infrastructure resulting in inadequate growth of rural economy in this region. For this, all the marginalized communities are equally affected wherein women are considered as the worst sufferers because of their status in society. The greater impact on women is that of losing their sons and husbands in the

name of combating insurgency and communal riots which this region has frequently witnessed. Due to unrest and instability in these areas the patriarchal values and norms are seen to be resurrected and have become even stronger. Some new restriction on the movement of women, the dress they wear and moreover physical violence such as molestation, rape etc. are seen to be used against women's free movement due to unrest in these area.

The status of women in the country, particularly those from the disadvantaged sections of the society, is unfavourable. A girl child suffers from discrimination even before birth and also after birth in the allocation of household resources such as food, education, access to health care and at puberty, sometimes forced into early marriage. Most women in the rural areas suffer from double burden of carrying out less quantifiable work like cooking, fetching water, sending children to school along with agriculture labour, feeding cattle, milking cows etc., while the men folk perform defined activities like selling milk and grains produced by the household. They are not just a minority, but the 'marginalized minority' and are sidelined in decision making in the family, and usually cut off from full involvement in the workings of the community and form an equal share in the rewards from social institutions. Empowerment of women is not only essential for equity, but constitutes a critical element in our fight for poverty reduction, economic growth and strengthening of civil society. Women and children are always the worst sufferers in a poverty stricken family and need support. Empowering women, especially mothers, is even more important as it is in homes that she nourishes, nurture and moulds the character of her offspring.

A report of the High Level Committee on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India (popularly known as the Sachar Report) had highlighted the fact that India's largest minority group, the Muslim numbering 13.83 crore, have been left out of the development trajectory and within this group Muslim women are doubly disadvantaged. With this in mind, the Ministry of Women & Child Development (WCD) formulated a scheme of "Leadership development for life, livelihood and civic empowerment of minority women" in 2007-08 for ensuring that the benefits of growth reach the deprived women among the minority communities.

As we know women of India constitute 50 per cent of the country's human resource and their contribution is vital for the nation's progress. Thus, women's development should be regarded as an important approach to break the vicious circle of poverty, for which better health and education of women is important. In order to make the marginal section of our society developed equally with the other communities, the doubly marginalised group (women) in the marginal section should be taken care of first.

Conclusion:

In a democratic country like India all section of people are said to be treated equally. The constitutional values like equality and freedom are considered much essential ingredients to make the democracy a grand success. The constitution of India confers on women, equal rights and opportunities in all fields – political, social, economic and legal. The government of India has endorsed the same through its plans and policies, different programmes are launched at different point of time. The overriding objective of the planning process is social justice. The important features of the Seventh Five Year Plan was acceleration of the voluntary adoption of small family norms and a positive role of women in economic and social activity. Apart from this universal elementary education with special emphasis on girls and nutrition programme for mothers and child are also notable features. The article 15 of the constitution of India prohibits any discrimination on the ground of sex (constitution of India Article 15). In spite of these, women have not been able to take full advantage of their rights and opportunities in practice for various reasons. The concept of development is multi faceted. Since women comprise a very large part of our country's mainstream population, so without the proper empowerment of women the progress and development of our country may remain a farfetched dream. Hence, women should be treated equally with that of the other half of the society by discouraging the gender disparity irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

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