



SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF DALIT WOMEN - A STUDY IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT :

The present paper examines issues related to the Dalit women vis-à-vis socio-economic problems of Andhra Pradesh. The disadvantages of caste, class gender and the exclusionary mechanism entrenched hierarchical social relations have had differential outcomes for Dalit women in our society. The constitution of India is enriched with several provisions for schedule castes to safeguard and promote their cultural, social, educational, and economic status in order to bring them in the mainstream of the nation. This paper also explores, who are living outside the mainstream of the society due to their lower social and economic status. The caste-based stratification of the society adversely affected the equality of opportunities to the disadvantage of these groups. It also examined the demerits of caste attached to the present scheduled castes in general and scheduled caste women in particular. The scheduled caste women are disadvantaged by their caste and gender and as such they are subject to exploitation and discrimination by their family members, by their caste people and by forward castes. The female feticide, illiteracy, gender inequality, different types of violence, dowry, child marriage, etc are few of the problems faced by scheduled caste women in present society. Apart from, this paper addresses the socio economic status of the Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh as well as in India.

KEY WORDS: Economic status, Dalit, hierarchical.

INTRODUCTION

In Indian society, caste is still the most powerful factor in determining a person's dignity in terms of socio-economic indicators. The caste system is the result of the Hindu belief in 'Reincarnation and Karma'. The four castes eventually developed into a social mosaic of 3000 sub-castes, with the untouchables at the bottom of the list and actually outside the list. Such a rigid caste system is not found anywhere in the world outside India. A person is born into a caste. Once born in that caste, his/her status is predetermined and irreversible. Birth decides

one's status and this cannot be altered by any talent the person may accumulate (Meena Anand, 2005). Similarly, the caste in which a person is born predetermines what vocation the person will pursue. One has no choice. Birth decides the occupation of the person in question.

The social and economic deprivation among Scheduled Castes had been most common during pre and post-Independence. Therefore, there was a need of number of special safeguard policies. One of that is, 'Reservation Policy' in the Government Recruitment. The objective of the reservation policy is to eradicate the social and economic disparities which existed in the society (Jagan Karade, 2008). While dalit women share common problems of gender discrimination with their high caste counterparts, they also suffer from problems specific to them. Dalit women are the worst affected and suffer the three forms oppression - caste, class and gender. As some of the above figures show, these relate to extremely low literacy and education levels, heavy dependence on wage labour, discrimination in employment and wages, heavy concentration in unskilled, low-paid and hazardous manual jobs, violence and sexual exploitation, being the victims of various forms of superstitions.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study is to examine the real situation of Dalit women to move in the direction of development. Further, the study intends to

- 1) To study their educational and health & Economic situation in India as well as in Andhra Pradesh;
- 2) Examine the socio-economic problems of the Dalit women in our society.
- 3) Find out their Status and problems associated with it;

METHODOLOGY

This paper study completely secondary data collected from NFHS, NSSO, Census of India, A.P and Social Welfare Department of Andhra Pradesh.

STATUS OF DALIT WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY:

In Indian society, the Dalits woman is not treated as a human being. Both economically and socially, these women are marginalized. They are helpless beings and their life is cheap and unimportant in this caste society. They are the victims of caste, class and sex. For the majority of women in India, the greatest problem is that of survival. Poverty, dowry murders, widow burning, female infanticide have assumed new dimensions with modernization and technological advancement. The rural Dalit women face more atrocities from the upper caste men and women. In this society they have no safety and security. Any time the upper caste men can use them the way they like. Untouchability is forgotten here, if an upper caste man wants, he can to rape a poor, pale, weak, unhealthy, dark, voiceless Dalit woman.

There is no end in India for the sexual violence against Dalit women. In Madhya Pradesh it is quite common for land lords to rape Dalit women. In Andhra Pradesh, the violence against Dalits in Karamchedu, Neerukonda and Chundur has not yet gone out of our memory. In Orissa in 1995, within 8 months, 330 rape cases against Dalit women were registered. Near Chennai, 18 women of the Dalit community who belong to Pacheti village were raped by Forest Officers.

In each and every state we have this kind of incidents frequently. This is the status of Dalit women in our society. She is looked down upon in our society because she is a woman. She is looked down upon because she belongs to lower caste and She is also looked down upon because she belongs an economically lower class. Thus the Dalit woman is ‘thrice alienated’. In our society she does all kinds of labour. Even in the occupational sphere she is decimated. All 4th class jobs are assigned to her. She is paid very low wages. And so she is very backward and marginalized at all levels in our society.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS:

As per the educational survey by the Government of India in 2011 the literacy rate among Dalit women 56.05 per cent. Dalit women study up to primary level and normally drop out of middle school. Education is the means of realizing one’s life-desires which help to develop one’s personality and qualifies one in improving one’s status in all respects. This has direct association to the socio-economic and political status of women.

Table-1
Literacy rates of SCs and General in India from 1961-20011

Year	General Total	SC Total	General Male	SC Male	General Female	SC Female
1961	24.02	10.27	34.44	16.96	12.95	3.29
1971	29.45	14.67	39.45	22.36	18.70	6.44
1981	36.23	21.38	46.89	31.12	24.82	10.93
1991	52.2	37.41	64.1	49.91	39.3	23.76
2001	64.8	54.69	75.3	66.64	53.7	41.90
2011	74.04	66.01	82.14	75.02	65.46	56.05

Source: Director of Census operations, Govt. of India

Table-1 illustrates that the Scheduled Castes literacy rates are always lower than the general literacy rates from 1961 to 2011. Further, even among Scheduled Castes, female literacy rates are lower when compared to male literacy rates. The gap between male female literacy rates in Scheduled Castes in 2011 is 18.97 percent. Thus, the literacy rates of Scheduled Caste women are at the bottom and it did not exceed 56.05 percent in 2011.

Table-2
Literacy Rates of SCs and General in Andhra Pradesh from 1961-20011

Year	General Persons	SC Persons	General Male	SC Male	General Female	SC Female
1961	21.19	8.47	30.19	13.43	12.03	3.4
1971	24.57	10.65	33.18	15.9	15.75	5.3
1981	29.94	17.65	39.26	24.8	20.39	10.25
1991	44.09	31.59	55.13	41.88	32.72	20.92
2001	61.11	53.52	70.85	63.51	51.17	43.35
2011	67.66	49.02	75.56	-	59.74	-

Source: Directorate of Census Operations, Govt. of India.

The literacy rates of general and SC's from 1961 to 20011 are shown in Table 2. The literacy rates of Scheduled Castes are always lower than the general literacy rates. Further, even among Scheduled Castes, female literacy rates are lower when compared to male literacy rates. In 1991 and 2001 the difference between SC female and SC male is more than 20 per cent. Thus, the literacy rates of Scheduled Caste women are at the bottom and it did not exceed 43.35 per cent in 2001.

It is due to lack of education that Dalit women are not able to come out of their poverty and marginalized situation. Being not educated and trained properly, they cannot go for a good or white collar job and they can't make entry into the organized sector. So their economic status remains low. Since they cannot earn a good amount of money, they cannot afford to live in good houses, they cannot wear good clothes and they cannot look after their health. Being illiterate they are not aware of their own rights and their own life-situation. It is because they are uneducated and innocent and ignorant that upper caste people can easily exploit them and oppress them. Due to lack of education there is no knowledge of health among them. They do not care about their health. They do all kinds of menial work, and they do work which is hazardous for their health. So, education is the main feature which helps a person to develop a good personality.

Health Status:

The gender inequality is prevalent in all societies including India. Owing to the phenomenon of gender based inequalities, women tend to fare quite badly when compared to men with in the same families. Consequently, they are deprived of education and opportunities to develop their talents. They are also denied in more basic and elementary areas of nutrition, health and survival. This is reflected in demographic features of high female mortality rate and low Female-Male Ratio (FMR). Though medical evidence shows that given similar care, women tend to have lower age specific mortality rates than men. Still, FMR is less than unity in many third world countries including India. This phenomenon has been explained by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze in terms of 'missing women'. This concept states the denial of birth to female fetus as a result of preference for male child. They further, state that there are many millions of 'missing women in India'. Moreover, juvenile FMR is more adverse to girl child.

The data in regard to Scheduled Castes FMR (Females per 1000 Males) has been presented in Table-3

Table – 3
Female- Male Ratio (Females for 1000 Males)

Period	FMR in India	FMR for SCs in India
1951	946	967
1961	941	957
1971	930	943
1981	933	932
1991	927	922
2001	933	935
2011	993	945

Source: Directorate of Census Operations, Govt. of India.

Table-3 clearly indicates that FMR show a continuous declining trend till 1991 and later on a small rise to 933. The data pertaining to FMR for scheduled castes though indicate a declining trend, it is relatively higher than general FMR till 1971 and 2001 later on it became less when compared to general FMR. A.K.Sen and Jean Dre'ze (1995) opine that higher levels of poverty tend to go with higher Female- Male Ratio. Therefore, higher FMR can be seen in Scheduled Castes. In 1981 and 1991, the FMR for Scheduled Castes tend was declined faster than the national average. This is due to the cultural impact of upper castes and upper classes on scheduled castes. A.K.Sen says that the sharp decline of FMRs among Scheduled Castes may be a manifestation of the economic progress of growth and poverty reduction rather than being directly related to caste as such.

Table-4
FMR of Total Population and SC Population in Andhra Pradesh from 1961-2001

Year	Total Population			Scheduled Castes			% of SC Population to Total Population
	Male	Female	FMR	Male	Female	FMR	
1961	18161671	17821776	981	2512325	2461291	979	13.82
1971	22008663	21494045	976	2927416	2847132	972	13.27
1981	27108922	26440751	975	4039242	3922488	971	14.85
1991	33724581	32783427	972	5379654	5212412	968	15.93
2001	38527413	37682594	978	6228011	6111485	981	16.19
2011	42509881	42155652	992	-	-	-	16,07

Source: Directorate of Census Operations, Government of India

Table-4 clearly indicates that the FMR shows a continuous declining trend till 1991 in general and SC's in particular and later on a small rise in 2001, it is 978 in general and 981 in SC's. It is relatively higher than the national average. The data pertaining to FMR for Scheduled Castes through indicating a declining trend till 1991 and later on a small rise to 981 in 2001. The FMR for Scheduled Castes in 2001, it is relatively higher than the state FMR.

As mentioned earlier, Dalit women eat only the left-overs after serving their husbands and children. It is unless to speak of nutritious food, in the light of acute poverty. These women, who grow food for others, have to fill their stomachs with water! This is really the pathetic condition of Dalit women. Since these women don't eat well, they also can't feed their children properly. Malnutrition among Dalit children is a common problem. If they get ill they can't afford medicines. Money-minded doctors and medical practitioners do not provide medical help to people with insufficient money. They demand high fees which these people cannot afford.

Even at work place there is no such benefit as medical allowance, or medical leave for them, because most of the Dalit women work in unorganized sector. Unless these women work, they can't feed the family and they can't run the family.

ECONOMIC STATUS OF DALIT WOMEN

Dalit women are estimated to contribute eighty per cent of social labour to strengthen the Indian economy. There is no restriction on Dalit women going out to work. They are free to perform jobs which is normally kept off from upper caste women, i.e., menial, filthy and unwelcome. Dalits are poor and live below poverty line. So to feed the family, the Dalit woman has to go out and work. But her sphere of work is very limited. Though she does hard work, she will not earn much because the work she still does is only what Manu has ordained. Dalits live in huts. Dalit women wear patched clothes. Even in the 21st century Dalits live on the outskirts of the village. They live in dirty areas, where there are no facilities for drainage, toilets, washing or drinking water and so on. They don't have enough food to eat. Though they are poor to keep up tradition, they spend so much money on the occasions of marriage and rituals and festivals. It is a caste issue and if they don't spend they may be labeled as anti-social. For this, they have borrow money from the landlords on high interest and it is hard for them to repay the principle amount and so they work as bonded labourers, and their children automatically taking their place a servant, when they die.

In 1991 70% of the total SC households were landless or near landless (owning less than one acre). This increased to 75% in 2000. In 1991, 13% of the rural SC households were landless. However, in 2000 this saw a decline and was 10%. As per the Agricultural Census of 1995-96, the bottom 61.6% of operational holdings accounted for only 17.2% of the total operated land area. As against this, the top 7.3% of operational holdings accounted for 40.1% of the total operated area. This gives an indication of land concentration in the hands of a few.

The information regard to population living below poverty line in India general and SC's 1993-94 and 2003-2004 have been presented in Table - 5

Table - 5
Population living Below Poverty Line in India - SC (1993-94 and 2004-05)

Category	1993-94		2004-05		(% Points) Decrease (1993-94 to 2004-05)	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
All*	37.30	32.40	28.30	25.70	(-) 9.00	(-)6.70
SCs	48.11	49.48	36.80	39.90	(-)11.31	(-)9.58
GAP	10.81	17.08	8.50	14.20	(-)2.31	(-)2.78

Note: * Include SC Population

Source: Perspective Planning Division, Planning Commission, New Delhi

Due to the lack of access to fixed sources of income and high incidence of wage labour associated with high rate of under-employment and low wages, SC households are often faced with low incomes and high incidence of poverty. In 2004-05, about 36.80 percent of SC persons were BPL in rural areas as compared to only 28.30 percent for others (non SC/ ST). In urban areas the gap was slightly larger; 39.90 percent of SC households were BPL compared to 25.70 among other households. The variation in poverty ratio across household types or occupational groups is striking. In 1993-94, the incidence of poverty was about 60 percent among agricultural labour followed by 41.44 percent among non-agricultural labour.

Table-6
Distribution of Rural Households of Different social Groups by Size class of Land possession
1993-94, 2003-2004

Land Possessed (Hec)	1993-94			2004-05		
	ST	SC	All	ST	SC	All
No Land	13.3	18.1	12.9	3.6	2.7	2.2
0-1	51.3	68.5	59.1	66.7	86.9	74.8
1-2	18.7	8.0	14.0	16.3	6.7	12.0
2-4	11.9	3.9	8.8	10.6	2.7	7.5
4.1 & Above	4.8	1.5	5.2	2.9	1.0	3.6

It is observed in the table-6 that the distribution of rural Households of different social Groups in case of dalits' land possession in India. 0-1 acres of land possess the S.C households in 1993-94 that the percent is 68.5. When we compared to 2004.-05 the percent above 20 percent increasing possess the SC households. 18.1 percent of S.C holds, they did not have land. The lowest percent i.e 1.5 4 and above 4 acres of land has the S.C holds. When it is compared to 2004-05, 1 percent of the SC community people have 4 and above 4 acres land in India.

Table-7
Distribution of Scheduled caste households by Size class of Land possession 2004-05

S.No	Size of Land Possessed (Hec) in Andhra Pradesh					
	%Land Less Households	% of HHS with less than one hectare	0-1	1-2	2-4	4&above
1	4.2	86.3	5.4	3.2	0.90	90.5

In 2004-05, 4.2 percent of SC households land less in Andhra Pradesh. Less than 1 acre land has the household's percent 86.3. 90.5 percent 4 and above 4 acres land possessing in Andhra Pradesh. 0-1 acres of land possessing 5.4 percent of S.C holds in Andhra Pradesh is looked upon the table.

CONCLUSION:

Women constitute the family which leads the society and nation. The socio-economic development of women is necessary for overall economic development of any society of the country. Almost in every socio-economic indicator shows that the position of scheduled caste families is awful. In many cases, their plight is getting worst day by day. Let us have a look at some of the major indicators. The 19th and 20th centuries saw great social reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Sri Narayan Guru, Jyothiba Phule, Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Naickar and others. These social reform movements have undergone many struggles against the caste system, caste oppression and untouchability in many ways. The independence of India has given many safeguards for dalits. In Indian caste system create many problems in the name of caste discrimination. In the case of dalit women who are facing many hardships in day to day life. Dalit women status is not getting improved in Indian society. The government should provide all the facilities like Education, Economic, Employment, Health etc. The government implemented properly the SC, ST sub-plan in various states in India as well as Government of Andhra Pradesh.

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