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DALITS, INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND SOCIAL MOBILITY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

Dalit is now a widely used category in social science as well as popular discourse. Dalits are described as poor, socially placed outside the fourfold caste system of Hinduism. Historically Dalits were called by various name such as “Untouchables” “Harijans” “Depressed classes” or “Outcaste”. In present time, the term ‘Dalit’ implies as an expression of self-identity or expression of hope in recovering their past and reclaiming their self-dignity as full human beings. It reveal a sense of a unified class or a movement toward equality. During the British colonial rule, ‘Dalits’ began to attract attention of the state for welfare and change. The continuous struggle of Dalits forced to others to solution to their question. After Independence, constitution of India promoted many inclusive policies for development of Dalits. Most of Dalits gave up unclean traditional occupation, they adopted sanskritization. In general sanskritization and education brought positional change among Dalits. . In this paper through secondary source of data, try to explore and understand the social mobility attained by Dalits by availing the policies (especially reservation) through education and occupation and explain the obstacles in the implementation of inclusive policies.

KEYWORDS: *Caste, Dalit, Exclusion, Inclusive policies, Social mobility.*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian society is a complex society. It is a characterized by high degree of social stratification and inequality based on caste religion and social origin. Caste is a unique system of stratification found in Indian society. It is not only reflects in the social life of Indian people but also economic and political behavior which are governed by the caste. It is an identity of a person in Hindu society. The caste system divides the people into four main social groups such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, vaishya and shudra and also many subgroups. In this caste system the occupation, cultural rights of each individual

caste are pre-determined by birth and hereditary in nature which are unequal. (Thorat 2007)

In India social exclusion and inclusion of a person in particular category depend upon in which caste he is born. Shudra were considered clearly inferior to the other three castes and were constrained to perform only menial jobs. Those doing menial job obviously had low status since Dalits were assigned the Dalits of serving the other three varnas they were deprived of higher training of mind and were denied social status. Dalit occupy lowest strata in the caste system. Historically Dalits were called by various name such as

“Untouchables” “Harijans” “Depressed classes” or “Outcaste.” They are also known as Perial, Panchama, Atishudra, Antyaja or Namashudra in different part of the country. Their touch and sometimes their shadow and even their voices are believed to pollute caste-Hindus. (Shah:2004)

In this paper, the first section deals with the meaning of Dalit, identity formation of Dalit in different time and finally critically examines the social mobility attained by Dalits through government inclusive policies.

DALIT: ANALYZING CONCEPT

The word 'Dalit' comes from the Sanskrit word which means downtrodden and oppressed.¹ Different scholars/social reformers have explained the concept of Dalit in different ways. The Dalits are described as poor, socially placed outside the fourfold caste-system of Hinduism. Generally the term Dalit means oppressed and depressed but in Indian society the concept of Dalit has very much associated with caste and Varna system. , the term 'Dalit' implies as an expression of self-identity or expression of hope in re-covering their past and reclaiming their self-dignity as full human beings. It reveals a sense of a unified class or a movement toward equality. Historically Dalit has been regarded as untouchables who had been usually termed as panchamvarna, shudra chandalas etc. Mahatma Gandhi used to call them “Harijan”- “children of God”, Dr. Ambedker used the term Broken men, an English translation of 'Dalit' in his paper The Untouchables 1948. This word was also used in his Marathi speeches by Ambedker. He said, it is because they were Broken men that they lived outside the village.

The term scheduled caste is the official term used in Indian government documents to identify former “untouchables”. It's a legal category who claim benefits of special legal protection under welfare schemes. The term first coined by simon commission and was embodied in the government of india Act of 1935. After some time the term Dalit has generally used to refer to scheduled caste. (Naidu, R:2004) according to Zelliott, The word “Dalit” has its origin in the political movements of the ex-untouchables castes in the western state of Maharashtra. It refers to “those who have been broken-down by those above them in deliberate and active way. There is in word itself an inherent denial of population, Karma and justified caste hierarchy”. (Cited in jodhka: 2012)

In Rural India entitlement to right being hierarchically unequal. Every caste (except the

HC's) suffer a degree of denial and exclusion but all suffering castes do not suffer equally. Some suffer more and some less. By implication lower caste located to bottom of the caste hierarchy such as SC's or untouchables suffered most the practice of Untouchability and social isolation. They faced exclusion in education, employment and certain other spheres, reflected in their lower educational and employment level. (Thorat, 2010).

SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG DALITS

Caste mobility as a process of social and cultural change has been explained by Srinivas in his concept of Sanskritization. In the process of Sanskritization lower caste people change their customs, rituals, ideology and the way of life in the direction higher or twice-born caste. This has paved the way for mobility to occur within the caste system. It is a movement of individuals or groups in social standing or social position. This may occur in two different direction, horizontal mobility and vertical mobility.). Social mobility can be change in status between someone/group and their present/previous family generation (inter-generational); or over the change during one's lifetime (intra-generational).

Caste has been considered to be closed system of stratification. However, in reality no system can be absolutely closed. In fact, social mobility has always been present within the caste system. Sociologists observe that in spite of the closed nature of caste system, there have been changes in caste hierarchy and its norms from time to time. India is indeed a 'closed society' (Sorokin:1927) or a 'hierarchichal society' (Dumont:1979) Indian society is being a static society there has no mobility. . Studies by many of the scholars as M.N.Srinivas, Mckim Marriott, K.M.Panikkar, Imtiyaz Ahmed etc. prove that the case of status mobility existed in the caste system. M.N.Srinivas and Mckim Marriott have explained cultural mobility by way of the concept of Sanskritization, Westernization and Universalization and parochialization respectively. Sanskritization as discussed by Srinivas, it represent the aspiration of the castes having a place on the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy to move upward by imitating the cultural practices of upper castes such as the Brahmins, Rajputs or Vaisyas. Many social scientists have elaborately analyzed the changing status of scheduled castes in India such as Andre Beteille who talk about social mobility of non-Brahmins and Adi Dravidas especially in the context of power, in his study 'Caste, Class, and Power'.

K.L.Sharma (1974) observe that there are two pattern of social mobility among the Scheduled Caste-

¹ Here Dalit is strictly used for ex-untouchables of Indian society.

1. The welfare measures have brought about mobility among some selected sections of the scheduled castes adversely affecting the hegemony of the dominant castes in the field of education and employment.

2. Social mobility among scheduled caste is also directly a result of certain socio-cultural movement which in turn has created anti upper caste attitude and awareness about their own low positions.

Within the Dalit community, there are many division into sub-castes. A section of Dalits pursue traditional caste occupations along with agriculture. They are leather workers, weavers, scavengers, basket-makers etc. As the present age is the age of market or age of commodity, India is not the exceptional case. The capitalist system has opened avenues for those whose skills and products are marketable. For instance Chamars in Agra have improved their condition by marketing their products, though their social position has not changed much (Lynch, 1969). In urban areas, SCs are employed in the organized and unorganized industrial sectors; they are petty shop- keepers, small entrepreneurs, scavengers and white- collar workers, mainly in the public sector. Scavengers in urban areas have become blue- collar workers, but their social status has not changed. Their occupation is still looked down upon as polluting (Shah ed: 2001)

INCLUSIVE POLICY: PROVISIONAL SAFEGUARDS

Many privileges, which were considered as serious offence in the case of the 'untouchables' in the caste system. But under the various provisions of constitution a number of programme have been planned and encouraging inter-caste marriage and inter-dining and to protect them from the stigma of untouchability and caste-based discrimination. In a powerful endeavor to produce a casteless society. The constitution has promised equal protection of laws to lowliest and lost, forbidden the untouchability and made free access to all places of public resort a fundamental right. (Cited by Ramaiah:2007) Article-16 provides for Equality of Opportunity in matters of public employment. It provides the Constitutional format for the equality clause in the Preamble. Article-17 abolished untouchability.² (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

In the pre British the process of upward mobility among Dalits was slow and gradual. During the British colonial rule, 'Dalits' began to attract

attention of the state for welfare and change. The continuous struggle of Dalits forced to others to solution to their question. After Independence, constitution of India promoted many inclusive policies for development of Dalits. The government of India has been providing some constitutional safeguard to the people who are economically, socially and culturally backward. The objective of such a policy is to benefit the weaker section in the field of education and occupation. After Independence Dalits have benefited from welfare programmes and get education and employment. Employment generates income and income is an important means that is used to enhance well-being of the individual. (Bhumi:2007) For ex- In Uttar Pradesh 56% SC involved in mgnrega according to Rural statistic. As a result the change in the life pattern has been noticed. The process of democratization, constitutional safeguards, educational attainment, helped the Dalits to raise their status in ascriptive social system and formation of new assertive identity. Because through different governmental policies, they get education. Education enable them to organized and fight against their discrimination and subjugation. Epstein et al. (1998) in the 1990s in two villages in Southern India find an increasing presence of SC households in the village elite, with educated SCs entering into public sector jobs, as compared to the 1970s. In his work Sachidananda (1977) also clearly mentioned that new educated scheduled caste elite has emerged as a result of the policies of the government in providing the scheduled caste reservation in education, which ultimately helped them to improve their status.(cited in Naidu:2004). Now Most of Dalits gave up unclean traditional occupation like- scavenging, removing carcasses, they adopted sanskritization. In general sanskritization and education brought positional change among Dalits. Compared to 1990's SC's are less likely to work the field of traditional landlords, have moved into non-traditional occupation such as own account enterprise and are the increasingly restoring to circular migration to cities. (Kapur et al: 2010). Change is also reflect in geographical location of Dalit houses. Few years ago Dalit houses were outside the village now SC and other caste have residence adjacent to each other. (Kumar:1999)

All these study reveals that there are perceptible changes in the field of occupation, education and political participation in context of Scheduled caste. But in relation to whole Dalit population in India, the percentage of mobility (upward) are very less. In the rural area Dalits, who living below the poverty line are not availing the opportunity provided by the central and state governments just because of lack of awareness and

² Constitution declares in article 17: "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of Untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law."

illiteracy. Institutional barriers also played crucial role.

CONCLUSION

After 69 year of Independence, there has been consistent effort to safeguard the interests of the Dalits. Mobility among Dalits were slow before independence, after independence several social and economic changes are evident among them. But these inclusive policies or constitutional safeguards have not helped much in raising their social and economic status. In conclusion we would like to say that inclusive policies should continue with better and intensive implementation without any leakage. The objective of policy should be more social rather than political so that those people get more benefited who belong to lower strata of the society.

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