

# *Empowerment of Other Backward Class Women*

**Afshan Rizvi**

Education Department  
Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Meerut  
afshan.rizvi5@gmail.com

**Dr. Aradhana Pandey**

Education Department  
Lucknow University, Lucknow

**Abstract--The purpose of this study is to understand the educational status and its relationship with social, economic and political status and realities of backward class women. The key focus is on the presentation of backward women voices and their perception of education and their experiences. It also addresses the pain and sufferings of backward class women because of Prejudices prevailing in the society. In order to analyze the influence of education in empowerment of backward class women four parameters of empowerment were taken in study i.e. educational, social, economic and political.**

**Keywords-- Educational, Social, Economic and Political.**

## **1. Introduction**

Indian people have been systematically discriminated on the basis of their occupation and descent for centuries but it is seen that caste discrimination is more prominent in our society. Even as we are the 21<sup>st</sup> millennium, caste discrimination, an age-old practice that dehumanizes and perpetuates a cruel form of discrimination continues to be practiced. India where the practice is rampant despite the existence of a legislation to stop this, 170 million Other Backward class of which 49.96% are women continue to suffer discrimination. The situation of Other Backward class Women in India needs special attention. They are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world, and make up 3% of the world's total population. Other Backward class women are discriminated against three times i.e. caste, class and gender as they are backward, they are poor, and they are women. The traditional taboos are the same for backward men and backward women. Men are dominant in Backward communities. Backward women also have less power within the Backward class community itself.

## **2. The Origin of Caste**

The origin of caste lies deep in India's ancient past and the evidence of these origins provided by the archaeological and literary sources now available is, at best circumstantial consequently, scholars have been forced to engage in considerable speculation in their efforts to reconstruct the past history of caste system. The origin of Varna is usually associated with the advent of Aryans on the Indian soil. The Aryans, a set of related and highly self-conscious tribes sharing a common language and religion, began their invasion of India from the North West in around 1500 B.C.

There are only four varnas- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaish and Sudra. If Harijans who are literally beyond the "pale of caste", are including they are five;

1. There is a single all-India hierarchy, without any variation between one region and another
2. The hierarchy is clear and
3. It is immutable. This hierarchical pattern is hall mark of caste system also.

J.H. Hutton an eminent anthropologist and author of one of the best books on caste, *Caste in India*, locates the origin of caste in the taboos and divisions of labor in the pre Aryan tribes of India as well as in their efforts at self preservation in the face of invasion [1]. Dr. Ambedkar's thesis on the Origin of Untouchability, as expounded in his book 'The Untouchables' (1948) is an altogether novel one. The distinction between the Hindus and the untouchables is in its original form, before the advent of untouchability, was the distinction between Tribes men and Broken Men from alien's tribes. Despite so many efforts taken by the government to abolish untouchability, it is still being practiced specially in rural areas of India. Untouchability related to women is practiced in many ways that affect all Dalit and Other Backward Caste women every day. For example, these women fetch water from public water taps, wells, etc., they suffer from mental as well as physical assaults. However, when a marriage takes place between an upper caste boy and a lower caste girl, problems occur as she is not accepted by her husband's family. Subsequently, she is mentally and physically abused and abandoned in many cases.

## **A. Women Education with Perspective of Empowerment:**

India is reputed to have a progressive education policy with regard to the focus on gender. The National Policy on Education, 1986 put specific emphasis on women's education. It states that: "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women. The National Educational system will play a positive role in the empowerment of women".

## **B. Mahila Samakhya Programmes an initiative to empower women**

The Mahila Samakhya Programme seeks to benefit women of all ages, especially those from socially and economically marginalized groups. It aims to integrate formal and non

formal education for girls' education schemes for adult women and vocational training for girls and women. Launched as a pilot project in 10 districts in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Karnataka in 1988. Its nodal agencies are voluntary organizations, women's associations and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), all of which are eligible for Central grants. The predominant composition of the Mahila Sanghas is SC/ST/OBC women belonging to land-less and marginalized families engaged in wage labour.

The Mahila Samakhya Scheme empowered adult women to take decisions regarding the family. It was expected that empowered mothers would want to educate their daughters. In fact the Mahila Samakhya Scheme is also called The Education for Women's Equality Scheme. The National Policy of Education, 1986, India is also a signatory to several International treaties that reinforce this commitment. The most important initiative taken by the government is National Policy of Women Empowerment, 2001.

### **C. National Policy of Women Empowerment, 2001**

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil;
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.;
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 has been framed by Government of India with goal to bring about advancement, development and empowerment of women. Education is regarded as a key instrument of equalizing opportunity for the poor and other backward/down-trodden castes/classes, women and tribes- the 'great equalizer'.

, if and when Other Backward Class women get 100% formal education, will they be empowered for life and living. Now

let's see the educational status of Other Backward Class women. [5]

### **D. Educational status of Other Backward Caste women**

Other Backward Caste women have low levels of literacy in comparisons to upper castes in India. In rural areas only 15% are literate. Their low level of literacy is due to three interrelated factors:

1. Continued monopolization of state, economic, cultural and other resources by upper class groups;
2. The stronger influence of casteism in rural areas on other backward caste women; and
3. The control of backward class males over backward class females and girls. As a consequence, other backward class women access to even basic literacy education is limited.

Close to eighty five of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) women are living in rural areas; most of them are landless or marginal farmers who live in abject poverty with grinding labour. Many work as coolies, or day to day manual workers, at fewer wages than men. Other Backward Classes women are the target of government population programmes, and female literacy .

In all cases of caste conflict, other backward class and backward caste women are the first victims. They are raped and gang-raped in order to terrorize a whole caste and community. Even though these incidents of violence against women are extreme nevertheless, some of these caste biases exist in schools among caste Hindu teachers. Poverty compels most rural Other Backward Castes parents to send their children to work rather than to school. Many Other Backward Class parents view

education for girls as a luxury, pointing out that it is expensive and there is lack of gainful employment opportunities after graduation. For example Other Backward Class women's participation in the organized sector is negligible. However, many parents also feel that education beyond the primary level for girls will affect their household management.

Controls by men over women starts as a girl child where infant mortality due to neglect and malnutrition is very high. Many Other Backward Caste girls and women are used and abused by drunken male relatives.

Educated Other Backward Caste females encounter discrimination as well, for example in employment and wages, appointments and promotions, in political participation, demands made for dowry, and in personal relations. The major beneficiaries of education and employment reservations for Other Backward Classes and SCs/STs are men from the 'forward' castes. The fact reveals at least two issues:

1. That not all Other Backward Castes (OBCs) have equal access to reservations, and
2. That Other Backward Castes women, especially do not have equal access as men to benefits reserved for OBCs.

### **3. Empowerment:**

#### **A. Emergence of the concept of Empowerment**

The concept of empowerment is an outcome of several debates generated by the women's movement all over the world. Its origin can be traced to the interaction between feminism and the concept of 'popular education' developed in Latin America in the 1970's. The notion of 'popular education' developed out of Paulo Freire's theory of "conscientization" which as a process enabled the poor to challenge the structures of power and take control of their lives.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **B. What is Empowerment?**

The mid 1980s saw the term empowerment becoming popular in the field of development especially in reference women. Empowerment of women, in its simplest form, means the redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. The concept of women empowerment throughout the world has its roots in women's movement. It implies struggle that is, learning to deal forces of oppression. With a vision of a new society, it involves a conscious and deliberate intervention and efforts to enhance the quality of life.

The most conspicuous feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word 'power'. It implies control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be established may be of any type-physical, financial such as land, water, forests, labor, and money. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies in turn, confers the power of decision-making. "The process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power may be termed empowerment" (Batliwala, 1994).<sup>[3]</sup>

### **4. Education as a Tool to Empower Other Backward Caste Women**

The study is based on this assumption that can education empower Other Backward Class women. Undoubtedly education of girls and women is necessary for their full participation in all aspects of life. Despite multiple obstacles and oppression. Literacy can be empowering, however it must be done at a pace and level determined by women themselves. And most importantly, it must address issues important to backward castes women and be accompanied by other social and economic reforms such as : sanitation, health, child care, credit and loans, land reform water and fuel supply and conservation; and reservation and scholarships for Other Backward Castes women.

### **5. Parameters of Empowerment**

Empowerment is difficult to measure, and there is no agreed-upon method. Empowerment needs to be clearly defined if parameters are to be developed. Most of the definitions stress two main areas of empowerment.

1. A personal change in consciousness involving movement towards control, self-confidence and the right to make decisions and determine choice.
2. Organization aimed at social and political change.

The parameters chosen should fit these areas. It is important to specify:

- The type of empowerment
- Rough time-scales within which research objectives will be accomplished
- The number of people to be affected, and
- The degree to which they will be affected.

In short, choosing parameters of empowerment will depend on the way empowerment is defined. While difficulties exist, there are a number of usable parameters to measure empowerment. Many empowerment parameters are process indicators, because becoming empowered often involves a long process of change. It is seen that education, economic, social, and political areas are often critical in ensuring that women are empowered. Therefore, keeping this in consideration researcher has taken following parameters of empowerment in the following study.

### **A. Educational Empowerment**

It has been universally accepted dictum that education for women leads to empowerment of the society. Often enough we hear that to educate one woman is to educate a family. Education for women is therefore a necessary prerequisite for an educated and developed nation. Despite of so many educational provisions made by the government for the marginalized section, the issues like access of education and retention in school is still a big problem for the Other Backward Class girls. Therefore, it is worth examining the status of access of education among reserved girls as well as consciousness among Other Backward Class women and men regarding education of their girl child including awareness among them about the welfare schemes launched by the government for them and last but not the least problems faced by Other Backward Class women in access of education. These were some of the issues which were taken in order to measure the educational empowerment of Other Backward Class women.

### **B. Social Empowerment**

It is a "process to change the distribution of power in interpersonal relations among different people, cultures, activities of the society." In past awareness regarding the society is unknown to the women but present scenario reveals completely different pictures and knows they are equally participating in all activities of the society. Best references are our former President Mrs. Pratibha Patil. U.S. foreign secretary a woman, Hillary Clinton. Therefore, all efforts must be mobilized to enabling at least the next generation to be genuinely literate to empower socially. In India within the given socio-cultural context, women get a very low access to medical care. The nutritional status of women especially that of rural women is far from desirable. Early marriage, multiple pregnancies lack of opportunity in attaining full bodily growth

are some common practice among other backward class community. Therefore, in this study when we talk about social empowerment we are actually addressing the issues like availability of health and birth control facilities to the backward class women, nutrition for backward class women, access of drinking water and sanitation for women and their family, status of housing and shelter for backward class women and their family, and environment and the connection of backward class women with other women.

### **C. Economic Empowerment**

Women play a crucial role in all sectors of the Indian economy. They are predominantly represented in the agricultural and unorganized sectors but among these women the women belonging to other backward class community are most economically deprived section of Indian society. Other Backward Class women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement, degree of autonomy on the asset and engagement in productive activity are some of the issues which are worth analyzing while examining the economic empowerment of Other Backward Class women.

### **D. Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment refers to the participation of individuals in the political process, which ensures that individuals are able to take part in deciding the common goals of the society and the best ways of achieving these goals. Here political empowerment includes not merely electoral politics and activities of political parties but it refers to the issues related to the backward class women regarding knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote. Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns.

### **6. Conclusion**

Education has been perceived to be a significant instrument in improving the status of women and consequently there have been efforts to improve the access of girls and women to education but it is seen that whatever policies or programs related to education were made in the system could not reached to the most disadvantaged group that is poor other backward castes and of them more disadvantaged women.

The programmers and policies should be designed specifically to improve the status of backward class women and that such policies and programs need to take account the gender caste

and class oppressions at all levels along with the need to incorporate other backward castes women themselves into decision making and leadership. Through education other backward caste women can come to know their human rights and they can then raise an even stronger voice against the discrimination done by the people of upper caste as well as they can strongly stand against the abuse and exploitation done by male member of their caste. It is descriptive and exploratory study which will definitely generate a hypothesis. The next chapter include the review of related literature, I had gone through number of studies related to the education of the women, empowerment of women, education for the backward caste particularly women studies done in India as well as abroad and also reviewed some book in order to understand the plight of Other Backward Class Women.

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