

STRATEGIC REFORMS FOR DALIT EMPOWERMENT

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INTRODUCTION - DALITS IN INDIA

Dalits, termed as God's children (Harijans) by M.K.Gandhi, in actual don't seem to be so. The Hindu Manudharma actually says each Dalits, the most vulnerable community forms almost 1/3rd of the District's population. Though in majority the term 'Dalit' has its roots in Sanskrit (dal) which means broken, cracked, trodden down, crouched or destroyed. It is interesting to note that the prophet Isaiah uses this word having the root in Hebrew language 'DAL' meaning broken or crushed or the poor of the land, and the frail one which denotes the poor or the lowly of the society. It is the self designation of those who are astride of the fowl Hindu caste called in the Indian constitution as 'Scheduled Castes'. They are not even treated as human beings and are neglected in the society. They are deliberately made poor and outcast though their work is exploited. They are shoved to the corners of the society by the landlords and the upper caste, who call themselves as aristocrats.

1. EMPOWERMENT OF DALITS

In India Dalit's means "oppressed people". They are defined as "untouchables" by the caste system and occupy the lowest level of society. Dalit people's use of water wells is limited, they face restrictions on entering temples or residences of higher caste people, their ability to own land is limited, and their residences are frequently isolated and scattered from the rest of the population. In addition to this social discrimination, Dalit people also face physical violence and murder. Dalit live in abject poverty and are forced into such jobs as street cleaning, disposal of excrement and animal carcasses, and leather tanning; sometimes they are also forced to work as indentured servants.

Within the group, Dalit women occupy the lowest caste, class, and gender position, and have long been the object of oppression and violence in all parts of their daily lives. The atrocities against dalit women is the primary issue which in-turn result to an evil kind of situation to the society. Due to lack of literacy, sufficient knowledge they are being assaulted by the upper caste people. As per the bad economic conditions in the state the dalit children are treated as servants in the houses of good economic conditions. They are being harassed mentally and physically tortured by them. Due to the poor background she has to perform her tasks so far facing ill treatment.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR DALITS

The Constitution of India formally abolished "untouchability" when it went into effect in 1950 and there have been subsequent laws prohibiting brutality and protecting civil rights, which were to function as a Dalit protection law. However, due to resistance on the part of higher castes these laws do not function as they were intended to.

The phenomena of atrocities against the Dalits generally understood by the people in terms of physical violence such as rape, murder, hurt, arson, looting and other offences as defined in the Indian Penal Code (IPC).Such meaning of atrocities is partial as it does not include cognizance of other aspects and like abusing, humiliating, taunting and making remarks by a person or group against others or socio economic oppression of them.

The caste atrocities are an integral feature of dalit life. The government machinery keeps on collecting their statistics year after year and issues it in a report of its Commissioner for SCs and STs (now the National Commission for SCs and STs). There are at least three Articles (15,17 and 23) in the Constitution of India which seek to mitigate the evil. To give effect to these Constitutional provisions the following acts also have been in operation:

- 1. The Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, later amended and re-titled as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955**
- 2. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act) 1989 and The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976** Coupled with the weakness of dalits, their growing assertiveness and refusal to submit to the casteist dictates of the village lords, rebellion ethos assimilated through the Ambedkarian struggle and process of general awareness, also cause atrocities to increase.

3. GOVERNMENT POLICES AND PROGRAMMERS TO DALITS TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT

The social disadvantage suffered by dalits in India was taken note of in the Constitution of India which was drafted under the chairmanship of Dr. Ambedkar - a person who had spearheaded the most momentous anti-caste movement of the depressed classes. It provided dalits with many safeguards, viz.,

1. Social, educational, cultural and religious safeguards,



2. Economic safeguards,
3. Political safeguards and
4. Safeguards for employment.

The free market ethos of the Reforms, conceptually can neither confirm to the democratic spirit of the Indian Constitution of 'one vote, one value', nor can it coexist with the system of positive discrimination embodied in these safeguards. For, the market grants moneyed person more value, and overtly believes in the jungle law of 'might is right'. To a large extent, the primary motivation behind these Constitutional provisions was liberal democratic aspirations that characterized the freedom movement. However, these aspirations and the initial ideological zeal of the founding fathers withered away in no time and what survived was its utilitarian dimension for the electoral politics. The sorry state of the executive compliance with these Constitutional provisions amply bears out the fangs of the Indian society. The Reforms will bring a kind of legitimacy to this attitudinal resistance. These safeguards will stand eroded as the Reforms gain in momentum. Influence of the Reforms is bound to be all pervasive. However, only a few issues of importance to the dalit masses have been picked up for discussion here.

4. PRESENT POSITION OF DALITS IN INDIA

Dalits who have played an imperative role in social transformation, do not cultivate the fruits of the reforms due to the following reasons-

'Lack of awareness an impediment for Dalit empowerment'

Lack of awareness has become an impediment for Dalits and tribals (SCs and STs) in availing various schemes being implemented for their empowerment by the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

As the State government is extending financial assistance from Rs. 5 lakh to Rs. 1 crore under credit guarantee for micro and small enterprises scheme. Under the industrial investment promotion policy of 2005, known as Tata-Birla scheme, the entrepreneurs could avail loan up to Rs. 5 crore without any collateral security. But the bankers are not sanctioning loans for lack of collateral security. Many applications were submitted for availing different schemes, but to no avail.

The Practice of Untouchability

Untouchability means the avoidance of physical contact with persons and things because of beliefs relating to pollution or infection. It is widely prevalent in regard to cultural matters such as temple entry and domestic sphere such as marriage, place of shelter, inter dining and social get together.

Agrarian Dependence

Most of the Dalits are landless agricultural labourers. Low wages for more work, under employment and unemployment are the part and parcel of the occupational life of the Dalit people. They depend on money lenders and rich farmers for their unforeseen expenses. They borrow money from them and most of the income goes for paying the interest. Rural indebtedness is very common in these villages. As a result bonded-labour is prevalent in a disguised manner. Literally speaking Dalits, the manual labours are the legal holders of this civilized world.

Housing Pattern

Major portion of the Dalits live in huts built with the mud walls and thatched roofing's. Their huts become easy prey when there are natural as well as human made calamities. Dalits even now in villages are residing in worse areas like the ending or near the extremities of the village. They are not having equal opportunity to share even water near the Hand pumps. Due to the improper power facilities they are far away from the awareness and the fruits that cherish them with development through electronic media.

Denial of Self Dignity & Opportunity

The real problem of Dalits is not just economic. It is primarily social & psychological. It is not a color problem. The sense of inferiority and other negative attitudes of the Dalits have remained the same for generations. Fundamentally every Dalit is a victim who is in urgent need of restoring his/her human dignity and human rights.

5. STEPS TO BE TAKEN FOR DALIT EMPOWERMENT

In order to attain an efficient empowerment system certain strict strategies should be put in practice like



Rights regarding to the provision of housing, health, property
Providing food security with an efficient distribution system
Reservation and financial assistance in education institutions:
Policy of eliminating caste discrimination and ensuring that all public authorities and institutions -do not engage in caste-based discrimination which has been traditionally followed .
Rules of reservation policy should be adopted by the private sector
Freedom to choose religion.
Eradication of social interaction between dalits and non-dalits.
Distribution of land to the landless agricultural labours.

CONCLUSION

The dalits in India, being the poorest of the poor have been hit the hardest. Their social disabilities, largely reinforced by and sustained on the economic deprivations, are bound to get accentuated with these policies. The Indian reforms were essentially 'crisis driven' and not 'strategy driven' when they were adopted. There have since been changes in the formation and key persona. The broad Indian reality is that India has too many poor. No statistics moreover can adequately capture the heinous socio-cultural inequality that is an abiding part of Indian reality. It has acute inequalities not only in economic terms but in the socio-cultural terms.

The reform strategy thus should embody sustainable economic empowerment of rural masses; investments to enhance their capability and effective measures for accelerated development of the disadvantaged sections like dalits. The pre-requisite to reforms therefore could be the radical land reforms, massive investments in rural areas into agriculture-related infrastructural projects, universalization of primary education, primary health care system and reinforcement of positive discrimination in favour of dalits. The devil of casteism could be tamed only by freeing general masses of people from the anxieties and uncertainties about basic survival. The general condition of deprivation has rendered them vulnerable to be the preys to the frequent machinations of the vested interests that make them see the enemy within their own class. The relative equality thus can be the bedrock for launching the socio-cultural offensive in the form of mass-education programmes. But this all may still not be enough. The policy of positive discrimination in favour of dalits will have to be reinforced much more vigorously in all the sectors of economy, than ever before. They need to be reframed and simplified for effective implementation.

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