Dalit Women & Globalization: The Impact of Increased Dalit women's Economic Rights on Globalization

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Abstract: Globalization appears to be the buzzword of 1990s which has penetrated many academic debates. The process of globalization has made deep inroads into India’s social, economic and cultural life. It has not only affected all aspects of human life but also influenced the social institutions to a great extent. In order to promote the socio-economic justice many affirmative measures were introduced in the Indian Constitution and a lot of welfare schemes were initiated for the uplift of the underprivileged Dalit Women. But globalization has not only threatened it but also made it very weak. In fact socio-economic justice and social welfare which is an integral part of Indian Constitution is slowly getting eclipsed because of privatization and globalization. It has created a new situation where dalit women’s are pushed again in a state of anxiety.

Keywords: dalit women’s, social, economic and cultural life, globalization, welfare schemes

Introduction

Globalization is the new buzzword that has come to dominate the world since the nineties of the last centuries. It is the most widely debated and discussed phenomenon in all over the world. It is based on the principle of unrestrained functioning of the free market economy. In the paradigm of globalization, state is reduced into a sort of security mechanism to protect its citizens from internal disruption and external threats. State is not supposed to care for social and economic interests of its citizens. The world opinion is divided on what constitutes globalization and whether globalization is good or bad. The fact is that today almost every nation state is forced to become a part of a global economy. Globalization as a new world economic order imposed on the world with a promise of more prosperity, progress and freedom for all. On the contrary, evidences show that globalization affected negatively in all these aspects for some communities particularly the dalit women communities. More than two decades of implementation of these policies pertaining to globalization have severely affected the welfare and development of dalits. In this paper we will try to examine the magnitude and direction of the impact of these policies on the dalit women in India. Dalit women are very distinct social groups in the caste-ridden Hindu society. They are the victims of social disabilities and oppression. Economically, most of them are still the poorest of the poor. Due to some affirmative action’s, dalit women have made a significant progress on almost all parameters during the 71 years of our independence. However, they are not empowered enough to face the challenges of competing equality. The backwardness of the dalit women will be evident from their illiteracy, unemployment, dependence on agriculture and social segregation. In terms of residence, housing, poverty and health conditions the condition of the dalit women is precarious. All these issues have historically been related to dalit women deprivation and these have been aggravated by globalization over the last two decades. The social disadvantages and disabilities suffered by the dalit women were of serious concern in the constitution of India which was drafted under the chairmanship of Dr. Ambedkar. The constitution provided the dalit’s a number of safeguards, such as, (i) safeguards insocial spheres; (ii) safeguards in educational and cultural matters; (iii) economic safeguards (iv) safeguards in politics and (iv) safeguards in the public services. Dalits happened to be the beneficiaries of these affirmative measures before India entered into the realm of neo-liberal free market economy. Actually the Indian State had brought some improvements in the lives of dalit women’s making these special provisions to provide them education, employment, access to land, health, housing and other resources. However, unsatisfactory the results of the implementation may be, the importance of reservations from the dalit women view point cannot be undermined. But after the introduction of free market economy in the early 90’s the welfare stance of the Indian State have become gradually ineffective. One of the main tasks of this new paradigm is to force the roll back process of the welfare state and to allow the market forces to operate in an unrestrained manner. The premarket stance of globalization has led to the widening of the gap between the privileged few and the large mass of the marginalized sections of the society. Globalization further led to marginalized of the already marginalized sections of the society. In other words, globalization process severely affects the dalit women and other underprivileged sections that are deprived of jobs, and face enormous difficulties in accessing education, employment, housing, food, healthcare etc. Thus the way globalization affects the lives of dalits differs significantly from that of the non-dalit women. So, we have to give a serious thought to the consequences of liberalization, privatization and particularly globalization on the socio-economic conditions of dalit women. Globalization has seriously affected the socio-economic conditions of dalit women over the last two decades in terms of education, employment, access to land, poverty and other welfare programmes. Now we will try to give a picture to consequences of liberalization, privatization and particularly globalization on the socio-economic conditions of dalit women in India in the following discussion.

Education

Education is the most important pre-requisite for achieving the goals of personal, social, political, economic and cultural development. In other words, education is the most effective instrument for meeting the challenges that dalit women are facing. Historical evidences in this regard indicate that dalit community has been excluded from the whole process of education since centuries. So, vast inequalities exist within the education system in India. Although Article 21A of the Indian Constitution stipulates...
that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years it still remains an elusive goal. However, owing to reservation and affirmative action in the arena of education, substantial progress has been made in the field of education of dalit women during the last few decades. The literacy rate of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) has increased from 10.27 per cent in 1961 to 54.7 per cent in 2001 and for the country as a whole has increased from 28.3 per cent in 1961 to 68.38 per cent in 2001. Available data also reveal that there has been substantial increase in the enrolment of children belonging to the dalit women at all stages. So reservation in the educational institutions and the financial assistance in the form of scholarships constitute perhaps the most important factor in the development scheme for dalit women It is a well known fact that without education other constitutional safeguards, reservation in services would be meaningless. It would also be hard for dalit women to send their wards to the temple of learning. But it is to be kept in mind that the enrolment alone does not give any substantial amount of educational achievement when the rate of drop out is also substantially high among the dalit women. Despite several kinds of State assistance, the dropout rate is also alarming at the primary, middle and secondary stages of education in respect of dalit women.

Impact on Traditional Occupations

Globalization process has directly hit the traditional occupations of dalit women. It is a well known fact that the dalit women have historically specialized in the production of all kinds of artistic tools and equipments for household and agricultural production. But globalization is adversely impacting their traditional occupations now. Their livelihood and specialized occupation is now being replaced by global capitalistic productions. Easy availability of mass production goods from latest technology based industries at cheap prices has not proved to be a big challenge for their traditional occupation Dalit women have the capacity to complete with these productions nor do they have an alternative way so far to earn their livelihood. Our traditional artisan culture and technological knowledge is on the verge of ruin. Before the introduction of globalization as we know today, dalit women would make a numerous essential equipment like pots, plough, clothes, shoes and other leather products etc. and also all kinds of artistic tools for music and dance. In fact, the smooth functioning of any household was simply impossible with the skill and craft of the dalit communities. We have to keep in mind, due to lack of adequate education and employment the livelihood of the majority of dalits are depended on their traditional occupation. So under the changing situation, the government needs to urgently take adequate steps to promote and preserve the unique role of these artisans and for realizing their full potential. Besides financial assistance and proper guidance the government should establish production factories for the traditionally skilled dalit community who can share their experience for producing goods and get employment. Priority should also be given to the local produce and artisans so their traditional occupation can be sustained.

Health Care in India

Extreme inequality and disparities exist across India in terms of access to health care. This highly inequitable health system has denied quality health care to all those who cannot afford it. Privatization has also been extended enormously in health services. Like education health also becomes commoditites. Government expenditure is continuously reducing so as to bring the deficits to the controllable level and at the same time, the private players are encouraging to enter and establish their control into these socially important areas. The growing commercialization of health has kept the weaker section out of this vital social service, because the cost of private health services is much more expensive than the public health services. So this private health care is not affordable and accessible to the vast majority of the weaker sections. In reality, India has one of the most privatized health systems in the world that has effectively denied the poor access to basic health care. Instead of increasing the investment in health and making health services much more accessible to the poor, the Indian State is not only withdrawing from providing a health services to the poor, it is encouraging the commercialization of health care services. It is a well known fact that the situation of dalit women in terms of residence, housing and health conditions is dismal. So, due to their poverty and unhygienic living conditions, they, in large numbers, suffer from malnutrition, physical disabilities and diseases such as tuberculosis, leprosy, anemia, malaria and general diseases. Due to lack of financial ability, dalit women have to rely upon the inadequate public health services or are forced to purchase costly private services, which can ultimately lead them into financial ruin. Under the changing situation, Government should provide some kind of safety walls so that the weaker sections should not be deprived of healthcare services.

Poverty

Poverty is a sum total of all deprivations. The incidence of poverty among the dalit women is much higher in comparison with all India average. According to 61st round NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation) data, 22.7 per cent of India’s population was poor in 2004-05, the SCs and STs are the most poor with a Head Count Ratio (HCR) of 35 per cent. Despite various poverty alleviation programmes and special strategies for their economic development poverty among the dalits is not reducing in a significant manner. In spite of government statistical jugglery, a large number of Indians still live under the poverty line. The high dependence of casual labour, with relatively lower earnings coupled with inadequate exposure of education among dalit women induced a high degree of deprivation and poverty among them. In fact increased poverty is an unfolding reality among dalit women. Globalization is leading to mass pauperization and rapidly widening socio-economic inequalities. The free market ethos unleashed by reforms has contributed significantly to the price rise. It is clear from the day to day experiences that the price of the primary articles of consumption has increased enormously. All the studies on the economic reforms are unanimous in their conclusion that the reforms have significantly contributed inflation. It is factually true that inflation hits the poorest the hardest. Because most of their earnings spent on food, shelter and clothing. So any rise in prices has had a direct negative effect on dalit women’s level of consumption.
Food Security

India’s food grain god owns are overflowing of food stocks, but more than a quarter of India’s population does not get adequate food. The Public Distribution System (PDS) leaves out large sections of the poor people and distributed inadequate quantities of food. A shift has taken place from universal PDS to Targeted PDS (TPDS). As a result, a large number of poor people have been dispossessed of their entitlement of food subsidies under the PDS. The government has raised the price of rice and wheat as a condition put forth by the World Bank. The increased food price has affected people’s ability to purchase their basic food requirement. As a result of this, a large number of poor have been excluded from the PDS. The PDS, which was meant to ensure food security to poor people, seems to have lost its purpose. In fact, the poverty alleviation programmes have not reached the poor. Several policy measures in the reform period have undermined the PDS objectives of providing food security to the poor people and acting as a check against market price. Instead of strengthening the PDS, the Government is continuously downsizing the PDS. So in this situation, the government should strengthen and activate the PDS for the marginalized sections. In addition to that poverty reduction strategies in India cannot succeed without a healthy agricultural sector. Economic reform has weakened rather than strengthened this sector.

Atrocities

The caste atrocities are an integral feature of the dalit life. The government machinery keeps on collecting their statistics year after year and issues it in a report of its Commission for the SCs and the STs (now the National Commission for the SCs and the 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 despite this, the statistics of the registered atrocities read like a balance sheet of a blue chip company with consistent rise every successive year (see Table 16 in Appendix). It is pertinent to remember that owing to the dependency relationship of the dalit women with the perpetrators of atrocities, not every occurrence of the atrocity gets registered. Rather, it can be safely assumed that behind each registered atrocity over ten atrocity cases go unreported. As per the latest statistics, every day nearly 50 cases of atrocities are registered all over the country. Over three dalit women are raped and six are disabled on each day round the year. The National Commission analysed the causes of each of the atrocities in a sample of 45 cases. The analysis shows that out of 45 cases 13 are clearly attributable to the economic reasons. The balance can also be explained out by some kind of weakness of the dalits. Coupled with the weakness of the dalits, their growing assertiveness and the refusal to submit to the casteist dictates of the village lords, rebellion ethos assimilated through the Ambedkarian struggle and the process of general awareness, also cause atrocities to increase.

Conclusion

From the beginning of the economic reforms, the government talked about social safety nets for the poor marginalized sections. But in practice, the government has done little do strengthen social protect measures. Consistent attempts have been made to downsize the budgetary allocation for the social sector in the name of reducing the fiscal deficit. The impact of India’s aggressive shift from a state regulated economy to market economy with the privatization of industries and liquidation of policies and controls in economic planning and regulation has been most acutely felt by dalit women. In fact the reform process facilitated the emergence of new middle class that has appropriated the fruits of economic growth at the expense of the poor marginalized people. Not only that the property owners, industrialists, real estate personnel, software companies and other propertied sections have also been benefited greatly from the open market economy and globalization. But under the globalization, the socioeconomic conditions of the vast majority of the dalits are going from bad to worse, rather than improving. So the State have to take up and implement the long awaited land reform programme, massive investment in agriculture-related infrastructural projects, good quality primary education for all, good quality primary health care system and enforcement of reservation policy in private sector in favour of dalit women. Under the present situation the role of the state becomes crucial for the empowerment of dalit women’s as the state cannot deny socio-economic justice to the dalit women’s for a long period. The issues of socio-economic justice of the dalit women’s and other weaker sections are needed to be suitably addressed for the maintenance and survival of our democratic set up.

References