

Social Exclusion of Dalit Children in Contemporary Society

Apeksha Kumari^{1*}, Prashant Chaudhry²

¹Law Centre 1, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, India

²Dept. of Social and Political Studies, Manav Rachna International Institute of research and Studies MRIIRS, Faridabad Haryana, India

Available online at: www.isroset.org

Received: 17/Jul/2022, Accepted: 29/Aug/2022, Online: 30/Sept/2022

Abstract— In India, the prevailing caste system creates the channel of connecting the people with one another. Even after 70 years of Independence, caste system still continues to determine the nature of social relationship between various communities. It still continues as an institutionalized system to determine do and don'ts for the entire society. In our society mostly people belonging to the scheduled caste community are facing the consequences of caste system in all walks of their life. Caste is one of the oldest and most persistent forms of stratification and results in discrimination based on ascribed status differentiations. Caste based exclusion and stratification is traditionally based on Hindu religion and is sustained by religious ideologies. The interactions and interrelations between the different upper and lower caste is regulated by privileges and burdens accorded according to one's position in caste based hierarchy. Traditionally, the forced enforcement of caste based norms related to social, economic, educational, cultural etc. have adversely impacted the day-today life of lower caste communities. The present study is based on literature review of studies conducted on exclusion of lower caste children in social, educational, civic amenities, peer relations etc. The focus of the present study to the explore causes and consequence of the caste instigated practices and behaviours faced by children of lower caste communities. The nature of present study is explorative and descriptive. The rationale of the present study is to prepare a roadmap for building the capabilities and capacities of the lower class children to deal with the negative consequences of caste based exclusion on their personal and professional life. The present study would also suggest inclusion strategies for lower caste children in the mainstream society.

Keywords— Caste, Discrimination, Scheduled Caste, Social Exclusion, Dalit

I. INTRODUCTION

The position of lower caste communities is vulnerable due to caste based discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society. "Caste discrimination in India based on hierarchical division that has led to long term deprivation of the Dalits due to their low social position in caste based hierarchy through limiting their access to education, employment and income leading also to passive discrimination where the lower caste themselves are discouraged and lack the self-confidence and encouragement to challenge their social and economic barrier" (Thorat and Newman 2007). Due to that the living standard and educational opportunities remain noticeably lower for the low caste communities in comparison with general caste communities. Although, the government's policies and programmes promoted the education of lower caste community children. "The children belonging to lower caste often experience prejudice, punishment and rejection in the school system by other children, resulting in a relatively high degree of school drop-outs and poor performance in the exam, which in turn affects their life chances in their future" (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008).

The linkage between caste and occupation has long association in Indian society and it find its expression in modern industrial societies also. In a study conducted by PRAXIS Institute of Participation and Practice in Bihar has revealed the plight of scheduled caste children, who are engaged as child labour, ragpicker, barber and cobbler due to poverty and caste based society. The study highlighted that certain caste categories are more vulnerable among the Dalit communities due to their traditional occupation. Such categories faces extreme form of social and economic ostracisation.

In India, in keeping with the international conventions and the constitutional provisions the central and state government has enacted several statutes and also launched various welfare schemes to eradicate poverty, child labour, caste based atrocities etc. However the existing legislations and provisions could not provide much relief to the poor, marginalized and low caste communities due to inextricable link between the caste and occupation in society.

In view of the above, it can be said that caste has strong linkage with the descent based occupation. The long term deprivation of lower caste has affected that capacities and

capabilities of lower caste communities. The children are worst affected category among the population of lower caste as they have to bear the repercussion of caste discrimination and poverty in their early stages of development.

The caste based exclusion affect the socialization process of children as it restrict their access to various resources. The lack of resources also limit their life chances for upward mobility and forced them to become victims of caste based exclusion..

II. RELATED WORK

In India the conditions of dalit children are vulnerable as they become the easy victims of various caste based practices and atrocities. The Scheduled Castes are distributed across 31 states and union territories. While the 200 million SCs constitute a significant proportion of India's population. The Census of 2011 recorded nearly 20.14 crore people belonging to various Scheduled Castes in the country. As per the 2001 census, the number was 16.66 crore. The Dalit population showed a decadal growth of 20.8 per cent, whereas India's population grew 17.7 per cent during the same period¹. However, despite the increasing population of dalit communities, the people belonging to dalit communities particularly children are still facing the challenges because of persistence of caste based system in both rural and urban areas. The present section deals with analysis of exclusion faced by children of Dalit communities.

The study conducted by Geeta B Nambissan (2009) on exclusion and discrimination of dalit children in the state of Rajasthan. The study has been conducted in a semi urban area covering 234 dalit households to explore whether Dalit respondents experienced/perceived unequal or differential treatment vis-à-vis their non-Dalit peers in school. The study has revealed a very significant issues of 'shifting' between schools that takes place for an individual Dalit student results in sense of unease and discomfort. In schools dalit children have to face caste based issues in drinking water as they were not allowed to drink water with general caste children. The study highlights issues such as segregation in seating arrangements of dalit and non-dalit children, lack of peer relation between dalit and non-dalit children, non-participation of dalit children in co-curricular activities, lack of support from teachers in resolving study related queries, comparisons of dalit children with non-dalit children, lack of supports from parents, lack of enrollment of dalit girls in schools, assigning of cleaning jobs in school to children of dalits communities particularly children belong to Balmiki community. The non-supportive attitude of teacher over the complaints made by dalit children was also reported by the respondents under the study. The above study highlights various aspects of discrimination and differential treatment faced by the dalit children in schools. However the dalit children residing in

the village communities are more vulnerable towards facing caste based discriminatory practices in comparison to urban areas.

The study conducted by Vimala Ramachandran, Taramani Naorem (2012) in six states - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to look into the level of inclusion and exclusion of children in schools. The study investigates the nature and intensity of exclusionary practices prevailing in the schools. The finding of the study highlights various aspects related to the discriminatory practices viz language, infrastructure, enrollment and attendance, sitting arrangement, toilet, mid-day meal etc. The study observed that infrastructure is poor in almost all the states. A minuscule proportion of schools had usable and functional toilets for girls. And where there were such toilets, girls from the poorest or the most socially disadvantaged groups in that village were asked to clean them. The study found that in all the states such children were excluded from active participation in class because they were not able to keep pace with the lessons being taught. They also tended to sit in the back rows and were often ignored by the teachers. The combination of being poor, first generation school goers, SCs or STs and being absent frequently were perhaps the most compelling reasons for their exclusion from school activities.

The study conducted by Wesly (2017) on forms of exclusion faced by dalit children in Hyderabad slums. The study has been conducted in four slums areas of Hyderabad to understand the nature of discriminatory practices against the dalit children in educational institutions. The study highlights the prevalence of discriminatory practices against dalit children in cultural context. The dalit children become victims of discrimination due to lack of economic sustainability of parents. In such situation it become difficult for the parents to incur expenditure of their children education. The study revealed that many of the dalit parents are sending their children to private school to escape the discriminatory practices but due to poor socio-economic conditions most of the children have to drop-out from the school in early age. Along with other reason the study revealed discouragement of dalit children to school going children and ill treatment of teachers and students as most significant reason of drop-out of dalit children. The caste based discriminatory practices also prevails in sitting arrangements at midday meals. As the findings of the study revealed that children are discriminated at maintaining physical distance with non-dalit children in the class room and also upper caste children called their children by caste. The study also stated the gender based practices also restrict the access of dalit girl children to schools.

The findings of the above study highlights issues and concerns faced by the children of dalit community in schools. The caste based discriminatory practices along with poor socio-economic status results in deprivation of dalit children from education. Despite the various

safeguards provided to the dalit communities, the children of dalit community are still facing the caste based issues.

1. The review of above studies helps us to understand the issues, concerns and problems faced by the children of dalit community. In view to have a better understanding about the issues of caste based discrimination faced by the dalit children, the next section deals with identification of specific problems associated with children of dalit community.

III. METHODOLOGY

The current study aims to investigate the origins and consequences of caste-instigated practices and behaviors experienced by children from lower caste groups. The study is exploratory and descriptive in character. The purpose is to provide a roadmap for developing the competencies and capacities of lower-income children to deal with the negative repercussions of caste-based exclusion in their personal and professional lives. Attempts have also been made to provide techniques for integrating lower caste children into mainstream society.

The secondary data has been used from the extensive literature survey to find out gaps and scope for further research on caste-based discrimination and exclusion. The data has also been gathered by referring to different books, diaries, research articles, papers, and websites.

The study has the following objectives:

I. To explore the causes and consequences of the caste-instigated practices and behaviors faced by children of lower caste communities.

II. To suggest strategies or inclusion of Dalit children in mainstream society.

IV. RESULT AND FINDINGS

A. IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS FACED BY DALIT CHILDREN

The children of the Dalit community are still facing challenges relating to their survival and sustainability in the society. Despite passing 75th years of Independence, the cases pertaining to caste based atrocities and discrimination against dalit children are still reported from both rural and urban areas. The opportunities related to education, participation and equal treatment etc. are still not available to most of children belonging to dalit community. Due to that children of such community become subject to discrimination and deprivation related to backwardness throughout their life. The following are some of the issues and problems faced by children of dalit community.

1. **Social Exclusion:** The children of dalit community are facing issues pertaining to their inclusion in the mainstream society. The children of dalit community faces exclusion in schools by teachers and fellow students as they are treated differently from students of upper caste in

schools. Due to that children belonging to dalit community feels isolated and social ostracized.

2. **Caste based discrimination:** The children of dalit community also faced caste based discrimination in schools by teachers and students of higher caste. They girls of dalit community are often asked to clean school toilets and clean the school premises. They are also denied drinking water from same taps used by upper caste children. Due to that children belong to dalit community feels lack of confidence and motivation for studding in schools.

3. **Lack of Educational opportunities:** The children of dalit community are often deprived of educational opportunities. In schools due to prevalence of discriminatory practices against the scheduled caste people discourages them to continuous their education. The situation become complex specifically for the girls as it diminish their life chances.

4. **Involvement in unclean occupation:** The children of dalit community often due to exclusion from mainstream society involved themselves in unclean occupation related to their caste. They are often discriminated on the basis of caste and also bear maltreatment from fellow students and schools staff. Due to that most of the children discontinue their studies in early age and resort of their traditional caste based occupation as their livelihood.

5. **Lack of rights:** Dalit children are largely segregated from other children in schools on the basis of caste. Due to that most of the children drop-out at early age from schools and remain uneducated throughout their life. The lack of awareness and educational opportunities often act as a barrier for dalit children in realizing their rights.

6. **Lack of social relations:** Dalit children often treated differently from upper caste children and that result in their poor peer relation with other children. Due to that children have to face social isolation.

7. **Lack of support from parents and teachers:** The dalit children often received non-supportive attitude from teachers in school and from parents at home. Due that they often feel difficulty in discussing their issues and problems with them.

B. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL SAFEGUARDS FOR DALIT CHILDREN

The caste based problem faced by dalit children have impact on their social, psychological and developmental aspect. The children of dalit community are vulnerable to various caste based atrocities due to their tender age and lack of understanding of caste based problems. The Indian constitution accords rights to children as citizens of the country, and in keeping with their special status the State has even enacted special laws. The Constitution, promulgated in 1950, encompasses most rights included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as

Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy . The following are specific provisions available in the constitution related to children, Right to equality (Article 14), Right against discrimination (Article 15), Right to personal liberty and due process of law (Article 21), Right to be protected from any hazardous employment till the age of 14 years (Article 24), Right to free and compulsory elementary education for all children in the 6-14 year age group (Article 21 A), Right to being protected from being trafficked and forced into bonded labour (Article 23), Right of minorities for protection of their interests (Article 29), Right to be protected from being abused and forced by economic necessity to enter occupations unsuited to their age or strength (Article 39(e)), Right to equal opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and guaranteed protection of childhood and youth against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment (Article 39 (f), Right to early childhood care and education to all children until they complete the age of six years (Article 45), Right of weaker sections of the people to be protected from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46), Right to nutrition and standard of living and improved public health (Article 47).

Apart from the constitutional provisions there are numerous legislative provision that provide protection to children. Some of the important legislations are discussed below:

1. The Factories Act, 1948: The legislation was passes in British regime. The Act prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories.
2. Mines Act, 1952: It prohibits employment of children in mines work.
3. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities act) 1989: The Act prohibits discrimination & atrocities against the scheduled caste and scheduled based on caste. It also make revisions for rehabilitation of affected victims.
4. The Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act, 2000: This Act deals with the law relating to juveniles in conflict with law & children in need of care & protection. The act provide provisions for proper care, protection & treatment by catering to their development needs & by adopting a child friendly approach in the best interest of children & for their ultimate rehabilitation through various institutions established under the Act.
5. Right to Education Act, 2009: The Act provide provision for free and compulsory education of children I the age group between 6-14 years.

Along with constitutional provisions and legal provision, the Govt. of India has enacted various policies from 1974 onwards related to child labour, education, health and development of children.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

It is a great irony that the provision given the constitution and the legal mechanism available to provide welfare, justice and rehabilitation have failed due lack of initiatives by the police and legal machinery. The police officials often refuses to file complaints of victims belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities. Most of the states have still not have translated copies of the SC ST Acts. The police officers are generally unaware about the provisions and existence of the act and that led to unreported cases and lack of investigation in atrocities cases. Along with the conviction rate in atrocities cases and scheduled caste and scheduled tribe is also very low due to long list of pending cases and lack of special courts and prosecutors.

The children belonging to scheduled communities are the worst suffers of caste based discrimination and atrocities. Despite enacting right to free and compulsory education but lacks the structural support necessary to track each student causing those who are most marginalized to fall through the cracks. Additionally, India's officials tend to ignore the harmful treatment that Dalit children experience in their classrooms. The children of dalit community are segregated from rest of children in often become victims of abuse and maltreatment from teachers and fellow students. The discrimination bear by the children of dalit community have a direct impact on their motivation and has a long term effect on student outcome.

The future researchers should try to explore more about other socio economic and cultural aspects of exclusion to better understand the situation of children belonging to Dalit community.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Thorat Sukhadeo and Katherine S. Newman, Caste and Economic Discrimination: Causes, Consequences and Remedies Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 42, No. 41 , pp. 4121-4124, 2007.
- [2]. Ramachandran Vimala and Taramani Naorem, Dalit children in Rural India: Issues Related to Exclusion and Deprivation, Working Paper Series, Vol III, Nov 5, Indian Institute of Dalit studies 2009
- [3]. Ramachandran, Vimala and Taramani Naorem, Inclusion and exclusion of students in the school and in classrooms in primary and upper primary schools: A qualitative study commissioned by SSA, MHRD, GOI. Technical Support Group, EdCIL, New Delhi, 2012
- [4]. Sedwal, M., and S. Kamat. "Education and social equity with a special focus on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in elementary education. Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE); 2008.
- [5]. Geeta B Nambissan, Exclusion and discrimination in schools : experiences of dalit children, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and UNICEF, New Delhi, 2009.
- [6]. Constitution of India | HAQ : Centre for Child Rights (haqrc.org)

AUTHORS PROFILE

Dr. Apeksha Kumari Dr Apeksha Kumari is Assistant Professor at the Law Centre – I, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. She has obtained her Ph.D (titled ‘Trafficking of Children-its ramifications and legal control in India) and LL.M (in Personal Laws), from the Faculty of Law, Jamia Millia Islamia. New Delhi and LL.B. from Law Centre-1, Faculty of Law University of Delhi. She holds Junior Research Fellowship (JRF-NET) awarded by University Grant Commission, India. She has published articles in areas, including human rights, foster care, Women and children Laws ,Trafficking of women and children in various journals

Dr. Prashant Chaudhry is working as Assistant professor in Department of Social and Political Studies. He has done his Bachelor in Social Work from Delhi University in 2003. Master in Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 2005. Master of Philosophy in Planning and Development from Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay in 2007 and PhD in Social Work from Jamia Millia Islamia (2015). Dr. Chaudhry has published various papers on themes related to social exclusion, marginalization, spirituality, professional social work etc. He has also given various presentations at national and international conferences.
