
UNIT 11 EMPOWERMENT OF THE MARGINALISED (WOMEN, CHILDREN)

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11.1 INTRODUCTION

India is a large country, a liberal democracy and a heterogeneous society seeking the welfare of its people, who are mostly poor. India is a complex network of people belonging to different races and ethnicity, languages, religions, and castes. Since large sections are poor, disadvantaged, and marginalised, the role of state has become very important. India, until 1991, was a planned economy seeking to achieve a balanced and equitable development. Though since then planning has become more indicative, still social sectors like employment, health and education are still very much the focus of the Five Year Plans and the Planning Commission.

During the past six decades of development India has achieved rapid and impressive progress. It is now one of the fastest growing economies of the world. It is the fourth largest economy in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). It is a nuclear and space power. In several important areas like biotechnology, pharma, automobiles, Information Technology(IT) and IT Enabled Services(ITES) it is an emerging global power. But paradoxically, its per capita income is low at \$720 (2005), 25% of its population is below poverty line, 70% of its population is rural, 60% of its work force is in agriculture, and it has 45% female illiteracy and 25% male illiteracy (Mark Dutz, World Bank, 2007).

Ninety percent of India's workers work in the informal sector, where there is underemployment, low productivity and low skill activities. Most of them are unskilled or have little skills. Regrettably, vast majority of India's workers are poor and marginalised. If India has to achieve its goal of becoming an economic super power in the future, these marginalised sections will have to be enriched with sound education, training and skills. The empowerment of the marginalised sections is the only solution that can optimise India's potential.

Aims and Objectives

After going through this Unit, you would be able to

- Define the concepts of ‘empowerment’ and ‘marginalisation’;
- Explain the position of the marginalised sections of India’s population;
- Identify the measures for their empowerment.

11.2 THE CONCEPTS OF ‘MARGINALISED’ AND ‘EMPOWERED’

11.2.1 Marginalisation

The dictionary meaning of the concept clarifies broadly and correctly. It explains stating that ‘marginalised’ means ‘to make (a person or group) feel less important or powerful’. For example, the tribals in India are generally considered to be marginalised because they are not fully in the mainstream in the country and are also not highly educated which makes them feel they are less important and helpless. Similarly women, especially poor rural women, feel exploited, subjugated and helpless, in the absence of assets and abilities to face the mainstream world. It is not necessary that such marginalised know that they are made less important or weak. For example, when children are sent to work, they are deprived of their basic rights for schooling and developing themselves. They get marginalised even without their awareness.

It is also not necessary that marginalisation is carried out deliberately; in fact doing so may be illegal and punishable by law. When governments at central and state levels come out with welfare and development schemes for the poor, the poor get marginalised when these schemes are poorly implemented and the benefits do not reach the targeted poor or the disadvantaged. In other words, the word ‘marginalised’ refers to ‘the overt or covert trends within societies whereby those perceived as lacking in desirable traits or deviating from the group norms tend to be excluded by the wider society and ostracized as undesirables’.

Marginalisation can arise out of chronic exploitation of a section of people. In case of bonded labour, they are marginalised by the burden of the loans taken by their ancestors. They feel ‘duty bound’ to work till it is liquidated. They do not know how the debt was contracted, on what rate of interest and on what terms. Being illiterate and poor already, they exist like slaves, exploited by the landlord or moneylender as the case may be. People may also be marginalised by age old customs, tradition and convention evolved in society which push down some castes and tribes to a very low economic and social status and they feel powerless to oppose or overcome it. The emergence and perpetuation of inequalities in society wherein the rich get richer and poor poorer also creates marginalised sections over a period of time. The entire section of population below the poverty line may be said to have arisen in such process though there may be other factors also.

There are multiple causes of marginalisation resulting in much higher intensity, for example, poor women in rural areas and women headed households tend to fall in this category. They are marginalised by the social attitudes, developmental process, and apathy of the state and of political elite, and so on. The denial of legislation for creating

reservation of seats in the Indian Parliament is an example of marginalisation of women in the governance of the country.

In India a majority section of the population is marginalised by politicians, bureaucrats and vested interests denying them reasonably good schooling, effective rural primary health care and access to credit, subsidies and other facilities. The result is the marginalised poor remain poor forever..

Lack of access for facilities and opportunities can also lead to marginalisation. For example even though the commercial and other banks have several schemes to help the poor and self-employed and the micro business owners, they are not fully effective due to lack of access created by cumbersome procedures, excessive obsession with security, difficult legal requirements and lack of sensitivity to the problems faced by the small borrowers.

The above discussion makes it clear that marginalisation of a large section of the Indian society exists. Broadly one can say that over 90% of the labour force which is unorganised in India is marginalised denying them not only a decent work life but also any opportunity to participate in India's governance with a view to make it more effective and just. The need of the hour is to eradicate such marginalisation. This is possible only through empowerment of these sections. Such groups are vast, covering a wide area of work and occupation from wage employment in small organisations to self-employment in areas like artisanship and craftsmanship, taxi and transport driving. They can be even micro entrepreneurs having own establishment with family labour or a few employed and include rural marginalised sections like poor women workers, child labour, bonded labour and S.C/S/Ts. The attention in the present Unit will be confined to a few but prominent marginalised sections. Before we take up such cases, it is necessary for us to understand in greater detail about the concept of empowerment as a tool to liberate the marginalised.

11.2.2 Concept of 'Empowerment'

Empowerment broadly refers to the process of strengthening the marginalised sections. It is a multifaceted concept. The dictionary meaning of the word 'empower' is 'to give authority or power, 'to give strength and confidence'. It 'includes providing opportunities to the marginalised to learn and to get confidence and capacity to come out of their marginalisation and become empowered to develop themselves freely'.

Wikipedia, elaborating the concept, explains that marginalised people fail to get opportunities for self development and are deprived of accomplishments that others achieve. 'Empowerment is the process of ensuring such basic opportunities for the marginalised people. It includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities'. 'Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing skills for self sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively, but there are many examples of empowerment projects which have succeeded'.

The marginalised group has to exercise great care in choosing their organisation that helps them. A good idea would be to form their own organization and develop themselves, because only they as marginalised people know what they suffer. Besides, there is always a chance of the organisation they select to help them, may, on the contrary make the marginalised dependent on them for getting opportunities to develop themselves. Same may be the fate of relying on charitable/philanthropist organizations who, by their charity,

may make the marginalised more needy and even less empowered than when they were not dependent on such organisation. However if the marginalised choose their organization judiciously, or form their organisation more carefully, then they may be able to help themselves much better. A competent and committed NGO, that is operating in the field of helping the marginalised to get access to the opportunities of empowerment, will be the greatest asset for such marginalised people.

Empowerment is a slow and steady multi-dimensional process. All stakeholders interested in empowerment must come together, arrive at a consensus and undertake harmonised and coordinated action. In solving problems like poverty and unemployment the affected marginalised sections themselves may not be able to achieve self-empowerment. They need support, encouragement and concrete help from others, from employers, from unions, from NGOs, and above all from the government.

Empowerment can also be looked upon as a four-stage process (Verma, 2005). These stages are:

- a) Relief, wherein marginalised survive, no further defeat or fall,
- b) Resistance, wherein they fight back to take control, may use political movement,
- c) Reconstruction, wherein marginalised build platforms of strength, and,
- d) Rectification, wherein they remove internal injustices and inequalities.

Empowerment is thus a multi-faceted approach. In empowering the unemployed poor, wide ranging activities on a long-term basis may be needed. The unemployed must be inspired and motivated to be interested in getting empowered and earning their livelihood. They must have access to job information and recruitment agencies like employment exchanges. They must also be provided training and imparted skills for which, facilitating NGOs or government agencies may be needed. Once the employability of the unemployed increases, it facilitates in getting jobs.

Employers must also be persuaded to consider marginalised sections like the SCs/STs, OBCs, women, and the physically challenged in their recruitment process. The unemployed can also be helped by banks to form themselves into self-help groups (SHGs). If all of them have similar skills, they may be encouraged to form cooperatives or any other suitable entrepreneurial organisation, so that they can programme their activities and generate jobs for absorbing some of the unemployed.

Social disabilities like lack of social acceptance may need social and political approach, of creating awareness among the socially deprived, and encouraging society to accept the marginal sections as their equal in the society. Issues like social boycott or strong legal action may be needed. Persons considered to belong to lower castes may be educated and their level of confidence must be raised.

However, there is an impediment wherein the pseudo-empowerment takes place with ultimate selfish intention. A suitable example lies in concepts like 'worker's participation in management' or worker's empowerment in terms of decision making etc where superficially it empowers a worker but the ultimate aim of the management may be to make worker to work harder so that the organisation gets more output and higher productivity.

Among all stakeholders, government and governmental agencies have greater responsibility. If they do not discharge their duties with commitment and without fear or favour, then the marginalised section may remain marginalised, never empowered. When atrocities are committed on minorities, or women or backward castes, the police must register the first information reports (FIRs) and raise the confidence levels of the marginalised. The government can also empower the marginalised collectively by passing suitable legislation in favour of the marginalised groups. At present the government is going through a massive legislation for social security benefits for the unorganised labour. Such activities of empowerment can only be taken by government, as they demand large organisational and financial efforts. With this background our attention can now be turned to certain selective and widely prevalent marginalised groups in the country.

11.3 EMPOWERING MARGINALISED WOMEN

11.3.1 Position of Women

Women, especially poor rural women, constitute the largest marginalised section in India and therefore deserve special attention. According to the 2001 census, India's total population was 1027 million, of which the female population was 496 million. Thus roughly half the population is women and their marginalisation should be a matter of deep concern for all. Ultimately, work and wages decide the standards of living of those who work and their families. The following table (Table 1) gives details of women workers in 2004-2005.

Table 1. Select Characteristics of Women Workers (2004-2005)

Indicators	Male	Female	Rural Female	Rural female S.Cs/S.Ts
Total workers (UPSS) (million)	309.4	148.0	124.0	44.9
Work Force Participation Rate(WPR)%	54.7	28.3	32.7	37.5
Percentage of Regular workers In Total Work Force(TWF)	18.2	8.9	3.7	3.1
Percentage of Self-employed In TWF	54.2	61.1	63.7	51.1
Percentage of Casual Labour In TWF	27.5	30.0	32.6	45.8
Percentage of Unorganized Workers in TWF	90.7	95.9	98.0	98.6

Source: Labour File: September-December 2007, p.71. Based on NSSO 61st Round (2004-2005)

The above table shows the adverse position of women. 95.9% of female workers, and 98% of female rural workers (Female rural S.Cs/S.Ts still larger – 98.6%) are in unorganised sector where the working conditions, wages, and terms of employment are of a poor order. They do not get any significant social security benefits.

According to the NSSO 61st Round, 11.1% of the households are headed by females. While 56% of rural males and 33% of rural females belong to the labour force, in urban areas 57% of urban males and 16% of the urban females are in the labour force. There is an increase in self-employment and more women are self-employed. The proportion of regular women workers is low (8.9%) compared to males (18.2%). The proportion of rural female work force is still lower (3.7%).

It appears a little paradoxical that while Gandhiji placed women on a very high pedestal, in reality the position of women workers in economic and social status appears not very encouraging.

Gandhiji on Women

To call woman the weaker section is a libel; it means injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power then woman is immeasurably man's superior.

— (The Mind of Mahatma, P.291)

Women in Reality

Most women are permanently working, but not permanently employed in the workforce. It is this difference between work and employment which has become a major issue of equity today. That women constitute half of the population is a demographic fact. That they perform one third of the total work hours in the market is also recognized in official statistics. But calculations continue to show that women receive only about five percent of the world income. Their income is so low that most women have no margin for savings and hence ownership of any assets, Therefore they have no independent control of directing income generation activity. If quantified, it would not be surprising that women own perhaps not even one percent of reproducible assets. This is the global profile of women today.

———Krishna Ahooja-Patel, 1999, p.17

The Shramshakti Report (Ela Bhatt Commission, 1988) has brought out the poor conditions of women especially rural women, in employment, earnings, and living. Some of the general characteristics of these women are: fewer and poorer opportunities to work; greater impact of unemployment, underemployment and casual nature of unemployment; greater vulnerability because of lack of skills and education; lesser mobility, heavy responsibility; a systematic social practice of undervaluing women's work; and lack of access to better technologies, tools and productive assets. To large extent poor women keep moving between the status of self-employed and casual labour and unemployed. They are also divided on grounds like caste, class and employment activity but deprivation and discrimination is common. Women-headed households have a higher incidence of poverty and majority is landless. In spite of governmental support at central and state levels, not much impact is made because of the perpetuation of inequality.

11.3.2 Women's Problems of Marginalisation

Women's contribution to work and development is now better valued, especially in rural areas, but still stand marginalised due to many reasons.

1. Their working conditions are poor and being unorganised they are not able to fight for good working conditions. Even when there is legislation demanding good working conditions, they are not be implemented effectively.
2. Their wages are low because most of them are unskilled, and there is excess supply of labour compared to demand.
3. Many of the women have multiple roles, to manage house, work and children. This excessive burden makes their life one of oppression and hardship. Domestic work is unpaid and thus has lessor value than paid work.
4. An important factor that makes them economically marginalised is discrimination at work. More remuneration and relatively skilled jobs go to men while low paid, stereotyped, routine jobs are dumped on women workers. This happens in agriculture, construction, bidi making etc.
5. There are also multiple causes making their life miserable and marginalised. 'Job insecurity, back-bending work and inhuman conditions make women 'beasts of burden'. Legislation in most cases remains ineffective.
6. There are biases that women are less efficient and unreliable when they face events of uncertainty. So they are not preferred especially in private sector. In unorganised small establishments their services may be terminated.
7. When economy develops, they remain stagnant and are thus marginalised by development.
8. In times of bad economic situations like recession their jobs remain more vulnerable.
9. Women remain marginalised due to discrimination, deprivation, exploitation, sexual and other harassments and atrocities, and poor implementation of government measures including laws. They are subject to domestic violence.

11.3.3 Measures for Empowerment

The governments at central and state level have taken a number of measures. A large number of NGOs are working for women's causes. There are also international measures for their empowerment. The measures narrated below are not exhaustive but indicate the approach towards empowerment.

The governmental measures can be classified into three categories:

a) Legislation; b) Policy back-up; and c) programmes designed to eradicate poverty and unemployment.

In the sphere of legislation, apart from the Constitutional provisions, there are several legislative measures to ensure that women get what they are entitled to. Maternity Benefits Act 1961, Factories Act 1948, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Contract Labour Act 1976, Workmen's Compensation Act 1923, and ESIC Act 1948 are some of the important such legal measures. However, unorganised rural women have not been able to benefit much from these laws.

In the sphere of policies, the government has been making vigorous attempts in recent times to incorporate women's empowerment in the policy formulations. Ministries like those of Education, Social Welfare, Health and Family Planning, Labour, and Rural Development have separate cells/Departments to look after women's interests. In Planning Commission, Social Planning Division deals with women's welfare and empowerment through employment and poverty-eradication schemes.

The governmental programmes help women in getting employment, self-employment or financial assistance. The Central Social Welfare Board assists women in setting up self-employment ventures by extending financing assistance to voluntary agencies for setting up women led units with employment potential.

Several state governments have set up separate corporations for women. For example, in Maharashtra, there is the Mahila Arthik Mahamandal (MAVIM) which helps poor women in getting training and employment assistance.

Apart from government there are several non-governmental organisations like the SEWA in Ahmedabad and Annapurana Mahila Mandal in Mumbai doing commendable jobs for helping women in almost all spheres of social needs especially in urban and semi-urban areas.

Every year 8th March is observed as International Women's Day when women's problems, policies, and programmes are discussed. The Department of Women and child Development set up in 1985 serves as the nodal agency for women's advancement. The National Commission for Women is a statutory body created in January 1992 to facilitate redressal of grievances and to accelerate the socio-economic development of women, to promote awareness about women's problems, and work for the empowerment of women. The Central Social Welfare Board promotes welfare activities for all marginalised sections including women. To ensure that women receive due benefits in government's public expenditure, the government has been promoting a 'gender based budgeting'. In spite of receiving high attention, the implementation of the laws, policies and programmes for the benefit of women has plenty of scope for improvement to make them more target-oriented and effective.

11.4 EMPOWERMENT OF CHILD LABOUR

"In recent years there has been a dramatic change in attitudes about child labour. Denial and indifference have given way to acknowledgement, outrage, and a readiness to tackle the problem effectively. Ridding the world of child labour will require a significant commitment of resources by the international community. Yet, globally, over two decades of the economic benefits of eliminating child labour would exceed the costs by nearly seven times. Eliminating child labour is unquestionably a sound financial investment".

Juan Somavia, Director General, ILO, 2005.

11.4.1 Position of Child Labour

A child is defined as the one who is below the age of 15 years. A working child can be defined as a child who is above the age of 4 and below the age of 15 who is doing labour, either paid or unpaid, and is working within or outside the family. It means, a child labour is one who is deprived of the right to education and childhood. This is the period during which the child is to be given opportunity of and access to the means of intellectual

and physical growth of the child, so that it transforms the child into an adult who can optimally contribute to the relevant activities for the all round and sustainable growth of the society in terms of its well-being. What makes this explanation important is that it makes it unambiguously clear that all out-of-school children are working children in one form or another. It does not make a distinction between children working in the so-called hazardous industries and children working as part of family labour.

Nevertheless, to understand the kind of pressures that children are subjected to in different sectors across the country, studies are being under taken in different occupations having significant incidence of the child labour. Much attention is being paid to the field of child labour and numerous occupations in India having significant incidence of child labour; sometimes it becomes necessary to undertake some base line surveys to understand the nature of the problem so as to prescribe the solutions and to assess the impact of the steps taken to solve or to ease the problem.

The term Child Labour, formerly applied to the practice of employing young children in factories, is now used to denote the employment of minors generally, especially in work that may interfere with their education or endanger their health. Throughout the ages and in all societies children joined with their parents to work in the fields, in the marketplace, in the family trades and around the home as soon as they were old enough to perform simple tasks. The use of child labour was not regarded a social problem until the expansion of the village economy and introduction of the factory system.

Even in the 21st century, with splendid developments in the processes of production of goods and services required for the basic needs of the human being, communication, transport and such infrastructure, the child labour remains a serious problem in many parts of the world especially in developing countries. The recent studies by national and international organisations show that more than 50 million children below the age of 15 are working in various jobs under quite hazardous conditions; and a larger number is engaged in activities not identified as having hazardous conditions. Juan Somavia says, “one out of six children in the world—an estimated 246 million children—are involved in child labour. Think of it. The number of child laborers is roughly equal to the entire population of the United States.”

Many of these children live in underdeveloped countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia under crude living conditions and with few chances for education. The meagre income they bring in, however, is necessary for the survival of their families. Frequently, these families lack the basic necessities of life like adequate food, decent clothing, shelter, and even water for drinking and bathing.

In some countries skewed industrialisation has created miserable working conditions for children; in India, for example, some 20,000 children work 16 hours a day in match factories with serious health hazards. Similar is the case in brick-kilns or the slate industry. A growing concern in recent years has been of an increase in sex labour among the youngsters in urban areas.

However the estimates on the magnitude of the child labour differ widely. The Census of the Government of India gives a lowest estimate of 12.7mn. as in the year 2001. The estimates of the NGOs/institutions differ and go beyond the figure of 40mn. By any standard, the lowest estimate itself is significantly high and the plight of this section of the labour is worst and detrimental to their well-being and the growth of the country.

11.4.2 Problems of Marginalisation of Child Labour

Child Labour is a highly complex and multidimensional issue in developing countries like India. It is marginalised through the marginalisation of Children's parents. Withdrawal of child labour many times impoverishes its family to such an extent that the 'liberated child' returns to child labour. The problem is the marginalisation of its parents in perpetual poverty. How to help the parents so that they may not be compelled to send their children to work is the biggest problem.

Childhood is considered to be the most enjoyable period of a person's life. It is also the most crucial stage in life determining the child's personality and its human capital quality, for acquiring good education and training that can help them throughout their life. To help these working children is a challenging problem.

Children are compelled to work for long hours for low wages, to work in hazardous industries in appalling conditions where they have little or no control over their working conditions, are made to carry heavy loads or sit in fixed postures for long hours. In hazardous industries they come into direct contact with poisonous gases, chemicals, fire, cotton fluff and dust which makes them highly susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis, asthma, bronchitis, silicosis and byssinosis.

Though they add to the income streams of the family, it is at a heavy social and economic cost. The gain is short-term and the level of wages or income that children get are a pittance compared to the need based wage or income. Further there are long-term losses to the child, its family and society. The child is deprived of good education and training and this prevents it from developing itself into a high quality human capital resource. The family in the long-term loses the high income that the child would have earned if it had received better education and skills. The social loss is maximum as, on the one hand society loses potential human capital and on the other, it has to provide more resources for providing social security for such population whose income is bound to remain low. The loss of human capital has grave implications for productivity and economic growth and development. Thus failure of marginalised poor parents and marginalised children who have no say for their own interests and development has grave implications to the children, parents and the society.

11.4.3 Measures for the Empowerment of the Marginalised Children

The most important efforts to eliminate child labour abuses throughout the world come from the International Labour Organization (ILO), a special agency of the United Nations. Right from the year of its inception, the ILO adopted several Conventions and Recommendations concerning child labour, including a minimum age of 16 years for admission to all work, a higher minimum age for specific types of employment, compulsory medical examinations, and regulation of night work. In the late 20th century the ILO added to this list the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, prostitution, debt bondage (the practice of requiring children to work off loans made to their parents), and forced military service. The ILO, however, does not have the power to enforce these conventions; it depends on voluntary compliance (ratification) by member nations.

There were special Commissions to study and assess the incidence of child labour in the country. Projects like International Project on Elimination of Child Labour of the ILO and the India-US project particularly on rehabilitation of the child labour, and Government of India's National Child Labour Project have made and continue to make significant

progress in dealing with the elimination of child labour. Government, employers and employees/unions - are being sensitised on the issues, and parents are convinced and helped. NGOs also have a significant presence in the area of education and development of child labour. Special attention is also paid to the rescue and rehabilitation of girl children.

The Government of India and state governments have taken a number of measures to tackle the problem of child labour. The Indian Constitution's Directive Principles prohibit the abuse of the tender age of children until 14 years of age. Several ILO conventions on child labour have been ratified by India. The Government of India has passed the comprehensive Child Labour Act of 1986. There are measures to rescue child labourers and prosecute those who abuse child labour. There is ample scope to implement the laws and programmes effectively and proceed to achieve child labour eradication. Free and compulsory education for all children till the age of 16 is essential to eliminate child labour. The GOI has passed the Right to Education Act, but it needs to be rigorously implemented.

As a result of sustained efforts at different levels and by several parties, the number of child workers has been coming down as can be seen from the following table (Table 2) below:

Table 2: Per 1000 Distribution of workers by age group (UPPS)

Age group (yrs)	Male Rural			Female rural		
	1993-94	99-00	2004-05	1993-94	99-00	2004-04
5-9	3	2	1	5	3	1
10-14	30	22	16	46	37	26
5-14	33	24	17	51	40	27
Total	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000

	Male Urban			Female Urban		
	1993-94	99-00	2004-05	1993-94	99-00	2004-04
5-9	1	1	0	3	2	2
10-14	15	11	9	33	29	22
5-14	16	12	9	36	31	24
Total	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000

Source: NSSO various rounds, from Table 3(part), Labour Statistics, Indian Journal of Labour Economics, Vol.50, No.1, January-March 2007, (p.160)

The above table reveals that over a period of time the proportion of child labour has been falling. It can be seen that child labour intensity is more in rural areas than in urban areas. Girl child labourers outnumber male child labour. Though the number of child labour is falling due to several sustained measures, we have a long way to go toward the eradication of child labour. Further attention is to be focused on children in rural areas and on girl children.

11.5 EMPOWERMENT OF SCs, STs AND OBCs

11.5.1 Position of the Disadvantaged Groups

The SCs, STs and the OBCs have been facing severe problems in the Indian society. Their position has not significantly altered in spite of several measures taken by the

governments since independence, though it cannot be denied that their position has been gradually improving. In spite of the government implementing a wide variety of programmes and schemes marginalization continues as one official report cites: 'on the subtle examination of the schemes from the point of view of implementation, it appears much is said than done. In other words, much remains to be done'.

The position of SCs and STs has been clearly secured in the Indian Constitution right from its inception in 1950. Legislation to remove untouchability and protect them from atrocities in society has been a very important measure towards empowering these sections of the society. In 1981, SCs constituted 15.8% and STs 7.8% of the total population. In 2001 their population had increased to 16.2% for the SCs and to 8.2% for the STs. Thus they constitute a significant proportion of the population which is increasing. However their distribution in the country is not even. In Mizoram the population STs is very high, over 90% whereas in Goa it is less than one percent. Same is the case with STs whose proportion is much higher in the North-Eastern states.

The position of the OBCs received significant attention after the Mandal Commission in the early 1990s. Adequate data are not available, but the OBCs constitute a larger number (over 40% of the population) than the SCs and STs combined. One recent compilation claims that central and state governments including union territories have enumerated 2176 and 2551 communities respectively as OBCs. These include the poor peasantry of the period of zamindars; communities that rendered traditional services like the barbers, and dhobis; artisans; and communities without resource or skill base. The OBCs also constitute a very heterogeneous group.

11.5.2 Problems of SCs/STs and OBCs

The above communities have been suffering for a long time in all major spheres of life – social, economic, political, legal and others; these communities suffer, though they vary in intensity and magnitude depending on particular caste, tribe or community.

Socially the level of literacy is low among these sections of the society, affecting their employability. They also suffer from poor status and social exclusion, lower income and lower standards of living. They also find it difficult to get easy access to finance and credit as a result they are not able to undertake income generating ventures. Lack of productive assets like land, livestock and capital also keep them poor and exploited by moneylenders in the society. They are unaware of the legal provisions meant to protect them and enable them to get justice and priority treatment. Besides affirmative action, a network of schools must ensure that these classes of people get free access to education and other services.

11.5.3 Empowering the Marginalised Sections

The government's policies and programmes aim at helping these sections in two main areas. Firstly, efforts are on to help them to overcome the multiple deprivations which have been keeping them marginalised. Secondly, these programmes seek to provide them protection against social exclusion and socio-economic discrimination on the one side and on the other, encourage these groups' effective participation in the mainstream of the country. The government's approach has a two-fold strategy consisting of anti-discriminatory or protective measures, and development and empowering measures. For protecting SCs and STs there is the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989.

Among the various dimensions of empowerment are to ensure education and employment. Towards these ends, the government has introduced the policy of reservation in which there marginalised sections have seats and jobs reserved for them. This is applicable in all institutions of higher education including the prestigious IITs and IIMs. Similarly job reservations are in government and Public Sector Undertakings. But the targets in several areas are not fully achieved and their condition has not improved. The 55th Round of NSSO found that in 1999-2000, 50-9% of the STs, 42.9% of the SCs and 33.7% of the OBCs in rural areas were below poverty line.

11.6 EMPOWERING THE BONDED LABOUR

11.6.1 Position of Bonded Labour

Bonded labour refers to the age old system wherein a labourer is tied down to render his services to his creditor in lieu of consideration from him or his ancestors to the labourer or to his ancestors. Thus it indicates a cruel bondage on indebted labourers. This system prevails predominantly in rural areas and makes the life of such indebted labourers miserable. There is no precise estimate of bonded labour. Different estimates around mid 1990s show wide variance. While a survey done by the Gandhi Peace Foundation put their total figure at 26.7 lakhs, the survey carried out by the NSSO showed a figure of 3.45 lakhs and the survey carried out by the state governments put the number at 2.06 lakhs. While exact number is a matter of doubt, their significant presence is not disputed.

11.6.2 Problems of Bonded Labour

‘The system of bonded labour is an outcome of customary obligations, forced labour or indebtedness under which a debtor agrees to render service. Though the system is deeply embedded in feudal and semi feudal social structure, it is also prevalent in advanced agriculture with capitalist feature and in the non-agricultural sectors’. It is obviously a system of exploitation of poor labourers.

The problems of bonded labourers is a part of the wider socio-economic problems of excess supply of labour, unemployment, low wages and poor standard of living of labourers with little surplus, rural illiteracy and helplessness. Such labourers are in permanent debts. The system perpetuates itself and powerful intervention is needed to prevent their miserable conditions.

11.6.3 Empowerment of Bonded labour

The Government of India decided to abolish this evil practice stating that “bonded labour, wherever it exists will be declared illegal”. In 1975 the government promulgated the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Ordinance. This was replaced by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976. It freed unilaterally all the bonded labourers from bondage with simultaneous liquidation of their debts. Even after two decades, there is still a significant presence of this labour and in spite of clear provisions of identifying bonded labour, declaring them free and having plans for their rehabilitation, the evil practice still prevails. A strong concerted effort on the part of all concerned is necessary to put an end to this practice and empower the freed labourers for a new productive life.

11.7 OTHER MARGINALISED SECTIONS

Over 90% of the labour force is unorganised and faces very poor working and living

conditions. If their families are taken into considerations, they would constitute a large marginalised section in the country. There are several categories of labourers like construction workers, hawkers, and domestic workers etc who are all marginalised. But many of these are covered significantly in the groups discussed here above. Here we pay attention to two sections that have been receiving attention at the hands of researchers.

11.7.1 Disabled Workers

The disabled section covers all those with visual, hearing, speech, locomotor and mental disabilities and other permanent disabilities that may have arisen from accident, sickness etc. According to 2001 census there were 21.9 million disabled in India. 75% of them live in rural areas. Only 49% were literate. Again only a small section of them, 34% were employed. Their disabilities become the cause for their marginalisation as it becomes difficult for them to get educated in their fields of choice. They may also be not fit and employable as normal persons. Since many of them are poor, their marginalisation has become inevitable.

However governments, both central and state, and a variety of NGOS have emerged as their empowering supporters. The governmental attention includes medical and social rehabilitation. Several important laws like the Persons with Disability (Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights, Full Participation) Act, 1995; National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act 1992 and Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 have been passed to take care of the needs of disabled. There are also several empowering measures and programmes. A large number of institutions that deal with different disabilities and help in treatment, rehabilitation, training and employment have now come into existence. There is also reservation in employment in government, public sector, and aided institutions, for the disabled. The National Handicapped and Finance Development Corporation help in self-employment ventures of the disabled. Recently the government has come out with the National Policy for the Persons with Disabilities, 2006 which aims at comprehensive help and empowerment of the disabled. The policy gives the disabled the status of 'valuable human resources', and aims at creating an environment of opportunities, protection of rights and full participation. With the support of the civil society, disabled can look forward to a decent and productive life.

11.7.2 Old/Aged persons

Aged old persons are those who are over 60 years of age, though classification differs at different places and purposes. Called with dignity as 'Senior Citizens', this section of the population has fortunately begun to receive more attention. In 1951 their population was 20 millions which increased to 57 millions in 1991, to 70.57 millions in 2001 and is expected to reach 100 millions in 2013 and 112.96 millions in 2016.

Unfortunately the aged have now begun to face a number of problems. Decline of joint family system has marginalised them, making them an isolated and neglected lot. Children, when they grow up settle with their own family, often abroad. Marriages out of caste or community also lead to their being abandoned. In urban areas, there is the problem of housing in which aged may not be accommodated. They also do not have adequate social security support. Though the government has introduced the scheme of national old age pension, the benefits appear highly inadequate. Above all they suffer from typical problems and diseases of old age like dementia, senility, depression, anxiety, and diseases related to bones and nerves.

The government has come out with the National Policy on Older Persons, 1999. It has promised the old that they will not live unprotected, ignored and marginalised. State will support them in getting financial security, health care, shelter, welfare needs, protection against abuse and exploitation and opportunities for their development. A number of support measures now exist for the old like the provision of identity cards, special queues for public services like postal service and ticket reservation, travel concessions, etc. A number of NGOs like the Dignity Foundation in Mumbai are doing valuable services for the old. It can be hoped that such measures will expand contributing to the empowerment of the senior citizens in India.

11.8 SUMMARY

In India large sections of the society are marginalised. In a broad sense over 90% of the labour force which is unorganised is marginalised but this is too vast and heterogeneous. There are more specific large sections like women, especially poor rural women; the S.Cs; the S.Ts; the OBCs; children; the bonded labour; the disabled; and the old/aged. Marginalisation of such sections has led to development without social inclusion and social justice. Our analysis has pointed out that though the central and state governments and other civil agencies have contributed significantly to empower these marginalised sections, and there is no doubt some progress in this direction, a lot more needs to be done. To create a Gandhian society of peace and harmony; inclusion and empowerment; growth with equity; and of enrichment and sustainability, a more vigorous, purposive, integrated and concerted effort by the governments and civil societies is needed.

11.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the concept of 'marginalisation' giving examples from the Indian society.
2. Explain the marginalisation of women in India. How are they being empowered?
3. Discuss the problem of child labour in India. Discuss the measures in operation for their empowerment.
4. Write notes on
 - a) Empowerment of the OBCs
 - b) Helping the disabled
 - c) Supporting the aged

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