

Socio - Economic and Educational Status of Dalit Women: A Case Study of Nainital District of Kumaun Region

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi said "I cannot even conceive how one human being can feel superior by the humiliation of another". His insight into values expressed then still echoes into the 21st century. In India the Dalit women is humiliated and insulted everyday- every-minute-as a poor women- as a Dalit women and as a women. Oppressed, discriminated and tyrannized she is reduced to sub-human level. Keeping these considerations in mind the author conducted a study on the socio-economic and educational status of Dalit women of Nainital district of Kumaun region.

1. Introduction

The status of woman is the yardstick for assessing the standard of culture of any age of any nation. The term "status" denotes position of an individual in a social system. It also encompasses in itself the notions, rights and obligations of superiority and inferiority in terms of power, authority and grading. In the context of women, status implies her position in particular sub-system of society. Her rights, privileges and their determination, her access to power and authority, the state of her position when compared to that of man, manifests her status in that particular society.¹ So when compared to man's position, Indian women always occupied a status, inferior to man. Because Indian society has, always been dominated by man, placing the women in subordinate position. She has always been looked down and has been treated as inferior to man in matters of rights and privileges.² Hence when women in general face discrimination on the basis of gender, dalit women face a complex web of discrimination. Dalit women are burdened thrice over being discriminated as women, marginalized as dalits and economically deprived due to poverty. So the dalit woman faces a triple burden of oppression.³ Ironically she who gives birth to men is victimized by gender oppression. With regard to dalit women, in all aspect they are lowest level of the socio-economic and educational hierarchy.⁴

2. Review of literature

Ashalatha. P (2013)⁵ in his paper tries to highlight the status of dalit women in India. He in his study tries to present the devastating effects of the caste system on the educational, social, and economical status of dalit women. He also highlights the harsh reality of suppression, struggle and torture dalit women face every day of their miserable lives.

D. Swarupa Rani and Sudu Rajesh (2014)⁶ in their paper entitled "Socio-economic status of Dalit women- A study in Andhra Pradesh" examine the issues related to the dalit women vis-a vis socio-economic problems of Andhra Pradesh.

D Tata Rao (2014)⁷ in his study found that dalit women are socially segregated group anywhere in the world. Even after reservation policy, positive changes and a constant support of the political machinery in the country towards eradication of discrimination against the dalit women have not changed their conditions.

A Uma Mahesware Rao and B Garagpati. Varalakshmi (2014)⁸ in their study analysed that the status of dalit women in modern Indian is still inhuman. They still have to face the harsh realities of suppression, struggle and torture every day. The hardships of dalit women are not simply due to their poverty, economic status, lack of education but are a direct result of the severe exploitation and suppression by the upper classes, which is legitimized by Hindu religious scriptures.

Lajwantsingh (2015)⁹ in his study found that modern occupation, welfare schemes, development programmes of the government and constitutional law are contributing a lot towards the socio-economic, educational and cultural attitudes and the life-style of the dalit women.

Bina Rai (2016)¹⁰ in her study analysed that dalit women are coerced to be victimized in the patriarchy. They are bearing the burden of double day caste and sexual division of labour. Dalit women are demeaned and degraded and their body is a free terrain of colonization by men from other community. They are a deprived section and at the lowest level of economic and educational structure.

Nalla Sushma (2016)¹¹ in his paper highlights the point that scheduled caste women in no way are inferior to other caste people and the provision of social, economic, educational and political facilities after independence has improved their position.

Ramaiah. Kollapudi, Nagamani. K, Latchaiah.P, and Kishore.Mendam (2016)¹² in their paper highlights the point that dalit women are economically, educationally and socially backward when compared to other social groups thus their empowerment becomes a challenging issue in the present scenario.

3. Objectives

The main objectives of the proposed research are:

- a) To assess the socio- economic status of the dalit women.
- b) To assess the educational status of the dalit women.

4. Methodology and Sample Coverage

The study was conducted in the dalit area of Kuriya Gaon under Nainital district of Kumaun region. A multi-stage random sampling was employed to study the objectives. According to per plan scheduled a number of 80 households of the dalit community (female) were chosen for the study.

5. Results and Discussions

Social, economic and educational status together constitute a person’s personality therefore keeping in mind this point the author tried to focus on these three basic points.

(I) Social Status

In the following segment an attempt has been made to analyse the social status of dalit women. In this regard they were asked some questions, viz.: (i) status of females in family, (ii) status of females in society, (iii) causes responsible for female discrimination, and (iv) if the females of their caste experienced any type of harassment, in this regard then they were further asked two related questions- first, if they face harassment from their own caste members or members of other caste, and second, the nature of harassment.

i. Status of females in the family

Status of dalit females even after independence has remained pitiable. Their status still remains lower than that of the women of upper caste and in their own society their status is lower than their male counterparts. Thus, to gain response of the female dalit respondents on this bitter truth they were asked the question regarding their status in the family.

Table 1: Status of females in the family

Status	Number of respondents	%
Equality with husband	12	15.00
Subservient to	46	57.5

husband		
Superior to husband	0	0
No response	22	27.5
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

From the responses of the respondents it becomes clear that the status of dalit women in their families is not superior to their husbands. The female respondents usually engage themselves in activities which help in improving the financial condition of the family they work as labourers in fields, they cut grass and wood from the jungles for their cattle’s or to sell in the market, besides engaging herself in the financial activities they look after their families in spite of such hardship she is not given proper treatment by her husband. Women who are given equal treatment are either financially well-off or have attained good education.

ii. Status of females in the society

The dalit women have continued to toil in the lowest rung of the social order in the Indian society. They have been relegated to lower status compared to men within the scheduled caste group. The dalit women therefore constitute the most distressed section of the Hindu society.¹³ The status of the dalit females even in their own family is not pleasant. In order to learn about their status in the society the respondents were asked whether their status in society has improved or not.

Table 2: Status of females in the society

Status of females in the society	Number of respondents	%
Better	46	57.5
As before	31	38.75
Worse than before	3	3.75
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

The above table shows that 57.5 per cent (46) of the respondents perceived their status and condition to be better in the society. 38.75 per cent (31) of the respondents perceived their status same as before independence. It becomes rather obvious from the responses of the respondents that the status of the dalit women after independence has improved, as large number of respondents perceived their status and condition to be better in the society than before.

iii. Causes of discrimination in the society

Status of dalit women in the society is not very satisfactory, and therefore, the respondents were asked to identify the causes responsible for such discrimination.

Table 3: Causes of discrimination in the society

Causes of discrimination as viewed by the respondents	Number of respondents	%
Lack of education among dalit women	17	21.25
Lack of independent economic status	20	25.00
Being a women	2	2.5
Being a dalit women	41	51.25

Total Respondents	80	100
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Source: Present Survey

An analysis of these reasons given by the respondents revealed that caste of the women was the fundamental cause of discrimination in society. Thus, dalit women suffer both due to their gender and caste.

iv. Female harassment

Besides social discrimination faced by the respondents they also face various kinds of harassment (verbal abuse, physical beating and physical abuse). These harassments they face either from their own community or from other higher community members.

Table 4: Harassment of women in the society

Are you harassed in the society	Number of respondents	%
Yes	17	21.25
No	63	78.75
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

The respondents (17) who were harassed in the society were further asked a direct question "are you harassed by your own caste members or members of other caste". This question was asked to get a proper picture of the female harassment.

Table 5: Harassment met by own caste members/ other caste members

Harassment met by own caste/ other caste members	Number of respondents	%
Own caste members	11	64.70
Others caste members	6	35.29
Total Respondents	17	100

Source: Present Survey

64.70 per cent respondents out of the 17 harassed reported that they met harassment by their own caste members while 25.29 per cent respondents reported that they were harassed by members of other caste. Even members of their own caste have at times acted as their oppressors as they are the ones who try to suppress members of their own caste.

Table 6: Nature of harassment

Nature of harassment	Number of respondents	%
Verbal Abuse	15	88.23
Physical Beating	0	0
Physical Abuse	2	11.76
Total Respondents	17	100

Source: Present Survey

The type of harassment reported ranged from verbal abuse (88.23 per cent) to physical abuse (11.76 per cent). Few women especially those belonging to very low strata reported sexual harassment in the society. Women belonging to families of higher social and economic position were reluctant to be open with the real fact.

(II)Economic Status

For years dalit women have been denied a financially independent livelihood. They are the downtrodden of the downtrodden. These women have to do traditional work like sweeping, bamboo work, to serve high caste women in deliveries, to work as maid servants, to carry goods, to work in building and road constructions, to sell fruits and vegetable in the streets. They do all sorts of manual labour and are forced to work for lower wages. Due to ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and official apathy dalit women are unable to make full advantage of the reservation facility in jobs. The economic oppression has made them live below the poverty line.

Table 7: Monthly income of the respondent's family

Income	Number of respondents	%
Less than 3 thousand	54	67.5
3 to 6 thousand	7	8.75
6 to 9 thousand	9	11.25
9 to 12 thousand	7	8.75
Above 12 thousand	3	3.75
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

Annual or monthly income of a family plays a very important role in the process of socialization. If the annual or monthly income of a family is very low, the family has no hope for higher status. The results show that monthly income of 67.5 per cent households is below three thousand. Maximum of those who belong to below poverty line are wage labours.

i. Participation in the economic decisions of the family

One of the important indicators of measuring the status of women is to examine their independence in economic and financial matters thus the female respondents were asked a simple question "do you participate in the economic decisions of the family".

Table 8: Participation in the economic decisions of the family

Advice sought in important economic decisions	Number of respondents	%
Yes	34	42.5
No	46	57.5
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

Table 8 shows that a lower percentage of respondents (42.5 per cent) stated that their advice was sought in important economic decisions of the family. However, many of these women also commented that it was not necessary that the sought advice was implemented. In the final analysis, it is the male members who are the ultimate decision-makers. Male members are usually brought up with the idea that seeking advice from wives or females is a disgraceful exercise.

Table 9: Percentage distribution of women by decision making relating to economic aspects

Type of economic decision	Number of respondents	%
Daily family expense	17	50.00
Saving and daily family expense	9	26.47
Borrowing, saving and	8	23.52

daily family expense		
Total Respondents	34	100

Source: Present Survey

It would be safe to mention here that except for certain educated and high and middle class groups, in most of the lower class families the male domination in economic decisions continues even today.

ii. Own institutional saving

The institutional saving can be taken as an indicator of the economic wellness of the respondents if a respondent is able to save a part of her family income it signifies that they are able to earn more than subsistence living and can have other plans for their lives as well.

Table 10: Own institutional saving

Response	Number of respondents	%
Yes	27	33.75
No	53	66.25
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

Not many women had their own institutional saving .The reason for which is that they lack the knowledge, self-confidence, enough economic resources and also time for operating a bank account. The volume and amount of institutional saving done by women are determined by their accessibility to institutional, motivation and the quantum of money in the hands of women. Women who had their own saving (27) were further asked a question regarding the extent of saving.

Table 11: Amount of saving

Amount	Number of respondents	%
Less than 3 Thousand	21	77.77
3 to 6 Thousand	5	18.51
6 to 9 Thousand	1	3.70
More than 9 Thousand	0	0
Total Respondents	27	100

Source: Present Survey

The respondents due to their lower income were unable to save money for their future. Though the financial status of the respondents was not very satisfactory still they given importance to savings.

iii. Housing condition

Housing conditions form one of the important indicators of socio-economic development because it helps in the core understanding of individual's economic character. Hence, in the present study housing condition of the respondents was also studied.

Table 12: Housing condition

Type of Houses	Number of Respondents	%
Pucca	17	21.25
Semi Pucca	33	41.25
Kachaa	30	37.5

Total Respondents	80	100
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Source: Present Survey

The above table shows the type of accommodation of the respondents. 21.25 per cent of the female respondents during our survey were found to stay in pucca house (which is built with durable materials like oven-burnt bricks, concrete, cement, iron or other metal) 41.25 per cent respondents were found to own semi-pucca house (which is built mostly with an angle iron structure with tin roof and concrete floor and pillars) 37.5 per cent rural respondents resided in kachaa houses (which is built with temporary materials, like roof made of light wood covered with old tin and polythene sheets, walls are also made of tin sheets or thatch and need to be maintained very often to retain their integrity)

(III) Education Status

Education as an instrument of socialization it is considered as a powerful catalytic agent in social change. This is most effective changing agent for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste removal of their disabilities and acceleration of the integrate progress. Realising the importance of education, the framers of the Constitution included in the Directive Principles of State Policy provision for free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years and for promotion and with special care also the educational and economic interests of SCs and STs and protecting from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Article 15 (4) enables the state to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and economically backward class of citizens or for the SCs and STs.14 Women in India have been regarded educationally backward. The dalit women may, however, be considered doubly backward in education as they have been suffering from two sources of disadvantages, "the disadvantage of their caste status and the disadvantage of their sex status..."

Table 13: Educational level

Educational level of the respondents	Number of respondents	%
Illiterate	37	46.25
Literate or primary	18	22.5
High school or intermediate	11	13.75
Graduate or higher	14	17.5
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

Educational status of the respondents as depicted is not very satisfactory as larger number of the respondents (46.25 per cent) are illiterate while 22.5 per cent respondents are semi-literate, only 13.75 per cent respondents have attained education at high school or intermediate level, respondents attaining education at graduation or higher level (17.5 per cent) seems to present a dismal picture.

Table 14: Opinion towards education of women

Opinion towards women education	Number of respondents	Percentage
Essential	47	58.75
Less Essential	12	15.00

Neither good nor bad	21	26.25
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

In the sample population it was found that women gave importance to women education as education is the key for women's development.

i. Motivation for education

To discover the motivating reasons for women education the respondents were asked a question as to "what are the motivating factors for female education".

Table 15: Motivating reason for education of women

Motivating reason for education of women	Number of Respondents	%
To acquire knowledge	0	0
To acquire employment	19	23.75
To acquire higher status	11	13.75
To acquire self-independence	23	28.75
For rearing children	12	15.00
For marriage	15	18.75
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

As a whole it is commendable to note here that women from the lower section in the society in our sample study prefer to make them self-independent through education.

ii. Education of children

Views on education of children was enquired into through a series of questions: one "what is the motivating favour for education of their children" and second "type of institutions in which children are studying".

Table 16: Objective in educating children

Objective in educating children	Number of Respondents	%
No definite aim	29	36.25
To acquire knowledge	3	3.75

To acquire employment	34	42.5
To acquire higher status	5	6.25
For self-independence	9	11.25
Total Respondents	80	100

Source: Present Survey

Table 16 shows that 36.25 per cent respondents send their children to school with no definite aim while 3.75 per cent females send their children to school to acquire knowledge. The main reason for education revealed by 42.5 per cent respondents who send their children to school is that their children could get good jobs, only 6.25 per cent respondents send their children to school to acquire higher status. 11.25 per cent respondents send their children to school with the objective of making them independent.

6. Conclusion

After analysing the social status of our respondents it becomes quite clear that social status of the dalit women respondents in their family as well as in the society is unpleasing. However, it seems that their status is improving which could be mainly due to the efforts of the government to improve the status of women. Though the status of dalit women in the society is improving but in spite of all this they have to face various kinds of discrimination due to low literacy, low economic status, due to their gender and finally due to their caste. The economic status of the dalit respondents, like their social status, is also not satisfactory as the maximum number of the respondents are in lower income groups i.e., below the poverty line. Thus, due to low income the respondents are neither in a position to manage the budget of the family nor are they in a position to take economic decisions of the family. The respondents due to their lower incomes are also unable to save money for their future. Education status of the dalit respondents is quite satisfactory as maximum number of respondents give due importance to education in their lives. They consider education an important indicator in influencing their social and economic status.

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