Livelihood of Dalit Women

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Introduction

The present study tries to focus on the life of self-employed dalit women. They are facing three type of burden in the society i.e. caste, class and gender, but they are facing many problems which are creating from caste, class, gender, culture, patriarchal systems, migration, occupation etc. sometimes they became victim of exploitation, rape, harassment etc. in the society. The dalit women engaged in employment since decades, now days they are engaged in self-employment. In this concern the study tries to focus on the struggle of livelihood of dalit women in the society.

In the ancient time caste system was very famous and practice of untouchability also seen in the Indian society but during the British rule slowly changes come in the dalit society. After independence constitution provides many statues and provisions for scheduled caste, therefore some of the scheduled caste people are getting education, higher education, technical education, occupational occupation etc. and engaged in new occupation, similarly changes also seen in the dalit women those who are oppressed, depressed and supersede in the society, besides literate, less literate and illiterate dalit women are entering in the new occupation of organized and unorganized sectors employment. Mostly they are engaged in self-employment activity. In this concern the study tries to focus on the status of dalit women in the society and thrown lights on occupations of the dalit women.

Dalits are coming from the lower strata of the society and among them dalit women’s status is very low in the society. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar very rightly said that, “Indian caste system like as a pyramid where as Brahmin on the top level while sudra on the last stair of the pyramid while dalit women on the bottom of the pyramid, their status is very low in the society.” According to Routh Manoram dalit women are facing three type of burden on her head i.e. gender, caste, class, as being a women dalit women suffer more than general women because traditional Indian patreichel society does not believe in equality, women has second status in the society. Now day’s dalit women are suffering multiple exploitation, rape, sexual harassment etc. although till today that type of studies continue in India and now days it is increased. Mostly the middle class and general women problems put in the center of the studies. But very less studies conducted for dalit women in the Gujarat therefore the present study being very useful. The study emphasizes the status of dalit women in the society. Due to occupational mobility in the dalit community, its impacts also seen on the urban and rural dalit women and due to same they are also engaged in organized and unorganized sectors employment. The study is highlighting the occupation of dalit women in unorganized sectors and also throws lights on their various issues, with this aims the study has following objectives.

Objectives:

- To know the status of dalit women in the society
- To know types of self employment of the dalit women
- To understand the issue of the dalit women

Research Methodology:

The study was conducted in the two cities like Ahmadabad and Gandhinagar, randomly hundred samples are selected form the both the city, among them 50 respondents selected from the various sectors i.e. 2,3,7,8,13,24, etc. of gandhinagar. rest of respondents selected from various area of Ahmadabad i. e. Girdharanagar, Amrawadi, Paldi, Gomtipur, Dariyapur, etc., four scheduled caste selected in the study from the both the city, namely garo, vankar, chamar, and valmiki , 20 respondents from garo, 20 respondents from vankar, while 30 respondents from chamar and another 30 respondents from valmiki. The data relevant for the present study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Related literature were collected from various library i.e. Gujarat university, Gujarat Vidya pith, Sewa library, etc. and getting the
information from books, news papers, magazines, journals, reports, census etc. The present study was restricted for only two cities Ahmadabad and Gandhinagar, it was also limited for urban dalit women of the both the city.

Due to lower economic condition male and women both are engaged in the traditional occupation for livelihood of their family in the dalit community. They are engaged in their traditional and family occupation i.e. vanat, charm, cleaning and sanitary work etc. In this context the study also give the brief of traditional occupation of selected scheduled caste i.e. garo, vankar, chamar, valmiki etc.

Garo are known as brhmin of the scheduled caste. They are engaged in the ceremonies of religious rituals i.e. Birth, marriage, death, simant, yagna, etc. garo women are also work with male in all this religious work. Sometimes she went to yajman home with male member of the family, she is engaged in work until finished the religious ceremony. She is known as gorani or garodi. At the time of death, she is singing death songs and gives the sympathy to the members of families those who lost the person, her special duty at 12th and 13th days of person’s death. While any women being widow, at that time calling the garo women for the chuda karm. Garo women also making raja(godadi) and sell , it’s being a one more livelihood source for them.

Vankar women are engaged in vanat work with male in the family; all the members like elders to child are engaged in the traditional occupation in the family. While, elder member monitoring on work and gave the guidance to other members, vanker man and women have similar skill in the said traditional occupation.

Chamar women were doing their traditional occupation. While male member pulled the dead animal and cutout the skin (charm), women throws the skin in the kund till 25 days. Every day 15 to 25 pot of water spread in the kund. After 25 days they, pulled skin (charm) from kund. Afterwards women member engaged in cleaning work of charm, male member sold it in the city or kasba. Here, seen that chamar women doing more labour, more unclean work then male however she didn’t get any money from selling of charm. Male member kept all the money. Women done hard labour however her work contribution is not important.

Valmiki caste people earlier known as bhangis or mehtar, male and women alike perform the same odd jobs of cleaning the surroundings houses, societies, roadside etc. they are engaged in this cleaning and sweeping job since century.

Hadi women engaged in maternity job, before advancement of medical science, medical job used to be the work of hadi women. These women were permitted to enter the inside of the houses at the time of child birth. After jobs are over they are reverted back to the untouchable status.

Chandal men have the duty to help to dispose of corpse of all human beings irrespective of caste. Therefore chandal families used to live around the place near burning ghats. According to manu chandals were supposed to wear the cloths of dead persons or the cloth discarded by the relatives and friends of the dead who a company the dead and discard cloths after completing funeral ceremony. Chandal women used to have the duty to keep the burning ghat clear.

Domes were supposed to clear the village or towns from dead animals. They were supposed to do this duty free and earn by selling hides and skins, bones etc., of the dead animals. Dom women had the duty to help their men folk to complete this duty. Traditionally dom women used to entertain the village folks with various folk dances.

Thus, earlier dalit women are engaged in traditional occupation, sometimes dalit women compelled to go for various economic activities due to economic crises. Even they go for hard labour. But they used to get fewer wage in compare of male. During the colonial period, attempt of British officials, Christi missionaries, social reformers etc. education spreaded in the scheduled caste people therefore some of the people changed their occupation and entered in another occupation i.e. clerk, nurse, teacher, self employed etc. this is a beginning of the changing pattern of occupation in the scheduled caste. After independence most of the scheduled caste people changed their occupation. They left their traditional occupation and entering in the new occupations. Now day’s dalit women are also engaged in organized and unorganized sectors employment for livelihood of their family. In this context study also tires to focus on unorganized sector and self-employment.

"The unorganized sector consists of all unicorn ported private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers." NCEUS( National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector) defined unorganized or informal employment, “workers consist of those working in the unorganized enterprises or households, excluding regular workers in the formal sector without any employment /social security benefits provided by the employers”

NCEUS prepared estimates of employment in the unorganized sector. As on January 2005, the total employment (principal and subsidiary) in the Indian economy was 458 million, of which the unorganized sector accounted to 395 million, i.e. 86 percent of the total workers in 2004-05. Unorganized workers constituted 92.4% of the total workforce, accounting to 423 million workers.

Unorganized workers may be categorized under the following four broad heads namely, in terms of occupation, in terms of nature of employment, in terms of especially distressed categories, and in terms of service categories. Small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural laborers, share croppers, fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, in beedi rolling, beedi labeling and beedi packing, and other construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, stone quarries workers in saw mills, oil mills etc. agricultural labor, bonded labors, migrant workers, contract and casual laborers come under the second category. Tappers, scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal driven vehicles, belong to the especially distressed category while midwives, domestic workers, fisherman and women, barbers, vegetable and fruit vendors, newspaper vendors come under the service category.
Wage workers are persons employed for remuneration among the unorganized workers directly by employers or through agencies or contractors. Wage workers include casual and temporary workers or those employed by household including domestic workers. Wage workers also include regular workers in the unorganized sector.

These are workers who operate farm or non-farm enterprises or engage in a profession or trade, either on their own account, individually or with partners, or as home-based workers. Own account workers include unpaid family workers also.

Both the categories of workers face different kinds of vulnerabilities or risks and thus are referred to as worker sections of society. They suffer from two types of vulnerabilities- job insecurity or social insecurity or both. Regular workers in the unorganized sector are those working for others and getting in return salary or wages on regular basis. These workers suffer from social insecurity due to sickness or injury or old age and are not entitled to any social security. As against them, temporary, casual or contract workers suffer both from job insecurity as well as social insecurity.

Indian economy is dominated by self employed workers on the basis of the latest data for 2004-05, self employed workers account for 56.5 percent of the labor force- the single highest group in the categorization of workers followed by casual workers (28.3%) and regular workers (15.2). They fall in two categories those employed in agriculture constituting farmer marginal, small and big work in agriculture on their income from own cultivation and not wage labor. They are included in the unorganized sector and their number has been estimated to be 166 million in 2004-05.

On the other hand, there are quite a large number of self-employed in the non-agriculture sector and they were around 92 million in 2004-05. Self-employed workers are grouped into three categories:

a) Own account workers: they work on their own using their work for longer hours. This phenomenon is referred to as 'self-exploitation' by Chayanov, a Russian economist.
b) Unpaid family workers: these persons don't get any separate remuneration. Their contribution becomes a part of family income.
c) Employers: i.e. those who hire at least one wage worker, but the total number of hired workers is less than 10, to use the definition provided by the national commission for enterprises in the unorganized sector.

Low income self-employed those are closer to or marginally above casual workers i.e. Handloom weavers (mostly women), Chikan workers (mostly women), Street vendors, Food processor, Rickshaw puller, Rag pickers, Beedi rollers (mostly home worker), Agarbatti workers (mostly women), Potter, Bamboo product makers

All workers including self employed workers account for about 70 percent. The Share of the self employed is much higher among women in rural area, while in urban area, it is more or less equal for both men and women.

The vast multitudes of women are engaged in the unorganized sector employment mostly they are working as a self-employed and wage worker. Majority of dalit women engaged in self-employed activities, they are characterized by the some factors i.e. low earnings, Seasonal and insecure unemployment, woefully inadequate and non-existent supportive services, Lack of access to credit facilities, Weak collective bargaining power and, Very few opportunities for personal growth, but dalit women seek the opportunities and also do struggle for the livelihood. The study brings important findings from the struggling life of the self-employed dalit women which are the discussed in the below.

Major Findings:
This brief survey is to explain that mostly dalit women are engaged in self-employment activity since centuries. The list of types of self-employments of respondents is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Occupation of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

No | Name of Self-Employment |
---|-------------------------|
1 | Sanitary and cleaning work |
2 | Tailoring |
3 | Kullari selling |
4 | Readymade garments business |
5 | Labeling(sticker) on readymade cloth |
6 | Beauts salon |
7 | Servant(home) |
8 | hand embroidery |
9 | Rajai making(godadi) |
10 | Rag picker |
11 | Traditional occupation in Garo community |
11 | Perce making |
12 | Bear Bar(home) |
Total | 100 |

The above table shows that among one hundred respondents 30 respondents are engaged in scavenging and sanitary work nearing their residential area, all these respondents from valmiki community, the said work is just like their traditional occupation and it is done by them since centaury. Due to lower status of scheduled caste these respondents felt cast discrimination by not only upper cast but in the scheduled caste also. The inquiry revealed that even today scheduled caste women engaged in traditional jobs. There is no sign of change so far as women are concerned. While 20 respondents were doing tailor business, mostly they were stitching blouse and petticoat in their home. 10 respondents were selling cutlery i.e. buckle, boria, hair pin etc. another 7 respondents were engaged in readymade garments business, they were selling blouse piece and petticoat. Both the respondents were selling their things in the shopping center of their residential. They haven’t shop but they are doing this business on roadside at the evening time because of that time customer come and purcahsing. Respondents got product on hole sell rate and sold it in retail price. 6 respondents were engaged in labeling on readymade cloth. They are doing this work in their home, they went to shop for collection of raw material i.e. pin, sticker, hammer, cloth etc. from shop keeper afterwards finished the labeling work they return cloth to shop keeper and got wages from shop keeper. While 5 respondents
run a beauty parlor in their home. Due to completion in business and economic need, they were providing beauty service i.e. facial, waxing, hair cutting etc. to customer in low price. Another 5 respondents worked in the houses of upper caste people i.e. darbar, patel, marwadi etc., those who are reside near their residential area and doing clothing, cleaning the utensils, cleaning the home etc. due to lower status and unclean occupation they are not preferring valmiki people in their home as a servant but the study was found that two respondents belonging to valmiki community and they were working in darbar home, respondents didn’t felt caste discrimination in darbar home. 3 garo respondents were making rajai (godadi), they are collected chindi, old cloth , pin, rill etc., then made rajai and sell it to their customer. 3 respondents were getting livelihood from rag picking. they left their home at early in the morning, they visited every worksite, roadside, and garbage dump in search of anything , newspapers, paper, glass bottles, plastic bags, bottle tops, bits of broken machinery, iron nails and still fillings, discarded hair, and pieces of wood, iron, pieces plastic, rubber, glass etc. and providing free service to the society. At the noon time they return home and Afterward finished homework once again engaged in segregation work. Means whole day they are working for livelihood of their family. They earned Rs. 50 to 100 per day from rag picking. Among them one respondent from garo community and due to said work their status is very low in their community because their traditional occupation like as Brahmin occupation, here we also see the downward occupational mobility. But due to poverty these respondents had to do this occupation for livelihood of their family. Another 3 garo respondents were engaged in their traditional occupation. while any person dead in the family, at that time people invite them in their home for death rituals i.e. death songs, 12th and 13th day of persons death, chuda karm, widow cloth etc. respondents got dan, daxina, gift from yajman home. Mostly, aged garo women are doing said work. While one respondents making Perce (pocket), she was getting row material from shopkeeper, and made pocket, then gave to the shopkeeper. Another one tyakta respondent runs a bear bar in their home. She has two sons among them one has disease of night blindness. They live in the chaul area and many of alcohol addicted persons live in their area, therefore her husband forced to them for doing said business therefore she has to run a bear bar. Moreover all the responsibility on her head therefore she had to run bear bar, the respondet got bear from big bear bar which is near her residential area and sells it in her home.

Among 100 respondents 72 respondents had 1 to 5 years experience in their occupation while 14 respondents had 11 to 15 years experience. 12 respondents’ occupation 6 to 10 years old and only 2 respondents had 16 to 20 years experience in their occupation. Thus majority of respondents are having long years experience in the said occupation. Due to lower economic condition all the respondents have to doing occupation. Most of respondents got guidance from parent for their occupation.

Working hours is an important issue to study the balance between rest and work and it also indicates the extent and degree of exploitation. Most of the 72 respondents work for 7 hours a day. Valmiki respondents worked continuously or in two shifts. 14 respondents worked for 6 hrs a day. Rest of the respondents had less than 5 hrs of work.

Dalit women have been working for centuries; mostly they are engaged in self employed activities. Their earnings are not much and regular however their finical contribution in the family. The wages of respondents are given in below table:

**Table-2 : Wages of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1001-2000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2001-3000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3001-5000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above table shows the information regarding income, 40 respondents earned Rs. 2001 to 3000 per month. While 30 respondents got Rs.1001 to 2000 p.m. 25 respondents had less than Rs 500 pm income only 5 respondents had earnings more than 3000 to 5000. None of the respondents had income above 5000 p.m. therefore respondents earned very low wages and an account of their low income category, their income is not enough for livelihood of their families, resulting they are living in extreme poverty or on below poverty line in the society.

The present study was found that 70 respondents were dissatisfied with the occupation and their salaries. Besides, only 30 respondents were satisfied with their occupation and salary.

Now days, in the global era, persons are having various opportunity in occupation. Besides the standard of living is rising day by day and the cost of maintenance is also rapidly increasing, consequently, one pay employee is not enough for livelihood of family therefore women are obliged to take up a job. Sometimes family members force them to work. Some women are ambitious and want to social prestige and recognition. Some women utilize their talents and develop their personality it inspires them to seek employment. Due to all this things changes came in the Dalit women’s occupation. The details of occupational changes are given on below table:

**Table-3: Respondents and Occupational Changes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Caste of the Respondents</th>
<th>Traditional Occupation</th>
<th>Present Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Garo</td>
<td>Provide service in religious ceremonies of scheduled caste, marriage, death</td>
<td>Tailor, rajai making, home servant(rasoi), provide religious service in scheduled caste people ,specially at the time of death, cuttery selling, rag picking, pocket making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vankar</td>
<td>Vanat</td>
<td>Tailoring, cutlery selling, readymade garments, beauty saloon, servant, hand embroidery, Kabari shop, caterer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chamar</td>
<td>Charm</td>
<td>Tailoring, cutlery selling, readymade garments, beauty saloon, labeling on readymade cloth, servant, hand embroidery, bear bar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Above table shows the changing trend in scheduled caste occupation. More of Garo respondents change their occupation only 3 respondents continuous doing their traditional occupation. The women provide their service at the time of death, mostly aged garo women done this job. One respondent is doing rag picking, garo known as a Brahmin of scheduled caste, their work like as Brahmin therefore while any garo doing lower occupation i.e. rag picking it seen that downward occupational mobility in the society. Rest of respondents engaged in various self employed activity. Vankar and chamra women changed their traditional occupation and being self-employed women. Table shows that not any changes in valmiki community’s traditional occupation, their present occupation as like traditional occupation, difference is only that before they didn’t got any wages for their work, they collected food from home to home, but now they are getting very fewer and irregular wages from their hard labour, because they are working in unorganized sector. Only two respondents worked as servant in upper caste people house. Therefore, compare of other scheduled caste, there is meager occupational changes come in the valmiki community.

At last study conclude that majority of the respondents changed their traditional occupation i.e. vanat, charm, etc. and entering in new occupation of the unorganized sector, mostly they are found as self-employed.

Thus, slowly changes came in scheduled caste occupation. Dalit women are doing hard labour in their occupation and tries being a self dependent in the family and society, they also being bread winners for their family.

The study also has suggestion for Self-employed dalit women that they are working in unorganized sector but mostly they are not aware about benefit of social security bill, which is specially launched for them. Therefore they should be made aware of the same.

References