

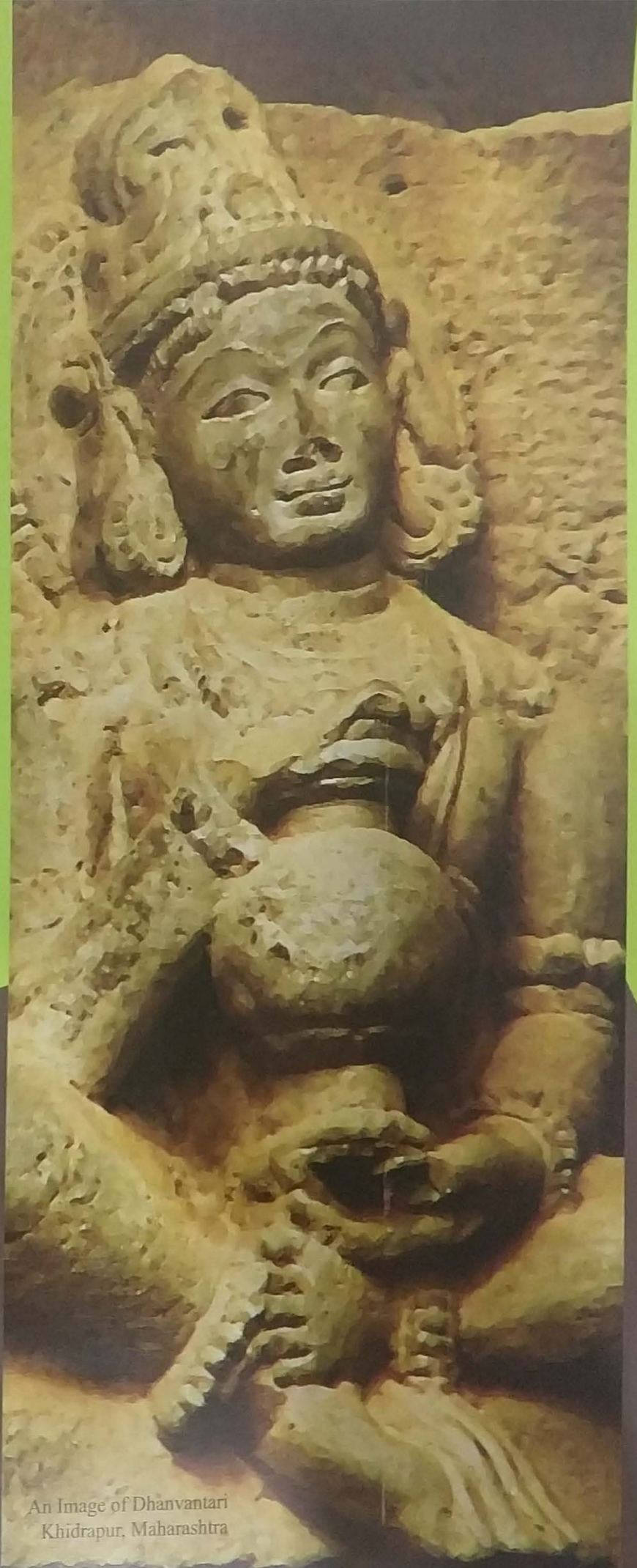
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Dalit Women's Issues in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract

Current paper focuses on conditions of women from backward classes (referred here as dalit women). Dalit women plays major role in supporting their families financially among other roles. Thus changes in social welfare policies and general financial policy of country deeply affect the present and future of their families and thus dalit community as whole. The paper tries to analyze the effect of globalization on dalit women through different policies such as economic, educational, health and social. Through analysis it concludes the need of special policy for dalit women in order to subsidize the adverse effects of globalization and a need of strict labour laws to protect them.

Key Words: Dalit Women . India . Globalization . Educational policy . Social policy . Health policy

India is sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic country. India's socialist nature came under scrutiny when India accepted new economic reforms following balance of payment problems, in 1991. The policy required to liberate public sector and to reduce subsidiaries along with other requirements. Thus India observed radical transition from social state to capitalistic state. During this transition the rift of social and economical inequality grew bigger. The existing system of socio-economic inequality, discrimination and injustice firmed its roots again under the pretence of quality. The programs ran for social welfare took a big blow due to the reduction in funds and opportunities. Its effect on socially backward class is significant.

Current Indian society is a patriarchic system. In the system, women in general and backward classes were always had a secondary role. When the paper speaks about dalit women it is presenting condition of women from backward classes.

Globalization

Globalization in defined in various ways one of which says, 'It is the process of restricting state's role evolved through multinational capitalism social and economic and political system.'¹ Thus globalization tries to create a system of trade without border which is

fueled by capitalism and consumerism. In 1991, in order to solve the financial crisis government of India approached International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World bank. Under some terms and conditions IMF agreed to approve loan against India's gold deposits. One of the terms was to liberalize economy through disinvestment and opening Indian market to foreign investment.

Thus, globalization increased pressure from across the border on products, services, capital, people, society, information and culture, thereby affecting local market negatively. As a result India needed to rethink of solutions to counter the negative effects of globalization so that even weaker section the society will get equal opportunity to prosper.

Aim: To put a light on the status of dalit women in globalization perspective.

Globalization and Dalit Women

Today's Dalit woman is trying to live earnestly by following Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's teachings and by utilizing power and liberty given to them by Indian constitution. But still there are no limits to her pain and sufferings. They are made to face many hurdles and difficulties while coping with new challenges. She is supposed to do household chores and work outside

simultaneously. They are mistreated and abused often by the in-laws and husband and family. Fear and insecurities are a part of her daily life.

Poverty add new dimension to the sufferings of dalit women in India. Food, cloth, shelter and health are being few of them. Due to rapid globalization and high illiteracy rate in dalit women it became difficult to get a job. In short apart from traditional issues she now also has to deal with more serious issues arose from globalization.

Economic Issues and Dalit Women

A convention of World Social Forum was organized in June 2003 at Mumbai in which the participation by women representatives from different women organizations was remarkable. While addressing the convention president of National Federation of Indian Women, Amarjeet Kaur, said the policy of globalization is responsible to keep intact and maintain patriarchal hierarchy and its authority & supremacy. Thus one can say that globalization is against women class in general. It is seen that women along with weaker sections of society are the first victims of globalization. They have to fight against important issues like food, clothing, education, employment and health. Due to collective effect of violation of fundamental human rights there is increase in prostitution, domestic violence and sex tourism. So it is needed to stand against globalization.²

According to International Labour Organization's World Employment Report, published in 1998-99, out of 300 crore labor 14 crore labours (employees) were unemployed and 17-90 crores labor were part-time employed.³ Rather than its workers interests' globalization nurtures the interests of industries. With the advent of globalization, there is a drastic change in type of employment and nature of jobs. Labour jobs have no longer remained of permanent type but turned in to either contract based or seasonal jobs or temporary part-time jobs. Lot of times the jobs are completed through contractual system. The

system now utilizes production and bonus pattern instead of on working hours and length of service.

All these things have affected women employment. Due to the declining secure jobs in government and PSU (public sector undertaking) they are compelled to work on secondary skills for their livelihood. Thus they are pushed away from organized sector to unorganized sector.

As per statistical data in the year 2000 urban and rural population belonging to SC families living under BPL (below poverty line) contributed to 43% of total population.⁴ Amongst BPL families the women's contribution to family income is reasonably more. To meet out their household expenses they are compelled to undertake hard working jobs such as agricultural and industrial labour. This sort of job requires low skill-set, thus low income and lower self respect. In the artisan families the women have an important role in running their traditional business. This way majority of dalit women are subjected to exploitation due to the nature of work. While educated dalit women is subjected to deprivation of secure jobs such as in Government sector and PSUs. The private jobs do not hire employees as a social responsibility and are profit based. Most dalit women, who are devoid of professional education, face difficulty in getting employed due to harsh and unrealistic parameters they demand. As the jobs are mostly contractual they always live in fear of unemployment.

Education and Dalit Women

Constitution of India proclaims India to be sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic. It promises justice, equality, liberty and to promote fraternity to the people of India. In order to realize the promises, which Dr. B R Ambedkar saw, the education is a device to reduce poverty and ensure equality, liberty and to improve fraternity in Indian society. For putting the nation on fast-track towards development he told that, in addition to boys we must seriously think and act toward girls education. But it is sad

to note that in today's era of globalization one's economic condition decides the quality of education he will be able to receive. But the worst part of is that dalit women and girls are suffering the most because of it. Over 71% dalit women are agricultural labor and their percentage of literacy according to 1991 census; it was only 23%, the lowest in India.⁶

Inspired by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, many dalit women educated their children even when they were harassed by society and abused my family and in-laws. The first generation after the independence saw a rise in their standard of living and status of the dalits because of their hard work. But with the change in economic and political policies after the globalization education became means to earn money rather than to serve the society. This only added to their sorrow. The number of private and un-aided schools, colleges and universities is on the rise. Being un-aided, government lost control over affairs of these schools and colleges. These institutions are mostly owned by socially, economically and politically dominant section of the society. Their apathy towards the weaker sections and towards the society is causing rise in inequality and disparity amongst castes. Only the one with money are able to enroll in to these institutions. Thus privatization in one way or other is hurting dalit woman. They have to work mostly as labours. Often they need to work overtime in order to provide their basic necessities. They struggle to provide good education and nutritious food to their children. This limits the level and quality of education the children receive. This pushes a dalit girl to choose traditional education over professional education. Thus even in the era of job growth due to globalization, the job opportunity has remained limited for dalits. Big chunk of youngsters from dalit community are jobless as a result. The girls usually get married before they turn 18, limiting their capability to get good job. All of this is turning in to a repeating vicious circle.

The social struggle in Indian society does not help to overcome the situation. As disinvestment in public sector and the number of private companies in on the rise, the protection to dalits and women provided by constitution through reservation stands invalid. Thus number of organization and jobs protected through reservation is decreasing day by day. Thus the opportunity to change the standard of living and status in society is falling rapidly. Not only the quality education is becoming costly for dalit children but also the accessibility to education is becoming a distant dream with respect to dalit girls.

Issues of Dalit Girls' Education

Following are some of the crucial issues facing Dalit Girls' Education.

1. Parents' Apathy towards educating girls and thereby making them independent.
2. Child marriages are forced due to their poor economic status. This usually hinders girls' education.
3. Girls are kept usually busy with household chores and are responsible to take care on her siblings as parents are busy with work.
4. Difficulty with accessibility to schools situated at distant places, due to absence of transportation or apt transportation and traffic, etc.
5. Once girls reach adolescence their fear of social security makes parents to stop their further Education.
6. The false sense of chastity/character and probable presence of molesters/perverts, girls are not allowed to attend distant schools and colleges.

Communal Violence and Dalit Women

In his thesis, '*Dalit-Nirantar Vishamata ani Daridrya*', Sukhadev Thorat has presented statistical data of women abuse from year 1981 to 1997. On an average during this period, every year 508 cases of arson, 754

cases of rape and approximately 12,000 cases of other type of abuses were reported.⁷

The numbers clearly show atrocity by sexual harassment and abuse is on high due to communal hatred. The target of such monstrosity is to destroy self-esteem and honor of the dalits as a whole. Such acts of sexual harassment are carried out to establish superiority or supremacy of some castes and societies over other weaker sections i.e. low castes (dalits).⁸ The Hindu sacred laws and sacred texts does not hold women in high regard but what is worst is that it do not consider dalits as well as dalit women to be humans. No laws are made to protect them but instead they are largely used to abuse dalit women. Thus women from higher castes do not protest against such cruelty but they also support it, as they think it to be the part of their religion. This makes them in to the conductors of such philosophy. Thus, these laws not only allow upper castes misbehave with dalits but also encourage them to abuse and mistreat dalit women. The severity of this was recently experienced in *Khairlanji incident on 29th September 2006*. In this incident upper caste men abused dalit women and violated the self-esteem of the dalits. While this was happening upper-caste women reportedly found cheering and clapping for upper-caste men as they were abusing dalit women.⁹ There were such incidents throughout in the past history and even today these are happening. And not only the Hindu religion sexually harassed dalit women by way of authorizing customs like *Devdasis, Muralis and Jogtins*. In many parts of India specifically the women from dalit category are forced to join as *Devdasi, Murali or Jogtini* to serve god in temples. It is important to note that only dalit women were recruited for such titles.

With the advent of globalization in India the problems of dalit women escalated further. With huge gap present in social and economical status due to unreasonable social structure they now have to face new elements introduced due to capitalism. They are forced in to a corner where they don't

have means to a better education, health and basic amenities. To distract people from the truth, political leaders habitually use caste based division present in the society to their political advantage. At times it is observed that the riots are not only used as a device to preserve upper caste supremacy but also to win elections by creating fear amongst the populous.

To summarize it, with the growing capitalism in India one can now say that increase in the issues of dalit women is not only a social issue but also is becoming a political one.

Health and Dalit Women

In India as the globalization process started the expenditure on public health has decreased. According to Human Development Report by United Nations' Development Program, India spends only 0.9% of GDP on public health. In developing nations like Brazil, Sri Lanka it is 4.8% and 2% respectively. Not only that our neighbour China spends 1.8% on it. Such frugal expenditure is reflected even in a progressive state like Maharashtra. According to National Family Health Survey of India in Maharashtra malnutrition in women and children is 38% and 53% respectively. According to R.C.A.R. report 1/3rd women population suffer from low hemoglobin percentage than norms set out. 24.6% girls get married before the age of 18.¹⁰

While looking at these numbers the expenditure on public health is meager. Lower income group people are affected the most by such policies. The biggest part of this being dalits, the effect on their women is long lasting. With the drastic changes in rationing system, privatization of water distribution and meager expenditure on public health, inflation is negatively affecting the dalit community. This is pushing them to do hard labour jobs for small wages. In order to survive they live frugally, unable to provide nutritious food; the children end up being child labours and girls getting married before the age of 18.

Lack of nutritious food and early marriage ends in malnutrition and birth complications and in turn a bad health. In addition to this in-laws of a married woman at times, put them through mental and physical torture. In case of a medical emergency, they are forced to stay away from medical treatment for financial reasons.

Thus globalization along with deep-rooted caste system makes it difficult for a dalit woman to avail take care of their own & their children's health. This inequality must be dealt with proper solution and more investment in public health system.

Conclusion

Dalit women are worst hit part of Indian community due to globalization. They are disregarded by the system and the government. Steps must be taken by the government and society in recognizing their problems. In order them to survive in upcoming rat-race of survival, it is our duty to help them by addressing the problems mentioned and restore the equality, honour and self-esteem. This will well-prepare us and them for upcoming dramatic economical changes introduced by globalization.

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