



EMPOWERMENT OF DALITS THROUGH INFORMATION DISSEMINATION: NEED OF THE HOUR

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ABSTRACT

The Scheduled Caste (SC) population is the most backward section in the Hindu caste-ridden society of India. In the era of ICT Revolution, one cannot deny the fact that information is power and knowledge of any society. In this context, this paper put forth a way of empowering dalits through information dissemination to create awareness among those people for capitalising their legally sanctioned rights and schemes.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

The Hindu Hierarchical Social order is a main pillar of the discrimination and inequality of caste system among the Indian society. The Scheduled Caste (SC) population is the most backward section in the Hindu caste-ridden society of India. "the main distinguishing characteristic of this downtrodden segment of the population are their low literacy and educational attainments, economic backwardness (lower income, higher incidence of indebtedness, fewer assets, etc), rural orientation and social retardation (low status, disabilities, etc)". The problem of their low status and economic backwardness is not a recent one, in fact it is deeply rooted in the historical processes since time immemorial. Since independence, various developmental programmes have laid special emphasis on raising the level of living of this underprivileged and poor section of the society. Because of years of exploitation, they have been exposed to 'vulnerabilities of all sorts'. They are subjected not only to social but also economic exploitation.

Constitutional Safeguards

It is one of the basic postulates of the Preamble of the Constitution to ensure all-round development of the backward classes, since without their improvement there cannot be socio-economic and political justice. Recognizing the special problems of the group, the government has, over the years, continuously introduced policies and programmes for building their human capacities and capabilities. The government's approach towards the SCs primarily draws from provisions in the Constitution, which legally abolished the practice of untouchability and the discrimination arising out of untouchability (Article 17). The Article 46 of the Constitution of India provides that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice, and all kinds of exploitation. For their social and economic welfare the Constitution of India provides for three kinds of positive actions: (i) of reservation in admission to the educational institutions as given under Articles 15(4) and 46, (ii) and job reservation as per Articles 16(1) and 16(4), 46 and 335 and (iii) political reservation in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures as given under Articles 330 and 332. Finally, the Constitution provides for the establishment of a permanent body to investigate and monitor the social and economic progress of SCs on an annual basis.

The government's approach meant a two-fold strategy consisting of anti-discriminatory or protective measures, and development and empowering measures. Anti-discriminatory measures include the enactment of the Untouchability Offence Act, 1955 (renamed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act [PCR] in 1976), and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities (POA) Act, 1989. Under the former, the practice of untouchability and discrimination in public places and services is treated as an offence; the latter provides legal protection to the SCs against violence and atrocities by the higher castes.

The educational development of SCs is a major area of thrust for the government. At the core of the SCs' educational problems are a low literacy rate; a high dropout rate at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels; low quality education; and the existence of highly discriminatory and exclusionary practices, which sometimes deny SCs access to education altogether.

Therefore, the government attempts to

- qualitatively improve the educational infrastructure, especially in areas inhabited predominantly by the SCs;
- ensure implementation of reservations in educational institutions;
- provide financial support in terms of scholarships and fellowships at local, regional, national and international levels;
- provide remedial coaching facilities to the social group to build their qualitative capabilities;
- provide special hostels for both boys and girls; and
- ensures equal opportunity to them by emphasizing specifically on girl/women education.

A number of studies and reports show that by and large the rights and privileges conferred upon Scheduled Castes have not percolated into all sections among these people. Though one can attribute many factors that work against the empowerment of Scheduled Castes, the latent and real reasons that affect them are yet to be identified, analysed, exposed and seriously addressed by the scholars.

In the era of ICT Revolution, one cannot deny the fact that information is power and knowledge of any society. In this context, this paper put forth a way of empowering dalits through information dissemination to create awareness among those people for capitalising their legally sanctioned rights and schemes.

Empowering Dalits through Information Dissemination

The policy makers should employ effective information dissemination method to achieve three important outcomes:

1. An increase in the dalits' knowledge
2. A change in the dalits' attitude
3. A change in the dalits' behaviour

There are two parties to the dissemination process, the information provider and the information recipient.

- Information provider may be the government or governmental agencies or voluntary agencies or individual volunteers, etc.
- Information recipient will be dalits (rural/urban, literate/illiterate, male/female, child/adult, poor/rich).

Ways of information dissemination

1. Two-way communication with the media

Through TV, radio and newspapers large population groups can be reached at one time. The communication with media may be carried out together with the Ministry of Social Justice and empowerment. The mass media provide indirect, one-way communication and

include community, national and international radio and television as well as newspapers, magazines, comic books, cinema or other situations where a large number of people can be reached with information without personal contact.

2.Traditional media

Traditional media are performance arts that are used to illustrate and convey information in an entertaining way. Live performances can provide special opportunities for interaction between performers and audience. They include drama, traditional forms of theatre, puppet shows, street theatre, storytelling, songs and dance. Traditional media are often artistic methods of communication passed down from generation to generation. Non-governmental organizations or voluntary organizations may take the responsibility of information dissemination among the rural, illiterate dalits by using the way of traditional media.

Small media

The small media are often tools used to support larger communication initiatives or to illustrate interpersonal communication. They include posters, cassettes, leaflets, brochures, slide sets, video, flipcharts, flash cards and loudspeakers. The strengths of small media are that they provide accurate, standardized information in a handy and re-usable form that can be used as visual aids in workshops, discussions and teaching. They attract attention and may be distributed to areas where the mass media do not reach. Most commonly, however, small media are used in isolation and as a result have little meaning or impact with target audiences. Posters may look good, but it is to be noted that it is the least effective medium of communication for development, particularly among the poor and those who have limited literacy skills.

2.Information on www

Information can easily be retrieved on www, but it is necessary to think about the selection of the most feasible form of each information content. An analysis of the use of Internet among the dalits needs to be done. This will facilitate to get an understanding on how widely and intensively Internet is used in order to know how effective it will be as a channel of information dissemination among the dalits.

3.Campaigns

The aim of the campaigns should be to draw the public's attention to most topical issues of dalits' empowerment. Campaigns are to be time-bound intensive information dissemination projects that aim at creating as wide as possible general awareness. It can be anticipated that some campaigns could be arranged at schools for pupils to become aware of the welfare schemes and opportunities in front of them.

4.Leaflets, guidelines, brochures

Various leaflets and brochures need to be prepared on various specific topics. The distribution of these should be made as wide as possible. The distribution channels need to be mapped.

5.Library

Library offers different kinds of services, which are based on the library collection and other electronic materials. All the information sources and new types of databases offer a good basis for the information services, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and retrospective search of references and original articles.

6.Follow-up

From the viewpoint of planning of future activities, it is important and necessary to follow up the information activities. The feedback on the future needs can be obtained through direct questionnaire surveys, asking feedback from the readership of the Newsletter, and in several other ways as well. This feedback is necessary in order to be able to develop and redirect the information activities.

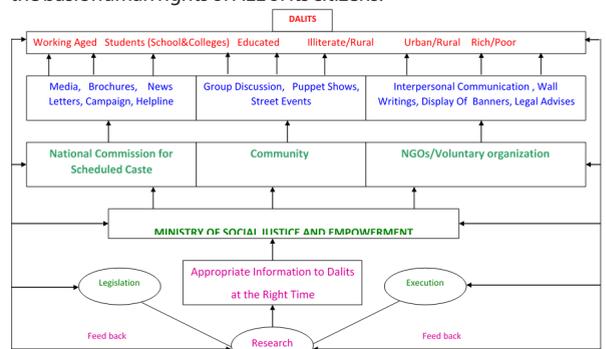
To sum up, the Scheduled Castes, occupying the lowest stratum of the caste-oriented hierarchical society, have been traditionally subjected to socio-economic disabilities and other disadvantages symbolizing social inequality. The persisting problems of Scheduled Castes in terms of social discrimination, prevalence of social evils, like untouchability and other social disabilities/discrimination, practice of manual scavenging, increasing exploitation and atrocities committed against them are some of main impediments that frustrate the development efforts. Although education, health and employment are recognized crucial for empowerment of the socially disadvantaged groups, the achievements made so far through plan efforts still reflect their backwardness in these sectors.

CONCLUSION:

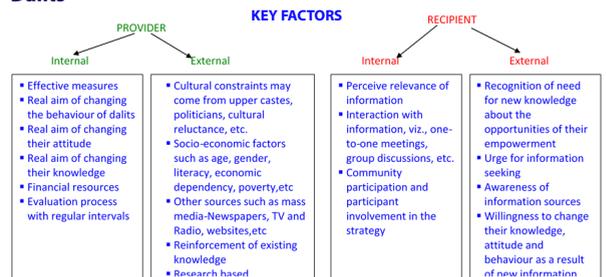
Though India is legally bound to make justice, freedom, equality and fraternity in reality, the foregoing discussion clearly brings to light that in Indian villages the concept of freedom articulated by the Indian freedom fighters and that enshrined in the Indian Constitution seems meaningless for the Scheduled Castes. It is so viewed in the light of continuing practice of untouchability and increasing number of atrocities on them in villages and the fact that they still remain the much exploited section of Indian society despite number of protective and development measures to safeguard their interests. What is happening in many Indian villages is in fact inhuman and unjust.

The efforts of Government through the Reservation Policy and protective measures to educate, provide employment, empower the Scheduled Castes politically and provide an opportunity to voice their grievances in State Legislature and Parliament and also to protect them from all kinds of injustice and exploitation have not yielded the desired results. Why? It is primarily because the Scheduled Caste people still are not aware about their rights and legal safeguards due to lack of information dissemination. Thus, the policy makers should strive towards the information dissemination among the dalits and put a step forward to empower dalits in India.

India, a rising star and increasingly important player on the world stage, must not be allowed to ignore the injustice and oppression within its own borders any longer. Together, we must unite, nationally and internationally, to force the Indian government to rise above an entrenched caste-mentality and to properly disseminate information about the legal safeguards, enforce its laws, implement its policies, and fulfill its responsibility to protect the basic human rights of ALL of its citizens.



Process of Information dissemination for the empowerment of Dalits



Factors influencing Effective Dissemination

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