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Political Science

WOMEN & EQUALITY IN WESTERN ODISHA: THE GROUND REALITY.

KEY WORDS: Women, Equality, Status, Position.

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century is well-known for its advancement and development in every aspect. Similarly it cannot be ignored that everywhere one strong belief has been established that women are equal with men. No doubt women are being empowered and have proven themselves in the higher position in different sectors. There are provisions for the promotion and protection of women's rights in UDHR, several international covenants, Indian constitution, and in the various schemes enunciated by the state government at the local or grass root level too. But in real world, are women actually treated equally with men in every field? Whether the legal provisions are been actually practiced? Are they leading a free and independent life as their counterparts? Are they enjoying equality with their men folk? Are these legal provisions really helping them? All the above questions remained unanswered. In this regard this paper analyses the provisions guaranteed by the Indian constitution providing equality both for men and women i.e. Right to equality with its ground reality. To answer the above questions it discusses the current status and position of women in western Odisha.

INTRODUCTION:

No society can develop without the talent, energy and co-operation of women. However over a long period of time, women were suppressed by men who adopted different normative misrules. Therefore throughout the course of time, women are being objectified for enjoyment and the practice of superstitions, traditions and culture, customs to tie them down. Women hold the key to social development. Social development is directly proportional to women's equal access to health and education, jobs and leisure. Odisha is a state with cultural, social and economic diversities. In Odisha, though women were always held in high esteem, evils like lack of education, child marriage, dowry system and female feticide ruined their equal status in society. There are still millions of women struggling for their survival and basic necessities of life. There still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the legislation, plans and programs on one hand and situational reality of the equal status of women on the other hand. Equality refers to being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities. The patriarchal attitude of the western Odisha perceives women as an object rather than subject. It gives her a low status in the society.

Right to Equality in Indian Constitution:

Equality is one of the most vital pillars of our Indian Democracy. Articles 14 to 18 of the Indian Constitution deal with the right to equality. Article 14 of the constitution provides that the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. This implies all the citizens are equal i.e. both men and women. Article 15 of the constitution guarantees prohibition on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. It means the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. The state is prohibited from showing any discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, sex, caste, race and descent, place of birth or residence. Article 17 abolishes Untouchability and its practice in any form is made an offence punishable under the law. But unfortunately women in western Odisha are deprived of these rights. Nominally they have equal status in the family, caste based society, or in work place. But in real practice they are not. Moreover it is found that women are not given equal opportunities. The social evil like Untouchability is still found to be practiced in many villages of western Odisha. People of the society are always living with a caste feeling.

The Ground Reality:

The growing inequality status of women in western Odisha has been resulting due to factors like domestic violence, lack of education, poverty, unemployment, frustrations, patriarchal

mindset and religious factors etc. The patriarchal attitude of the society perceives woman as an object rather than subject. It gives her a low status in the society. Odisha is the home of more than sixty-two tribal communities which has a unique culture, tradition and social norms. The tradition bound Oriya society maintains a restricted social conduct code for women. Poverty continues to affect the state and there is a high incidence of rural poverty. Odisha doesn't offer much opportunity for the educated or professionally qualified women for employment. Most of the women indulge themselves only to the household work. With the patriarchal mindset, majority of the financially poor family doesn't want to invest money on the girl child or female for higher education or for job opportunities. At work places too male employees get better opportunities or chances in comparison to the female candidates. In this case equality has been measured by gender disparities and physical power.

Literacy has been beyond the reach of most of the women of Orissa. Urban areas have witnessed acid throwing on young girls and poverty has driven girls to prostitution. Lack of empowerment among women and greater dependence on men is a big factor to their inferior position. When a girl is married into another family, there is a tendency by the mother in laws to keep her under control either because they feel threatened or because they do not want these girls to disrupt the family harmony. Female children are given less food both in quality and quantity and therefore they are under nourished as compared to male children. Girls are found often breastfeed for shorter duration than boys. Girls are therefore anemic, do not achieve their full growth and therefore produce malnourished children. This is due to differential treatment or access to resources where girls are at a disadvantage. Girls also face challenges to attend school especially when they attain puberty. Many of the educational institutions do not have gender friendly washrooms. These situations make them susceptible to infections and affect their reproductive health. During menstruation there are dietary restrictions for physical activity which will affect the nutrition and health status of women. One of the causes of malnutrition among girls is the compulsion for girls to eat last and the least whatever is left behind after the men have eaten. This problem is serious among the poorer segments of the society. They do not have the freedom of choice regarding their own lives. When it comes to marriage, decisions are taken by everyone other than the girl herself. Hence, in Orissa, a large section of women have little access to health and sanitation. On a daily basis, thousands of women in different parts of Orissa walk many miles to fetch water and firewood. Moreover, without toilets or hygienic living conditions, they lead humiliating and desperate lives. The social and cultural attitudes pull down women. It is the mindsets and self images of women that

continue to stand between them and a satisfying life. In Odisha, women are surrounded by limitations instead of possibilities. A woman is still not an individual by herself. She is first a daughter, a wife, a mother, a sister, daughter-in-law or a mother-in-law. The point is while a woman is expected to perform all her roles, it is often forgotten that, she too has an independent status.

CONCLUSION:

Women's situation has to undergo a major transformation. No doubt the constitution of India has provisions regarding the right to women to contest in election. Yet in reality women are denied of these rights. The key positions in the polity are not for them. A woman's progress is confined only to animated declarations and speeches. On the ground of sex the capable and talented women are unjustly ignored. In the economic sphere the disparity in the wages between men and women has to be eliminated. There should be proper application of the principle of 'equal pay for equal work'. There should be no discrimination against women in matters of selection for jobs, training and promotion. Women's education has to be encouraged in all ways. For the betterment of women's position and equal status the cultural atmosphere of the society has to be necessarily changed. Perfect equality should rule between the sexes. Treatment of the women just as a symbol of sex object has to be despised. The preference for male child has to be eradicated from the minds of both men and women. Women's equality has to be all-round in all spheres of life i.e. social, cultural, political and economic. Activity has to be directed toward proper implementation of beneficial legislation, translation of government's promises and declarations into practice, and public opinion for the progress should constitute the primary objective and task before the women's movement for equality.

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