

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF DALITS AT WORKPLACES

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ABSTRACT

In the competitive market of present scenario, the knowledge, skills and abilities and manifestation thereof is important. To achieve this objective, the educational system has promoted the knowledge, skills and abilities among the students through innumerable professional streams ranging from school level to the university level. It felt that due to comparatively higher number of dropouts of dalits at these levels, they are devoid from attaining knowledge, skills and abilities. As a result, they are unable to reach and manage the higher posts at the workplaces. The strong background, networking and flow of work are the decisive factors to enter into the competitive market in which this section is mostly lags behind. Despite all this, we cannot ignore the fact that some from this particular section have managed to reach and work with those who belong to upper castes. They enter the workplaces because they are equipped with certain qualifications and skills. The present paper is an attempt to evaluate the success of Educational System in generating opportunities for dalits and enabling them to enter the workplaces and also suggest meaningful reforms to overcome the obstacles and challenges.

Introduction

This paper is an attempt towards understanding the struggle and endeavours of dalits in relation to their employment. It will bring to the fore the role of knowledge, skills and abilities in empowering dalits. No doubt, both of these factors have played very significant role in the upliftment of dalits and bringing them at the workplaces from which this particular section was deprived of since centuries. Despite having skills and qualifications, the dalits are still struggling for their existence at workplaces. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to evaluate the success of educational system and skill development strategies particularly in the context of dalits. The paper has been divided into 4 sections:

The first section dwells the brief overview of the condition of dalits in the caste based feudal society and struggle of dalits in getting their right to education and employment.

The second section puts the light on the contemporary condition of dalits at the workplaces.

The third section suggests various suggestions to overcome the challenges at the workplaces.

Dalits in Caste based Feudal society

Caste in India is not a new phenomenon. In traditional India, the caste played a role of 'Class' and 'Class' is formed on basis of skills. With the domination of Aryans over the non-Aryans, skill based master-slave relationship was started. The traditional society according to Vedas and Manusmriti, was divided into four Varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras). This division was skill oriented. The Brahmins knew the Vedas and performed religious ceremonies, Kshatriyas were meant for defending the territories because they knew the art of war and rule. The Vaishyas were traders whereas the Shudras consisted of the peasants, artisans and nomadic, whereas, the fifth category was that of 'Acchut' or 'Untouchables' that included butchers, hunters, removers, cremators, hangmen, sweepers, drum beating in funerals and festivals, grave digging, making chappals, and scavenging etc.. This category was considered outside the Varna System and they performed a large number of skill oriented duties as compared to other Varnas. The bad-luck of this section (which later known as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or dalits) was that from the beginning, this section was deprived from the education. Though they had skills, but the discrimination with them in all fields led to no progress in their upliftment.

The Charter Act of 1813, Wood Dispatch of 1854 and establishment of Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1861, introduced the English education during the colonial period. The benefit of this western education system was reached to children from the rich families of both Hindus and Muslims. Very few dalits could reach to the level. This was because they were extremely poor and were discarded by the society since centuries. They worked as the watchmen. In the British army, dalits were not appointed above the rank of foot soldiers, whereas, the higher-castes on basis of their education, could manage to reach the Fauzdar (a military officer). In 1849, Indians were employed in the government services as clerks and no doubt, majority of them were the upper-castes. In 1887, about 66% Europeans and Anglo-Indians got the posts carrying salary of 200 rupees a month and 34% were the Indians. The circumstances indicated clearly that the Indians had started getting their jobs but this is also very much clear that upper-castes had managed the knowledge, skills and abilities much earlier whereas the dalits had to struggle for getting their right to education and representation.

Departments	Natives	Europeans
Civil Department	55	1211
Military	1	854
Public Works	3	239
Incorporated Local Bodies	1	9

Number of Employees working in different departments till 1890 during the colonial period.

Source: Talukdar, 2001

The slogan “Educate, Organize and Agitate”, which was raised by Dr.Ambedkar, had its roots in centuries’ old discrimination with dalits. The objective was to fight for the socio-economic and political representation of dalits, to educate them and provide them a respectable life. Because dalits were engaged with leather since centuries, therefore, with the coming of industrialization in the mid-nineteenth century, they moved to various textile mills of Nagpur, Bombay and Agra. The large number of Chamars engaged in making chappals and leather work, dominated the leather factories. Their traditional skill improved a lot and they were popularly known as ‘Machinewalas’. Mysore was the first state with seats reserved for dalits in the government services. The reservation for this particular section was opposed by the dominant section of society. Up to 1930s, the number of Natives had been increased to 421 in the civil department as against 1027 Europeans. In public department the number reached to 85 Natives as against 549 Europeans. The dalits entered in education and reached to the ranks of lawyers. But their number was still less in the educational and government services. The issue of their representation in services was put before the Miller Committee. Further the issue of their (dalits) representation was raised in Borough Committee and Mudiman Committee. In south, Indian Liberation Federation raised the voice against the discrimination to dalits. Though Government of India Act 1909, 1919 and 1935 favoured the dalit’ representation in educational, political and economic field, but many conservative Indian voices again opposed it. When Nehru Report was presented, the Muslim brotherhood rejected the demand of dalit representation, whereas, Gandhi and Tilak supported the *Varnadharama*. The issue of discrimination was put before the Cripps Mission, but it could not reach to any conclusion. Even the Poona Pact could not reduce the hardships of dalits. However, the struggle of dalits for their representation was reduced a little when the fore-fathers of the Constituent Assembly provided the legal basis to the Affirmative Action and Protective Discrimination to dalits. The various Articles of the Constitution have been introduced to

provide the right to education and representation at workplaces as well as in legislative organisations.

Competing for Higher Positions

There is no doubt that dalits are performing the skills based services since the period of Aryan invasion. The domination of Aryans over non-Aryans resulted in the beginning of struggle of haves and have not. As compared to the upper-castes, dalits started getting the education very late. This is the reason that more people from upper-castes are seen at the workplaces as compared to dalits. Though, reservation has aimed at representing dalits in the educational, employment and political field. But the fact is that the drop outs among dalits are more as compared to general students from the primary to secondary to higher levels of education. This is due to their low-income or centuries' old discrimination committed to them. The other reasons behind the more drop outs among dalits are that most of them are from rural than urban areas and do not have tradition of education at the higher level. These people lag behind the visionary realization of importance of providing the higher and better education. Even the career guidance is also not available to them. Their low aptitude for higher education and absence of abstract thinking also prevent them from going to higher level of skill oriented education. Moreover, the improper guidance and weak background at the primary and secondary levels and the problem of their adjustment and their inability to fit in the social and personal relations in these institutions also discourage dalits to enter. In case they succeed in enrolling themselves in these institutions, the competition and merit among students discourages them again. As a result, they generally lag behind in education and skill development. However with the opening of various professional streams, the present trend shows the shift of upper-castes to higher carrier. For example in south, the Brahmins are taking very little interest in the carriers like hotel-management as compared to the past. As a consequence, it provides the opportunities to dalits to enter in this career but the caste stigma still exists with them. Dalits are still employed as cleaners or sweepers.

In the employment sector, the right to work and right to proper wages are still denied to poor dalits. The feudal society still exists in some villages and dalits are forced to work as peasants in the fields of rich high-caste landlords without proper wages. When they demand their wages, they are beaten-up by their masters. In states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, the large number of dalits are working as bonded labourers in the brick kilns, stone quarries, beedi manufacture, carpet weaving, construction projects and sericulture processing industry. All these works require the skill perfection

in which dalits are involved in majority. Those who managed to migrate to cities either works as housemaids, sweepers or labourers. No doubt, a section within dalit community which received education has succeeded in starting their own business and setting-up the industries. Some from this particular section have managed to reach the offices on basis of their skills and qualification. With education the skills of dalits have been enhanced. As a consequence, a middle-class within dalit community has emerged. No field has been left today where dalit is not engaged. This is only because of knowledge, development in their skills and abilities that a large number of dalits are now becoming part of high ranks in the Indian army, joining teaching profession, mass media and framing laws for the progress of Nation by entering into the legislature. It is a fact that the knowledge, development in skills and abilities are the basic factors that have brought in them a feeling of self-respect. This up gradation in their status has also brought changes to their culture.

But does this mean that the development in their knowledge, skills and abilities in some from this particular section of society has resulted in the decline of caste based discrimination in offices among them? These educated and skill oriented people have to struggle for their existence under one roof. They are named as '*Quota Wallas*'. On the name of skills and merit, they face discrimination. Many seats reserved for dalits are kept vacant because of non-availability of skill oriented educated candidates with a particular qualification. The strong background, personal contacts and flow of work are decisive factors to enter into the competitive market in which this section is generally lags behind. These are the major reasons that also prevent the poor dalits to enter the workplaces. In the present scenario, the large section within dalit community is still living below poverty line. In order to remove their poverty they do not hesitate to engage in manual scavenging. These people have skills to do work but they don't have the opportunities. Thus one cannot deny the fact that mere development in knowledge, skills and abilities cannot decline the caste stigma unless equal efforts will be carried out by government and the people. The question whether education and development in skills and abilities can reduce the 'unfavourable inclusion' and 'unfavourable exclusion' of dalits, needs a serious debate.

Conclusion

One cannot deny the fact that most of the Indian economy is still rooted in traditional activities and structures. The traditional structure of society in the form of feudal system still prevails in certain villages of India. No doubt, the struggle of dalits in the colonial period, in achieving the right to education and representation in services, has lead to their entry at the workplaces but they are still struggling with the caste based discrimination in the market. Knowledge, skills and abilities do play a

crucial role in increasing their capabilities but a lot has still to be done in maintaining their self-respect. The need is to emphasis on bringing the radical change in the implementation of government policies so that opportunities and the rights to dalits cannot be overtaken by others. The need of the hour is to give up the unfavourable attitude towards dalits and provide them the opportunities to work with dignity at the par with upper-castes. The Government should frame the inclusive educational policies in such a manner so that the poor dalits can become its part. There is need to demolish the ideology of 'theirs' and 'ours' tradition. When all the Ministers, officials, bureaucracy and the people are sensitized to recognize the hard struggle of dalits for their rights, the idea of secularization of India (term used by Srinivas) will automatically be fulfilled.

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