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UNDERSTANDING ON THE PROBLEM OF 'HARIJAN' IN INDIA

Understanding on the Problem of 'Harijan' In India

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Abstract: This report develops an understanding on the problem of "Harijan" in India. Harijan include a section of in Indian society, who come from the lower castes, particularly the untouchable and other lower caste, and who beside gender discrimination, also suffered from the prescribed customary provisions in the institution of caste and untouchability. Excluded are not 'just like' the rest of the. They are also disadvantaged by who they are. They suffer from social exclusion which deprives them of choices and opportunities to escape from poverty and denies them a voice to claim their rights. There is a close inter-face between patriarchy and social exclusion which enforce each other. The from discriminated groups suffer from triple deprivation – gender, poverty and social exclusion. The discussion presented selected evidence on the nature and forms of caste – based discrimination suffered by Harijan in access to sources of livelihood and social needs. This evidence however, is very limited and there is a need to study the nature and forms of discrimination faced by Harijan as a woman, as a Harijan woman and as poor. The Harijan woman's exclusion from the rights normally considered as accruing to every Indian citizen thus needs to be examined more closely, looking both at her conditions of livelihood and employment and the various ways in which she is subjugated in the public and private spheres. The challenge is to capture the interface of these three dimensions of caste, class and gender and to analyse the consequences of social exclusion and discrimination on their rights and citizenship. This would help to conceptualize inclusive policies to address the problems of Harijan more effectively.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Mainstream Indian Feminist Movement address some and not all aspect of Harijan's rights and citizenship. This discourse is universalistic in nature and does not cover the aspect of caste and its interface with gender and as a result Harijan Feminist activism emerged. There is very limited information on the varied experiences of Harijan as woman, as Harijan and as poor woman and that they constitute a sizeable proportion of's population. It is because of this neglect of Harijan problem that IIDS and IDRC developed a programme on Harijan discourse.

OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

1. To develop an understanding on the problem of 'Harijan' and,
2. To evolve a perspective on their rights and citizenship in India.

Specific Objectives

- Review of Feminist Discourse
- Indian Feminist Discourse and treatment of Harijan question,

- Understand the evolving Harijan Feminist Discourse and New Harijan Movement,
- To get an insight into their problem through empirical evidence,
- Through theory and empirical evidence, evolve the perspective on Rights and Citizenship of Harijan ,
- Identify emerging issues

METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed was of desk review of literature and analysis of the official data base on human development indicators for Harijan. A comprehensive review of the current theoretical and empirical literature related to gender discourse in general and of Harijan in particular was undertaken. With the help of current data from the official sources and some studies (which are limited in number) this project also tries to capture the economic and social situation of Harijan and examine them in the background of theoretical discussion. Further on, analyses of the current economic, education, health and political status of Harijan. Based on insight from the theoretical and empirical literature, the project indicates the need for studies based on the primary survey to develop a suitable perspective on the group specific problem of Harijan.

Project Activities: The activities undertaken were the following:

- Undertook review to locating Harijan in the social science literature on gender and caste.
- Reviewed the available debates on Harijan in feminist literature.
- Analyzed Harijan 's Socio-Economic status from the development literature and from the literature generated by civil society organizations.
- Identified Harijan 's role and participation in local and national government including cabinet, parliament and sector ministries.
- Located resources and parallels in the global literature on race, black , other discrimination communities and issues.
- Reviewed literature produced by Harijan to understand Harijan 's articulation about the self, society at large, patriarchy, caste, human rights and development issues. Harijan 's writings in English as well as Marathi were reviewed.
- Analysis of indicators of human development for Harijan from the unit level data set of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 62nd round at the all India level and across social groups for comparative analysis was undertaken.
- Since unit level data set was analyzed where data is at the individual level, this study is an analysis of current status based on primary level data set collated by the NSSO.
- The data was collected by the NSSO during the 62nd round survey on employment and unemployment conducted from July, 2005 to June, 2006. The survey was spread over 4,798 villages and 5,125 urban blocks covering 78,879 households (37,975 in rural areas and 40,904 in urban areas) and enumerating 3,77,377 persons (1,86,571 in rural areas and 1,90,806 in urban areas).
- Analysis of indicators of human development for Harijan from NFHS 3 at the all India level and across social groups for comparative analysis.

Project Outcomes: This report developed an understanding on the problem of 'Harijan ' in India. This was done through a comprehensive review of the current theoretical and empirical literature related to gender discourse in general and of Harijan in particular. With the help of current data and some studies, the report captured the economic and social situation of Harijan and examined them in the background of theoretical discussion.

Further, based on insight from the theoretical and empirical literature, the report indicated the need for

studies based on the primary survey to develop a suitable perspective on non-discriminatory access to rights of Harijan . The themes i.e. economic rights; formal and informal employment and; political participation for the conducting study during Phase-II. However, the proposal for the Phase-II would be submitted by IIDS only after the finalization of the prospectus of IDRC for the next financial year. This was discussed in the 2nd advisory meeting held on 21st April 2010.

Overall Assessment and Recommendations: This is in one of the most neglected areas of gender studies and we are grateful to International Development Research Centre for sponsoring this particular study and for supporting the Indian Institute of Harijan Studies.

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