

Chapter-IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Untouchability in Indian society rests upon the idea of the superiority of one section of people over another on account of their birth. A Brahmin might be as poor as an untouchable but he is not ill-treated by the rest of the caste Hindus.

Time and again, ceaseless efforts were made by social reformers to elevate the status of the untouchables to a level by which they could breathe and subsist with some confidence.

Unlike gender or class inequality which attracts some attention, caste discrimination has few takers. Even more painful has been the use of “local justice” to further the cause of OBCs (Other Backward Castes) which are economically Backward. That the Other Backward Castes are economically backward cannot be denied, but to equate them with Scheduled Castes as victims of caste discrimination does not hold in contemporary India. The widely used term ‘*Dalit*’ in fact sidelines Scheduled Castes and pushes forward the case of other so-called weaker sections of the Indian society to the detriment of Scheduled Castes, historically, socially and culturally the untouchable communities.

Being the middle castes, they compete with those above them in caste hierarchy but refuse to accord equality to those below them – the Scheduled Castes. The history of more than a century of the so-called ‘anti-caste’ movements led by the Other Backward castes is reflective of this contradiction. Hence the present study concentrates only on

Scheduled Castes, the real victims of caste discrimination in the Indian society and scrupulously avoids the term '*Dalit*'.

According to data obtained in 2007, about 17 per cent of Scheduled Castes in the country cultivate land, about 12 per cent in the rural areas and 28 per cent in the urban areas are in business albeit petty; the literacy rate among them has gone up to 57 per cent; unemployment has diminished and the share in government service has improved.

However, Scheduled Castes continue to be victims of untouchability and often subject to atrocities. According to one study, on an average about 23,000 cases of human rights violation and atrocities are registered with the police annually by the Scheduled Castes.

There is still a long way to go before the Scheduled Castes to attain some degree of respectability, a dignified life and sustainable livelihood.

The Scheduled Castes constitute 16.2 per cent of the Indian population. More than half of them are concentrated in the States of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. Among the Scheduled Castes, Malas and Madigas are numerically insignificant majority in Andhra Pradesh.

The use of the nomenclature 'Scheduled Castes' can be traced back to 1932, when it was proposed before the Indian franchise committee by the then provincial government of Bengal. Accordingly, in the Government of India Act, 1935, a Schedule containing a list of these castes was added for the first time. Prior to this they were classified as 'Depressed classes'. Article 341 of the Constitution authorises the President of India to specify castes to be notified as Scheduled Castes. The President, in consultation with the

governor of the state concerned, notifies a particular caste as SC, the inclusion of the caste in the Schedule is then promulgated by the Parliament.

Various presidential orders from 1950 to 1978 notified, modified and amended statutory lists of Scheduled Castes in many states of India including Union Territories. At present there are 1,231 castes on the list of Scheduled Castes.

The criteria for inclusion of a particular caste on the SC list are to be based on the social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of traditions and customs related to the practice of untouchability.

The Government of India Act, 1935, determined the above mentioned forms of deprivation, particularly social and economic, on the following basis; that it occupies a low position in the Hindu social structure, its representation in government service is inadequate; it is inadequately represented in the fields of trade, commerce and industry, it suffers from social and physical isolation from the rest of the society and there is a general lack of educational development amongst major sections of the community.

Scheduled Castes are not homogenous group. Several case studies show considerable diversity among them either due to differences in *Jati* traditions and occupations or variations in regional patterns of landholding and caste interactions. Moreover, an interaction among Scheduled Caste *Jatis* is affected by the same considerations of hierarchy which govern all Scheduled Castes' relations with these higher castes. The Mangs and Mahars, Malas and Madigas both looked down upon one another.

Despite their lack of homogeneity or harmonious inter-relationships Scheduled Castes of all *Jatis* have several things in common which led contemporary observers to place them in the same category.

The stigma, “untouchability”, was attributed to the traditional occupation of the *Jati* and affected all members of the *Jati* irrespective of whether they are engaged in that occupation or not. Those *Jatis* which cleaned up after other people dealt with dead animals or ate their meat, are considered ‘unclean’ and beyond the pale of minimal respectability. This stigma, originated many centuries back, is quite deep seated in Hindu social system.

A vast majority of Scheduled Castes notwithstanding their traditional occupations are actually engaged as agricultural labourers. Ironically, agricultural labour is not in itself ritually polluting and no specific social stigma is attached to it. Higher castes engaged in it without seriously jeopardising their social status

Scheduled Castes in rural areas are mostly landless agricultural labourers. Working on the lands of other castes is their major source of livelihood. Almost always they work for others under various dispensations - slavery to sharecropping - than on their own lands. They are poorly compensated for their labour and are forced to live on the brink of starvation. A few of them who rose to own enough land live comparatively well; while some others left agriculture, to join the army, factories, railways, tea plantations and a vast majority of them, however, live in stark poverty. Poverty and indebtedness lead them to bondage, living at the mercy of landholders rather than as an independent, self-respecting person.

Scheduled Castes marry within their own *Jatis*. Considerations of status within the hierarchy of *Jatis* shaped their relationships with members of other *Jatis* including other Scheduled Castes.

Scheduled Castes had little hope of outside sympathy or support. Contrary to its claim to be the guardians of India's silent masses, the colonial government took no interest in the welfare of Scheduled Castes. In keeping with its post 1857 desire to win the support of the traditional leaders of the Indian society, it adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the caste system and did not interfere. The changes, the British government introduced to tax and administer Indian villages as well as to develop the economy did affect the Scheduled Castes. But these changes were not made specifically for their welfare.

Hindu social reformers were equally indifferent; concentrating their attention upon social evils which affected primarily the urban elites. There was one exception. Joti Rao Phule in Poona (Pune) opened two schools for Scheduled Castes and then in 1873, organised the *Satya Sodhak* (search for truth) Samaj to save 'the lower castes from the hypocritical Brahmins and then opportunist' scriptures. Thus, the overwhelming majority of Scheduled Castes lived in hopeless conditions because of their *jati* stigma and were placed socially, economically, politically and culturally at the bottom most of Hindu caste hierarchy.

Varna gave birth to the caste system which decrees that a person born in a particular caste either enjoys the fruits of it or carries its burden for the rest of his / her life. This means that the merit of an individual does not mean anything and the task he is

to performs was decided by the caste into which he was born. This is scripted not by the society but by the scripture which chants the *mantras* of *Karma* (Fate). Hence, Scheduled Castes are at the receiving end. This factor is the most significant to be taken into cognizance as it became the local point for the rise of protest movements led by the Scheduled Castes.

Since times immemorial, the Hindu society is based on four *varnas* - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Later on innumerable castes and sub-castes came into existence. The so-called untouchables who were originally outside the caste system came to be known as despicable to the caste Hindus. They were the worst exploited, sexploited and suppressed people in India. Ironically this non-egalitarian social structure had religious sanction as well.

These 'Broken Men' who were deliberately regarded as untouchables by the caste Hindus (*Savarnas*) never accepted their position. They began to protest against their degradation. At the beginning, their response to untouchability came to the fore in the shape of the *Bhakti* (Devotion) cult which originated in the 12th century as an antithesis of the Vedantic philosophy propagated by Shankaracharya who believed in *Dhyana* and *Karma* as the only two means to achieve salvation. The higher castes, especially the Brahmins, had the monopoly over both the ways of salvation. The saints belonging to *Bhakti* cult revolted against Vedantic philosophy. They believed in spiritual equality and *Bhakti* or devotion to God as one of the means to achieve salvation. They preferred vernacular languages and composed songs to catch the attention of the illiterate untouchables. They discarded Sanskrit which is an elitist language.

Of all the saints of *Bhakti* cult, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Ramanand, Vallabhacharya, Kabir, Tukaram, Meerabai and Chaitanya were more prominent. Chaitanya and Kanaka, the untouchable saints were denied temple entry.

The untouchables had no right to join military services. However, during the Muslim rule they were recruited to the army. Some of the valiant and ambitious converted to Islam to acquire good positions so as to exploit and take revenge on the caste Hindus. Malik Kafoor who served under Allauddin and trounced the Yadava kingdom at Devagiri (Daulatabad) in 1307 was once a slave brought from Gujarat. Khusru Khan - an untouchable convert - became the ruler of the Delhi in 1390. The untouchable Periahs who joined the East India company troops fought at the fort of Arcot heroically and served the victory for the Company in 1751. The untouchable Mahars at Koregoan fought against the orthodox and oppressive rule of peshwas and ensured the victory for the British East India Company.

The untouchables who were at the receiving end, all sited oppression in Hindu society in order to escape it embraced Islam at the first instance, which appears more egalitarian.

Then came Christianity along with the entry of Britishers into the Indian soil. Christian missionaries attracted the untouchables. St. Xavier and father Stephen came to India in 16th century and began to spread Christianity. The untouchables who were subjected to unbearable oppression in the hands of caste Hindus, especially in South India became Christians in majority and uplifted themselves with the help of missionaries.

Conversion of Islam and Christianity proved to be good only to some extent. Muslim community is divided into two categories. Ashrab and Ajlab - high class Muslims and low class Muslims. Then again there is one more category, namely, Arzal which included persons engaged in filthy occupation such as sweeping, scavenging, cleaning drainages etc., and they were subjected to untouchability.

Among the Indian Christians there are two categories - one converted from higher castes and the other from lower castes. The higher caste converts derived more benefits from missionaries in comparison to low caste converts.

This apart, even the converted untouchables could not discard the age - old Hindu impact on their mindset. They adopted Islamic names and rituals at the same time, they also followed their Hindu rituals and ceremonies. Similarly, even though they embraced Christianity and attended the church every Sunday and observed festivals of Christianity, they did not give up Hindu names and rituals. Names like David, Jayaraj, Mery Padmavathi, Esther Premavathi are quite common among the Telugu speaking converts of Malas and Madigas into Christianity. Apart from Christian rituals they also observe Hindu practices particularly women wearing *Mangalasutras*, bangles, putting Sindhoor on the forehead, and silver rings (*Mettalu*) on a couple of fingers of their feet, not to speak of decorating their hair - do with flowers.

Then caste status was retained by the converts even in the new faith. Even those who still live in Hindu fold have retained their caste identity and although all of them are untouchables yet one caste outcastes the other. In Andhra Pradesh, Malas do not touch Madigas ever with a barge pole. The agitation going on among the Scheduled Castes in

Andhra Pradesh over their classification - Malas opposing the classification and Madigas insisting on the same - needs no further explanation to indicate the bitter rivalry between the two dominant Scheduled Castes among the Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh.

Before the British came to India, there was no individual peasant proprietorship over the agricultural land. The land donated to the higher caste owners were either absentee or non-cultivating owners. At the middle, the intermediary class of cultivators existed and at the bottom the landless labourers who were mostly untouchables. The Scheduled Castes were landless labourers of serfs or slaves subject to hire or sale.

Either Permanent Settlement Act or Ryotwari System or the Zamindari system introduced in the British Provinces of India helped only the align Government to collect land revenue effectively, encouraged absentee landlordism among the high caste Hindus - Reddis, Kammas, Velamas in coastal Andhra - but did very little to improve the economic condition of the Scheduled Castes. They remained where they were. Whatever changes affected by the colonial rule concerning the Scheduled Castes - education, employment and legislative representation - they were only cosmetic and skin deep.

The Scheduled Castes which comprise a number of traditionally lower order castes have been the underdogs of the Hindu society. They were kept outside the mainstream of the Hindu social elite. However, with the emergence of modern social forces as a result of India's interaction with the west, gradually change is taking place in the mindset of the caste Hindus towards the untouchables.

There is a gradual realisation of self-worth among the Scheduled Castes. They feel that they have acquired social importance on account of their voting rights particularly after India became an Independent nation. As a result of numerous facilities given to them, they have now started leading a life like other free citizens of a democratic country.

Many of them have given up beef eating and removing carcasses and are keen to wipe out the stigma attached to them or pursuing unclean occupation.

The progress made in obtaining land through state distribution does not seem to have made any impact on economic conditions of the rural Scheduled Castes.

However, after becoming owners of their lands they feel elevated and a sense of belonging is rapidly growing among them. They now take more interest in their land - however meagre it may be - its cultivation and crops, etc.

There is an upward movement in the field of educational attainments. Assistance to Scheduled Castes including grant of stipends, scholarships, feeships, mid-day meals, uniforms, exemptions from payment of examination and other fees, hostel facilities book grants, etc., if properly utilised certainly provide them economic and employment benefits.

The Panchayat Raj and adult franchise have brought in considerable awakening among the Scheduled Castes. They are becoming aware of their democratic rights. However, there is no visible independent political awareness among them. They are agitating for their rights, putting up their demands but not getting adequate support from the recognised political parties.

However, the caste Hindus have started looking at them as their rivals and competitors. Till yesterday, the upper castes which used to be the leaders of the polity and obtained the support of the lower castes through sheer dominance and influence have now changed their thinking. This development points to the evolution of pluralistic tendencies in the rural polity.

Legislative and executive measures in respect of land tenure, fundamental rights, social justice and education that have been enforced to safeguard the interests of Scheduled Castes in various states - the Zamindari Abolition Act, the Untouchability Act 1955 and the Acts of 1955 and 1956 on marriage and inheritance - have further strengthened the rights of the Scheduled Castes.

The gap between Scheduled Castes and non-Scheduled Castes can be reduced by strengthening and expanding the current policy of empowerment and equal opportunity.

Scheduled Caste women labour force constitutes the backbone of Indian agrarian economy. A large number of them are employed as unorganised labourers in the urban areas. Feminisation of labour and poverty has become part and parcel of the life of Scheduled Caste women.

In India, basically women are oppressed and are not treated on par with men. Moreover, Scheduled Caste women are the most oppressed among the oppressed. Several authentic accounts of the living conditions of Scheduled Caste women, their oppression humiliation, sufferings, exploitation and sexploitation reveal the horrible state of them. Her sufferings are two-fold. She has her own share of universal suffering as a

woman and additionally she is victim of a variety of exploitations - social, religious, economic and cultural - as Scheduled Caste woman. Her experience of patriarchal domination is qualitatively more severe than that of a non-Scheduled Caste woman. Her opportunities of ventilating her grievances are extremely marginal since the Indian society is a male dominated society.

Therefore, it is very obvious for a Scheduled Caste woman to be dominated by the male members of her families and her community. She has to undergo atrocities committed on her by her drunken husband. She has to protect herself from the people where she works. She has to work daily and compulsorily since her husband demands money from her for his drinks. If she does not give, she is beaten black and blue. To save her life and for the sake of her children she has to work.

Poverty is a curse for Scheduled Castes. Because of weak economy Scheduled Castes cannot progress. Their women working in constructions, in houses as domestic maids are at the receiving end.

Scheduled Caste women have to wage a two-fold struggle - one in the house and the other out of the house. Due to the stringent and deep-rooted caste system with a strong patriarchal bias it is not surprising to come across a helpless SC woman. SC women are denied their just right to equal wages, a fair share in the distribution of financial benefits doled out by the ruling party as part of populist and vote catching programmes. They lack security, safe maternity and protection of property rights, if any.

The traditional four-fold caste system kept the untouchables outside the social fold as 'outcastes' or 'untouchables' whose very shadow was considered polluting to caste

Hindus. Many untouchables cannot draw, even today, in steeply tradition bound villages, from the wells and tanks used by the caste Hindus. They have to suffer the agony of two glass systems as well. They were denied the use of public roads and transport. SC women could not dress in the manner of other Hindu women, nor could they wear jewellery. They are subject to sexual exploitation by upper caste men. As domestic maids they face equal suppressions and exploitation from the fellow high caste women.

A great majority of SC women are 'illiterate'. It is due to the efforts of Savitribai Phule, that two schools for the education of SC girls were opened in Pune, the bastion of Brahmin orthodoxy. The orthodox people thought that if women would begin to write and read they would take the path of sin. Women were threatened that if they became literate they would become widows. More so, the SC women were tied down by the shackles of customs and traditions and made to obey the caste restrictions and the male domination. The most effective weapon which helped in the perpetuation of the untouchability was the institutionalised bias and denial of access to literacy.

Even the process of Sanskritisation or approximation to upper castes code of conduct did not help the Scheduled Castes to cross the barriers of untouchability. Economically, employment-wise they may have achieved some progress and registered some material gains but socially and culturally still they are looked down and their place is at the bottom most of the Hindu social structure.

The progress of literacy among the Scheduled Caste women still presents a dismal picture. Education is the means of realising the life desires which help to develop the personality and qualities in improving the status of a person in all respects. Education is

interlinked with the socio-economic and political empowerment of women. Therefore, it is necessary to start vocational courses to impart skills to Scheduled Caste rural women for self-employment, along with general education.

A large number of Scheduled Caste women are landless agricultural labourers working for others on daily wages. With the mechanisation of agricultural operations and the entry of technology into the agrarian economy most of them lost their traditional occupation. Scheduled Caste women are mainly employed in unorganised sector - agriculture, constructions, factories, household maids, etc. on meagre wages.

The proportion of Scheduled Caste women below the poverty line is comparatively higher than the upper caste women. The structural adjustment in the era of liberalisation struck hard at the employment opportunity of these helpless, unskilled, uneducated SC women more than any other sections of the Indian population.

To promote educational development among the Scheduled Castes the Constitution of India provided several provisions for their free education, and later on for their gainful employment. But their poverty does not allow them to go to schools. Most often they consider their children as economic assets - employing them as child labourers' or to stay at home and look after the younger kids while the parents and other elders are at work place. This is the major reason as to why the dropout percentage is high among the SC girls.

Although the statistics indicate that Scheduled Castes have made a significant progress on almost all parameters in the last six decades of Independent India, the relative distance between them and the non-Scheduled Castes more or less remained the same.

More than 75 per cent of the Scheduled Caste workers are still connected with land 25 per cent being the marginal and small farmers. In urban areas, they work mainly in unorganised sector. Out of the total Scheduled Caste population of 162 million, the number of Scheduled Castes in State services is falling in spite of reservations. Every year backlog posts are filled through recruitment of SC candidates.

Women in India are subject to discrimination not just on the basis of gender alone but on numerous other facts also such as caste, community, religion, etc. The concept of gender equality continues to be aligned to many communities.

Estimates suggest that at least two-thirds of the bonded labourers in India are Scheduled Castes. Over half of the Scheduled Caste workforce are landless agricultural labourers. Sixty six per cent of all women agricultural labourers are Scheduled Castes with marginal earnings. Scheduled Caste women and children are employed in spheres such as civic sanitation, scavenging and leather work. Many of those who belong to Scheduled Castes are expected to stay in the profession which they are born into. They are expected to marry within their own caste and relationships between Scheduled Castes and other castes often results in punitive acts.

Article 17 of the Constitution of India states that the practice of untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. It further prescribes that the enforcement of any disability arising out of “untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. Still in some villages the two glass system continues even today. Scheduled Castes regularly suffer mental and physical abuse at the hands of high castes.

The right of equality is a fundamental one. However, the institutional forces against it are equally powerful and exert control and shape people's mindsets. Facts like caste, class, community, religion, locality, family occupation all combine to affect women and men alike, making them accept gender inequality as something often without the need for questioning.

In the Indian caste system, a person born into a particular caste should and must remain in the same caste till he breaths last. Ironically the Constitution of India permits one to change his / her parents by way of adoption (*Dattata*), to change religion through conversion but not caste. If one is born into a particular caste without his fault he cannot change it. "Untouchables" or outcastes are condemned for the rest of their life to slug at the bottom most of the social hierarchy.

While poverty is not directly responsible for violence, their dependency on the powerful, all dominant high castes encouraged exploitation. This is more so in the case of SC women who are sexploited by high caste men and exploited by high caste women, especially if they are employed as domestic hands.

For the Scheduled Caste women, it is necessary to create proper socio-economic and political conditions so that they can participate effectively in the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

All political parties in India speak much about gender equality and ignore the SC women where their political status and participation are insignificant. It is regrettable that the Scheduled Caste women have not been represented in political parties which adequately reflects the social difference.

The 1993 Amendment to the Constitution had raised hopes that the gender and caste ridden society would lose some of its strength with the support of the state. But the road to such change is not simple. The state, while agreeing to share political power with women through this enactment, is yet unwilling at the grassroots for such a common practice. In all political parties whose nominees scheduled caste women are elected to Panchayat Raj institutions as Sarpanches, Presidents of Mandal Parishads, etc., under reservation category, more often than not their activities are influenced by either upper caste leaders directly or through the husbands of these elected women representatives.

Despite many positive developments and state policies since India became independent, in securing human rights to women in general and scheduled caste women in particular, patriarchy still continues to be a major hindrance in this direction.

In every village, Mala and Madiga hamlets are integrated with the village functionally. The services rendered by them - *Vetti* - by village servants digging graves for those of high castes who bury the dead, decapitation of heads of sacrificed goats, animals during the village rituals, for these services they are given rent free lands called *Manyalu*.

The caste Hindus assign high status to Malas; the association of Malas with high castes is limited. The village administration includes Munasab, Karanam and four village servants. The first two positions held by high castes have been abolished. Out of the four village servants one is a Mala, one is a *vetti* - Mala and the remaining two are Madigas.

Madigas who are assigned the lowest status, have been maintaining close relations with high castes compared to the other untouchable castes. Because of this, Madigas emphatically deny the inferior status ascribed to them as against the superior status to Malas who disassociate themselves from the high castes.

Scheduled Castes in general depend on the dominant caste of the village which controls land, economy and political power. Whichever untouchable caste or sub-caste that associates with the dominant caste claims superiority of status over the other untouchable castes.

Scheduled Castes are protesting against the society to undo the centuries old injustice meted out to them by the *Savarna Hindus*. For thousands of years, they were subject to utter humiliations and untold of miseries.

However, it would be too simplistic to say that nothing has been achieved through the struggles of the untouchables.

Scheduled Castes became politically more conscious and more determined to build a better future for themselves. They have become more aggressive and highly volatile in pressing for their demands. Very often they choose the agitational path to draw the attention of the ruling elite.

But the irony of the present situation is that although a few of Scheduled Caste candidates due to political reservation got themselves elected to legislatures, obtained positions of power, a vast majority of the SCs are still outside the purview of any significant improvement in their living conditions. Those who benefited out of

'reservations' are very few. And they do not evince much interest to improve the condition of their fellow beings.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps women gain control over their own lives, community and in the society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, economical, political and cultural spheres at various levels, such as individuals, group and community.

In order to improve the socio-economic conditions of women, particularly the rural Scheduled Caste women, it has become increasingly necessary to chalk out various programmes to empower them.

Empowerment challenges our assumptions about the status quo relationship and social dynamics.

Empowerment by means of education, literacy, modest income generating projects is insufficient to ameliorate the prospects for equality and promote quality of life. Empowerment should enable the individuals or a group of individuals to acquire greater ability to plan their lives, to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice.

Realising the need to improve the status of women a national policy for empowerment of women was adopted by Government of India in 2001 with the ultimate

objective of ensuring women their rightful place in the society. The policy recognised the need to empowering them as agents of socio-economic change and development.

Since a majority of women below the poverty line live in villages, there is a close linkage between rural development and empowerment of women.

It is through the implementation of several schemes for the empowerment of women, such as employment and income generation, welfare and support schemes, involving several agencies, including non-governmental organisations financial institutions that efforts should be made to improve the status of women.

The State Government of Andhra Pradesh is equally committed to the empowerment of women. Keeping this in view, the Indira Kranthi Patham with the liberal assistance from the World Bank has been launched to create umpteen opportunities to rural women to gain economic empowerment. This is one of the biggest schemes in Asia focusing on the formation, development and strengthening of the organisations of the poor, expansion of asset base and skill base of the poor, particularly the poorest of the poor by providing Community Investment Fund. Indira Kranthi Patham demonstrates sustainable approaches to poverty reduction.

With the sole objective of assessing and analysing the socio-economic conditions of the rural Scheduled Caste women of the Krishna district, a survey has been conducted which revealed several interesting facts. Most of the Scheduled Caste women of the district earn their livelihood through agricultural labour. Many of them have to work inside the house and go to work outside the house and hence they are burdened with

double work compared to men. They have to take care of their infants since many of them live in nuclear families. Most of them do not have their own houses. They are not aware of the housing policies of government. There is significant improvement in the literacy levels of Scheduled Caste women though many of them cite poverty as the main reason for not pursuing school education. In terms of political participation, many of them did not evince much interest. Rather they are keen on securing economic emancipation empowering themselves through schemes like DWCRA and SHGs. For a majority of rural SC women of the district Krishna medicare is still a problem. Very few of them suffer from major diseases connected with heart, lungs and kidneys. It is equally heartening to note that they are absolutely almost free from sex related fatal diseases such as HIV / AIDS. Many of them want to restrict child bearing to two only. They favour family planning. It is equally significant to note that most of the rural SC women of the district are against child marriages.

Many rural SC women are married when they are very young. Late marriages are quite uncommon among the SC communities. Their marriage expenditure is also not very high, though dowry system is prevailing among their communities. Family prestige, traditions and caste constraints make them reduce heavy expenditure at times.

SCs no longer suffer from the stigma of untouchability nor do they face any harassment from upper castes. To that extent they have achieved progress. Still, they are tradition - bound and do not consider the caste system as a hindrance to their economic, social and political advancement. They want to preserve their caste identity.

Many SC women prefer nuclear families to avoid any sort of harassment in a joint family. In the nuclear family, she may face harassment probably from one person i.e., husband.

Poverty and alcoholism of the male member of the family are the two obstacles to the empowerment of SC women.

Many rural SC women are aware of the implications of unplanned families. Most of them prefer to restrict child bearing to the minimum as they are aware of the cost of bringing up children. Less resources cannot meet the needs of more children. It is heartening to note the awareness among the rural SC women about the need to maintain the family planning.

For many rural SC women, health care is still a major problem. Poverty prevents them to make use of the services of private and corporate hospitals. They have to depend, inevitably on the primary health centres which are poorly equipped and inefficiently organised.

Equally, they labour very hard to fetch drinking water. Many of their houses are not connected with municipal / panchayat water taps. They have to go out to fetch water. They have to stand in queue before public taps, wells and tankers which supply drinking water. Anyway, in our country potable water has become an expensive commodity. The less we talk about the plight of the poorest of the poor the better.

Many rural SC women enjoy normal health and their behaviour and mindset are quite normal during the mensurating period. They do not become abnormal after they enter into the stage of menopause.

Many of the rural SC women are not politically active and also they are highly conscious of their right to vote. They are very keen to use their right to vote, though their choice is influenced by the “Spotcash”. Rather they are keen to improve their economic conditions and provide as much facilities as possible to their children. For that purpose, they prefer to join self-help groups to increase their income.

Rural poverty reduction has become the focal point and centre of the development in India since Independence. Several poverty alleviation programmes and initiatives have been implemented by the Government of India as well as the State Government of Andhra Pradesh for improving the livelihood and quality of living standards of the poor.

The Rural Poverty Reduction Project (RPRP) Krishna district, funded by the World Bank implemented several schemes in the district from June 2002 onwards. In 2006-07, IKP was extended to all the non-RPRP mandals and integrated with the DRDA schemes. They are funded by the Government of India and that of Andhra Pradesh in the ratio of 75 : 25.

Under RPRP, the CIF provides resources to the poor communities, notably the Scheduled Castes for utilisation of funds as a means to improve their living conditions through providing them income raising avenues. This is one of the important components which support the communities in prioritising their livelihood. The micro-credit plan provides 50 per cent funds to assist the poorest of the poor.

The bulk of the budget is earmarked to income generating activity and utmost care has been taken to ensure that at least 50 per cent of CIF shall go to Scheduled Castes.

With regard to Land Purchase Scheme, land purchase process is totally community-driven. Lands under minor irrigation sources which have assured water supply are purchased. The beneficiaries are all poorest of the poor landless belonging to Scheduled Castes who are the most vulnerable section of the society. Ownership of the land alleviates them financially which has a tremendous impact on their image and enhances their status socially to gain confidence and self-respect. In this scheme, Scheduled Caste landless are given top priority.

“The Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions” is a part of welfare activities, which the Government of Andhra Pradesh is implementing vigorously. The aged, the widowed the orphaned and the destitute and the disabled people are identified to provide them succour. In district Krishna, the distribution of pensions has taken place very successfully through Mandal / Samakhya / Village organisations in all the 18 APRPRP mandals and four project villages. In the remaining mandals, the distribution is carried out through MPDOs / Municipal Commissioners.

Pavala Vaddi (Rs. 0.25 ps. Interest) is a scheme started during 2004-05 to provide interest subsidy on loans taken by SHGs. The incentive in the form of reimbursement of interest is about three per cent irrespective of bank interest rates. The purpose is to reduce the financial burden of SHGs which include, needless to say, a majority of Scheduled Caste women. Under this scheme, during 2005-06, 4,276 in 2006-07, 7,572 Scheduled Caste beneficiaries were selected and provided interest subsidised loans to augment their income generating sources by enabling them to process physical resources.

Under social coverage during 2005-2006, 40 per cent of Scheduled Castes, out of the total beneficiaries were extended financial assistance.

The Andhra Pradesh Comprehensive Land Development Project (INDIRA PRABHA) is implemented in Krishna district through DWMA (District Water Management) for the benefit of marginalised families with an amount of Rs.1,129.67 lakh. The major objective of implementing this scheme among other things, is to reduce gender gaps in human development, education, health and nutrition, to strengthen the poor Scheduled Caste women to get asset based livelihood and extend economic opportunities, besides to expand opportunities for women to take care of specific needs like child care.

In the implementation of gender activities, Krishna district identified gender social issues as focused item under project activities. The district authorities conducted awareness camps in all mandals and formed district and mandal level women monitoring committees as atrocities. They are to take care of prevention of atrocities on women, to campaign against alcoholic consumption, dowry harassment, child marriages, property issues, girl / child education, health and nutrition, sanitation, sex workers; plight and HIV/AIDS.

The universalisation of Rice Credit Line and Comprehensive Food Security – Grain Banks - in coastal Mandals is implemented in Krishna district to avoid hardships to the poor and the poorest of the poor in the drought affected villages, to prevent their migration to other places in search of livelihood and to provide food security on non-working days and in critical conditions. At least 50 per cent of the beneficiaries are to be from Scheduled Castes.

Krishna *Ksheera Vahini* Scheme (KKVS) is to provide gainful implementation to the poor and the poorest of the poor in which apart from DRDA, SC Corporation, BC Corporation, Zilla Parishad and ST Corporation take an active part to provide milch cattle assets as main income generation activity particularly for the women folk in rural areas for their livelihood.

Having studied in-depth the socio-economic condition of Scheduled Caste women in Andhra Pradesh with a special reference to the Krishna district and the need to empower them, the researcher is ventured to make the following provisional suggestions and recommendations on the basis of the findings, for the policy makers to ameliorate the living standards of the Scheduled Castes and make them part and parcel of the mainstream of the society.

- 1) All the while, the State is concerned with the quota fixation and making some legal provision for the same. But more than that, there should be a constant monitoring of how best these provisions are made use of by the Scheduled Castes. If not, how to make them aware of the same.
- 2) Sufficient publicity is to be given to various schemes launched by both the Government of India as well as the State Government of Andhra Pradesh intended for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes since many of them are not aware of these facilities extended to them.
- 3) It is not enough to announce programmes for the benefit of Scheduled Castes. They must be implemented effectively.

- 4) Quite often these schemes are highly politicised in the sense that beneficiaries are selected on the recommendations of the local politicians who have partisan interest to serve. Instead care should be taken to select the needy and deserved for extending the welfare programmes.
- 5) All the while, the ruling class thinks that the economic 'benefits' extended to the SCs alone are enough. Our experience shows that their assumption is quite wrong. Empowerment does not mean mere extending of income generating opportunity. It only takes note of one dimension of the problem.
- 6) Empowerment is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. More than lifting them above the poverty line and improving the quality of life, empowerment should make them self-confident, gain self-respect and create among them the feeling that they are not socially, culturally, educationally second rate citizens but part of the mainstream of national life.

Finally, efforts should be made to make their mindset free from inhibitions of inferiority complex and to erase the memory of social stigma attached to them from the ages immemorial.
