

Is the Present education a tool for liberation of Dalit Women?

Manjula Pradeep¹

“I wanted to become nurse or doctor but what has come in my hands is broom to clean filth, dirt and human excreta”. Sangeeta a 16 year old scavenger girl.

“When we fill admission forms for our children in the school we have to write God as Father’s name” – ex-Devadasi woman.

“The teachers ask us to clean and sweep class rooms. Many times they even ask us to clean toilets” –a 10 year old Dalit girl.

“What is your caste? We are Shuklas, Sharmas. – A question which has been bothering my 10 year old niece and which had bothered me when I was of her age.

These are glimpses of the ground reality of children who are seen as untouchables till today despite of several measures, affirmative action and concrete policies.

Let us see what does the **Constitution of India** says:

- **Article 17 - “Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘untouchability’ shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law”.**
- **Article 39 (e) and (f) – “the State shall direct its policy in such a manner that the tender age of children is not abused and children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and childhood is protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment”.**
- **Article 45 – “the State shall provide free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14 years”.**
- **Article 29 (2) - no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.**
- **Article 46 - “The State shall promote with special care the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation.”**

¹ Manjula Pradeep is Director of Navsarjan. Navsarjan is addressing the issues of social justice and constitutional rights pertaining to Dalits, Tribals, women and other poor for past 12 years in more than 3000 villages covering 44 talukas and 12 districts in Gujarat. She is part of the Dalit movement since 1992.

Articles 330, 332, 335, and 338 to 342 and the entire fifth and sixth schedules of the constitution deal with special provisions for implementation of the objectives set forth in Article 46.

What is the present status of literacy particularly of Scheduled caste females?

1. Female Literacy rates for All-India and SC from 1961 – 1991

Year	All-India Total	All-India Female	SC Female	SC Male
1961	24.02	12.95	3.29	16.96
1971	29.46	18.72	6.44	22.36
1981	43.67	29.85	10.93	31.12
1991	52.21	39.29	23.76	49.91

Source: 1991 Census data taken from National Commission for SC/ST Report, 1996-97 & 1997-98

2. States having SC Female literacy rate below All-India Female Literacy rate i.e. 39.29% (1991 Census)

States	SC Female Literacy (%)	General Female Literacy (%)
Tamil Nadu	34.89	51.33
Meghalaya	31.19	44.85
Punjab	31.03	50.41
West Bengal	28.87	46.56
Karnataka	25.95	44.34
Haryana	24.15	40.47
Andhra Pradesh	20.92	32.72
Orissa	20.74	34.68
Madhya Pradesh	18.11	28.85
Uttar Pradesh	10.69	25.31
Rajasthan	8.31	20.44
Bihar	7.07	22.89

Source: National Commission for SC/ST report, 1996-1997 & 1997-98

3. Drop out rate at two different time-periods for different stages (%)

Time Period	Primary		Middle		Secondary	
	SC Females	General Females	SC Females	General Females	SC Females	General Females
1988-89	53.39	49.69	73.6	68.31	85.62	79.46
1990-	53.86	45.97	73.24	65.13	83.38	76.96

91						
----	--	--	--	--	--	--

Source: 1.1988-89 date from Annual Report 1992-93, dept. of Education.

2.1991 date for SCs: National Commission for SC & ST Report, 1996-97 & 1997-98.

The figures given in the above tables speak about the reality that lies when one speaks of educational development of a specific group within a discriminated community.

2 years back Navsarjan questioned **805 scheduled caste children** from **101 villages** of **37 talukas** in **9 Districts** of Gujarat. The study was to understand discrimination against Scheduled caste children in their schools. The major aspects with regard to Dalit girls that came out during the same are as below:

A. Complaints/Grievances of SC children against their Non Dalit Teachers in the School:

Type of Complaints/Grievances	No. of Complainant SC Children (out of 805)	Percentage %
We are not promoted as Monitors	408	50.68
We are not given motivation to participate in extra-curricular activities	356	44.22
They never put hands on our shoulders	329	40.86
They do not repeat again if we do not understand	273	33.91
They never visit our homes	641	79.62
We are not allowed to participate in the extra-curricular activities	183	22.73

B. Complaints/Grievances against other (non SC) students in the school:

Type of Complaints/Grievances	No. of Complainant SC Children (Out of 805)	Percentage %
They do not sit with us in the mid day meal	319	39.62
They abuse us with caste based derogatory words	429	53.29
They talk to us in humiliating language	364	45.21
They give us bad words	281	34.90
They do not behave with us in friendly manner	367	45.59
They beat us	208	25.83

They irritate us by teasing	375	46.58
They never come to our house	696	86.45

C. Complaints/Grievances put forward by the parents of the SC Children: (The female parent showed more eagerness for the same than the male parent).

Type of Complaints/Grievances	No. of Parents (out of 705)
1. Untouchability: Non SC students practice untouchability.	185
D. If we complain then enmity increases in the village.	151
E. The teachers do not pay attention to our complaint.	104
2. Humiliation:	
• Many times our child comes crying if s/he is humiliated in the class.	123
• Due to continuous humiliation our child/ren does not wish to go to school.	129
3. Problem with incentives:	
• Our children do not get regular scholarships.	374
4. Economic problem:	
• We want to educate our children but are not economically capable.	386
• We do not have enough money for books and uniform.	340
D. Fear:	253
• We are concerned about the security of our school going daughters.	

<p>D. Concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other villagers do not like our children getting educated. • Though we educate our children they are not going to get jobs. 	<p>413</p> <p>237</p>
<p>7. Belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Luck decides one's future. • One can go ahead through education. 	<p>191</p> <p>491</p>

D. Important areas that came out while interacting with the school going scheduled caste girls are given below:

- The Non SC girls do not allow us to participate in extra-curricular activities.
- We remain in constant fear of the Non SC boys who address us with abusive language and look at us with strange eyes.
- Most of the time we are asked by our teachers to clean latrines and toilets.

The above facts show that:

- Extent of caste based discrimination very much deep-rooted. The education system is very much influenced by the same.
- The need for better education is very much prominent amongst the scheduled caste community.
- The insecurity of the SC community about the safety and security of the girls and women of their community is very high.

Various UN Treaty bodies have also high lighted the issue of discrimination in their committee reports which are as below:

- **Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: India. 23/02/2000:**

Para 29: The committee recommends that concerted efforts at all levels be taken to address social inequalities through a review and

reorientation of policies, including increased budgetary provision for programmes targeting the most vulnerable groups.

Para 31(one part): In line with the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/304/Add.13), the committee stresses the importance of the equal enjoyment by members of SCs and STs of the rights in the Convention, including access to health care, education, work, and public places and services, such as wells.

- **Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee: India. 04/08/97.**

Para-15: The Committee notes with concern that, despite measures taken by the Government, members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, as well as the so-called backward classes and ethnic and national minorities continue to endure severe social discrimination and to suffer disproportionately from many violations of their rights under the Covenant, inter alia inter-caste violence, bonded labour and discrimination of all kinds. It regrets that the de facto perpetuation of the caste system entrenches social differences and contributes to these violations. While the Committee notes the efforts made by the State party to eradicate discrimination:

It recommends that further measures be adopted, including education programmes at national and state levels, to combat all forms of discrimination against these vulnerable groups, in accordance with articles 2, paragraph 1, and 26 of the Covenant.

- **Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: India. 17/09/96.**

Para-27: The Committee recommends that special measures be taken by the authorities to prevent acts of discrimination towards persons belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and, in cases where such acts have been committed, to conduct thorough investigations, to punish those found responsible and to provide just and adequate reparation to the victims. In this regard, the Committee particularly stresses the importance of the equal enjoyment by members of these groups of the rights to access to health care, education, work and public places and services, including wells, cafés or restaurants.

- **Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: India. 01/02/2000.**

Para-74: The Committee is concerned with the continuing discrimination, including violence, suffered by women of the Dalit community, despite the passage of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (prevention of atrocities) Act of 1989.

Para-75: The Committee urges the Government to enforce laws preventing discrimination against Dalit women and prohibiting the Devadasi system. It urges the Government to introduce affirmative action programmes in such areas as education, employment and health so as to provide life chances to Dalit women and girls and create an environment conducive to their progress. The Committee calls upon the Government to set a time-frame for those interventions and provide information on the progress made in the next report.

The question needs to be addressed to the education system itself is:

- What do they mean by literacy? Is it just to read or write or much more. If it is beyond being to be literate then does the system has enough mechanisms to address the same?
- Are the needs, issues and concerns of SC females and other females similar or common? If not then do they have specific programs for the development of SC women through education?
- By just providing Scholarships, Uniform, etc can it increase the literacy rate amongst the SCs?
- Why the present Education system has failed to reduce the gap based on caste and gender?