

Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth

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Foreword

The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is one of the foremost concerns of the Government of India. Translating constitutional provisions and commitments reflected in the acceptance of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, has been a constant endeavour and is reflected in national development policies, plans and programmes. Over time, the Government of India has moved from a welfare approach to an entitlement-based approach which recognizes women's centrality to development. The protection and promotion of rights, including the right to education, information, protection from violence, food security, participation of rights holders and attention to vulnerable groups have been at the centre of Government action.

Inclusive growth in the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007–2012) envisions respect for the differential needs of different groups. The Government has also decided to implement a number of programmes in mission mode, with clear objectives to be achieved in a set timeframe through provision of adequate resources and institutional structures for effective implementation. The strategies adopted have addressed women's access to resources, choices, opportunities and decision making.

Significant strides have been made towards the goal of achieving gender equality. Revamping existing schemes and formulating new ones, strengthening programme delivery, fund utilization, monitoring and evaluation, reviewing policies and plans of actions, amending existing Acts and enacting new legislations constitutes some of the more important achievements.

Women's right to ancestral property and ownership of assets have been recognized; however, realizing these rights continues to be a challenge. Women's voices in decision making within the family, the community and beyond, are further needed to be secured. While participation of women in political processes has increased at the local level, these gains have to be consolidated and replicated at other levels.

Smt. Krishna Tirath, Minister of State for Women and Child Development in her message said that the agenda for inclusive growth is not yet finished and a lot of work remains to be done to realize the vision for ending the multifaceted exclusions and discriminations faced by women, particularly women belonging to the deprived and marginalized groups, and to ensure that every woman is able to develop to her full potential and share the benefits of economic growth and prosperity.

This book presents selected papers presented on the theme, *Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth*. This collection includes contributions on the theme chosen for this edited volume from several academicians and research scholars. A number of case studies, studies related to women empowerment, financial inclusion among women and Dr. Ambedkar's views on inclusion of women belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes are included in this book which would enrich the knowledge on gender equality and inclusive growth in India.

This edited volume will indeed provide the required data and will fill up the information gaps to all researchers and academicians. This book will be indispensable to the readers in reflecting gender issues, difficulties and challenges and the strategies of inclusive growth as the **Goal of a Development Policy**.

Dr. Sheela Ramachandran

Vice Chancellor

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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Champion of Human Rights

Dr. S. Kalamani

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Man is the 'crown of beings' as God created him. God has endowed him with the best of everything so that he would prove himself to be superior to all created beings. Human rights is the sum of all rights necessary to ensure our rights to be human and it is the responsibility of all the people and governments to create conditions needed to exercise our right to be human.

According to Section 15 of the Indian Constitution, there should not be any discrimination against any citizen on account of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them cannot be barred from shops, public restaurants, hotels, or places of public entertainment; the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort. In spite of this article, even after so many years of freedom, untouchability prevails still in India. The Dalits are denied the status of human beings and are segregated. They are barred from sharing water, food and shelter and are subjugated, marginalized and oppressed socially, culturally and politically. The agony and pain inflicted on them by the upper class people are beyond utterance. Even today, newspapers give reports of such ill-treatment meted out to the Dalits in one or other part of our country. According to the report of the National Commission on Human Rights of India, more than 62,000 human rights violations are recorded annually. Assaults, rapes, torture and murders have become very common happenings in their lives. These Dalits cannot have recourse to police protection also, since the high and rich along with the police tend to use sexual abuse and other forms of violence, against women to inflict 'political lessons' and crush dissent within the community.

Regarding the condition of Dalit women, the condition is still worse. Violence is utilized against Dalit women to deny them opportunities, choices and freedoms at many levels undermining their dignity, self-respect and ultimately their right to development. It is at this juncture that one recalls the significant role played by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Chief architect of free India's New Constitution for the abolition of all forms of discrimination and inequalities based on caste, gender, race or status. He strongly felt that political and economic reform is possible only when the 'monster' of caste is destroyed. While championing the cause of the Dalits, he made it very clear to them that only through incessant struggle they could derive strength, confidence and recognition. He exhorted the Dalits to educate themselves so that it would agitate them over the injustice meted out to them and to fight against it. He felt that while marching towards equality, the Dalits should be filled with pride and self-respect because if they do not have self-esteem, they would not succeed in their fight for equality.

Bhimrao, who challenged to erase the ill fate of the Dalits was born on 14 April 1891 as the son of Ramji Sukpal, a serviceman of the Indore army. He himself was born a Mahar considered a lower caste. When the government stopped the intake of lower castes to the Indian army, the Mahar people protested strongly against the order under the leadership of Ramji. They submitted a petition to the Government and appealed for the repeal of the order with the help of justice Ranade. Thus the fight for equality started even before Ambedkar could understand what it was. Once when Bhim was travelling with his brother in a bullock cart, the cart-man became wild as soon as he knew about their caste. He shouted at them for polluting his cart and the bullock. The irony here is that the boys were considered inferior to the bullock just because they belonged to the lower caste. They could not drink water on the way even though they were very thirsty and there were many wells because they were untouchables. The barber would chase him out if he went for a haircut. Such incidents in his childhood affected Bhimrao deeply. He wondered how could people be relegated to such a lower level when everybody is a human being.

Things were not alright in the school, Bhim and his elder brother had to sit in a corner of their classroom as they were untouchables. The school which is meant for the enlightening of the young minds provided them with many bitter experiences and taught them about the ways of the world. Even the teachers would not touch their books; nor would they ask them any questions.

Women form a vital element of the society and a society's progress depends much on them. All societies must take possible efforts to integrate women in all walks of life in an equitable and just manner. Ambedkar realized the potential and importance of women and he wanted the women, of the depressed classes also to rise up along with their men.

There are around 100 million Dalit women in India who make up a large chunk of the country's workforce and agricultural labour. Dalit women constitute a lower segment in Indian society and suffer from dual disadvantages: (a) of being Dalit (i.e.) from socio economic and cultural marginalization and (b) being women, (i.e.) from gender based inequalities and subordination. They have to struggle harder to secure basic necessities of life.

The Dalit / Tribal discourse on human rights on Ambedkar and Periyar movements percolated into literary works by Indian writers particularly women writers and are gaining momentum. Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, Bama, Sivakami, K.A.Gunasekaran and many other writers write on issues of the Dalits, whereby they bring about an awareness of the issues of and problems faced by Dalits.

It is worth noting the words of Vidya Bhushan and Sachdeva by way of conclusion. "What is now needed is to educate public opinions and denounce caste-patriotism in unequivocal terms. The enthusiasm of youth will surely transcend the artificial barriers of caste. With the spread of education and the consequent amelioration of economic position it is hoped the Indian people will rise to the occasion and throw off the caste system" (396).

Mahasweta Devi, the political activist and writer from West Bengal avers, "I would go so far as to urge a special provision in the University for learning about them. For, unless the academicians and the elite of the society starts learning about the tribes and support their rights the tribals' yearning to get a dignified place in India will never be fulfilled.

Eleanor Zelliott, an American scholar, who has been in India for long and who has written extensively on the problem of the downtrodden says that Ambedkar's life and work should be better known in the West for he was a leader who believed that the leadership of a people must come from within the group; religion must meet the needs of a people and reflect their greatness, education must be stressed and must reach the lowest. Those who have achieved elite status must remain concerned about their depressed brethren and courage is the essential element among those who wish equality; also those who lead must be moral and pure of heart.

The government of India must adopt a comprehensive policy framework for the economic, educational and social upliftment of Dalit women. The emergence of various non-governmental organizations dealing with different issues concerning the Dalit women like violence, illicit human trafficking, divorce etc. is a matter of great satisfaction. Moreover since they highlight the key issues and problems being encountered by Dalit women in India, an awareness is being created among the public.

The nation is marching toward empowerment. Empowerment entails struggle. It entails learning to deal with the forces of oppression; it entails having a vision of a new society, it also entails conscious and deliberate interventions and efforts to enhance the quality of life; collective strength is necessary for building solidarity and support among workers to achieve empowerment. If steps are taken in the right direction it will not be long when untouchability is completely abolished in India.

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