
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE BSP EXPERIENCE IN UP

DR. RITU GUPTA

Abstract: Empowering and streamlining half the population in the working and development of the country has been among the initial goals of Indian polity. The fact finds enough reflection in the constitutional provisions through the fundamental rights and directive principles significantly. However, increasing violence, exploitation and harassment of the women populace is a major contemporary concern. There have been several new as well as amended laws to counter the concern but seem to fall short of the requisite. The Mayawati led BSP regime in Uttar Pradesh received global appraisal especially in context of the growth and empowerment of a common Dalit woman from an individual to a grand political leader. The tenure was also in popular talks about the social engineering initiated by the leader herself. It thus becomes relevant and significant to observe women's status in the Mayawati government and her party's approach towards the security and streamlining of half the society. The paper thus looks forward to analyze the approach and execution of pro- women provisions and laws in the BSP regime in Uttar Pradesh.

Keywords: Bahujan – Sarvajan, Gender Inequality, Human Development, Women Empowerment.

Introduction: Beyond being a concept, Empowerment is essentially a process of awareness, conscientisation and capacity building towards greater participation, effective decision-making and executive control for transformative action. It's a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It implies fostering power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

Women's suppression is rooted in the very fabric of Indian society. The origin of the Indian idea of appropriate female behavior can be traced to the rules laid down by Manu in 200 B.C.: "by a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent"[17]. They have been exploited on the grounds of their physical weakness and vulnerability since ages which cannot be justified. The society and government are still seen working to serve male interests supporting the continued subordination and domination of women. An average Indian woman has little control over her own fertility and reproductive health. More women are illiterates compared to men and more women drop out of school. There are fewer women in the paid workforce than men. Women's work is undervalued and unrecognized; they work longer hours than men and carry the major share of household and community work which is unpaid and invisible. Women and men earn unequal wages. Women are legally discriminated against in land and property rights. They face violence inside and outside the family throughout their lives and have little say in decisions affecting their own lives. The cumulative effect of all this is that women tend to lack the self-confidence and skills needed as an individual and social being [18].

The issue thus calls for sincere structural, functional and behavioral changes through the combined political,

individual and collective initiatives. The change so desired shall have its bearing over the woman's life and also at multiple levels of the society like the family, community, religion, market and the state too. It is a breakthrough from the age old belief and work patterns, which are hard to be fought and even harder to be recognized.

Empowerment and Gender Inequality: Empowerment of a woman is a necessity because they are the backbone of a family. They provide the basic infrastructural growth to its members, which is eventually responsible for the kind of development they attain and the type of person they become. Family is the first unit of society and the nation, its development is therefore significant. In nutshell the condition of women bears fundamental consequences for the quality of life of both women and the society at large. Gender inequalities have also had instrumental negative impacts over woman's status through creating constraints in the achievement of a number of development goals. Studies have shown that gender inequality in education and access to resources may hamper the process of reduction of child mortality and lowering of fertility, which in turn impacts the expansion of education further. Gender inequality also has a negative impact on economic growth. There is now overwhelming evidence that countries that adopt specific measures to protect women's rights and increase their access to resources and schooling have less corruption and achieve faster economic growth than countries that do not. Changing gender roles can thereof make a world of difference. Women empowerment is a struggle for assuring a respectful space and co- existence of the women in the society. Their empowerment is also a multifaceted concept comprising of several variables like the health, sex-ratio, economic status, education, physical security etc. of which education is a significant and primary variable. Education is a significant source of information and guidance that help an individual attain the optimum development and empowerment possible. The

paper intends to study the status of women empowerment and the efforts towards it in the light of this variable. The process of empowerment is understood to operate through the five concepts of welfare, access, conscientisation, mobilization and control[19]. Of these while welfare and access can be given or bestowed from outside; conscientisation, mobilization and control comes more from within an individual. The virtues to be attained from within are significantly dependent upon the level and quality of an individual's education, and are also the key factors that determine the use of the policies and opportunities given to them from outside.

Constitutional and Legislative Provisions in India for Women: Such an empowerment and development is however not possible without the political support. It is so because politics is the only organized accepted and authoritative platform and a measure through which structural as well as individual changes are brought or enforced as required. As reflected in the Preamble, the Indian Constitution is firmly grounded in the principles of liberty, fraternity, equality and justice and contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. The Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to political equality (Article 14) to both men and women. Women's right to nondiscrimination are defined as justiciable rights (Article 15) and there is enough room for affirmative action programmes for them. Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State is also a fundamental right (Article 16). The Directive Principles of State Policy stress on the right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women equally (Article 39a), equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39d), provision for just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 39e). Directives for promoting harmony and renouncing practices derogatory to the dignity of women are also provided for in the Indian Constitution.

The political rights of women are recognized without any discrimination, or distinction and they have the right to participate in decision making at all levels equally with men. The right to constitutional equality has been supplemented by legal equality by the passage of a number of Acts through which the traditional inequalities in respect of marriage, divorce and property rights are sought to be eliminated. The Constitution makers were inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 1 of the UDHR "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." And, Article 3 that proclaims the right to life, liberty and security of person - a right essential to the enjoyment of all other rights were incorporated in the constitutional provisions mentioned above. However, the fact is that even these basic human rights are denied to the girl child and India has a long way to go to ensure the enforcement of these for them.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National

Policy for the Empowerment of women was passed in 2001. But, nothing that could make striking difference has been achieved. A range of government programs have been launched to increase economic opportunity for women. It was believed that economic independence may foster in them independence of thought, opinion, and living and therefore decision-making. These efforts have but failed because there appear to be no existing programs to address the cultural and traditional discrimination against women that leads to her abject conditions. Women and girls are uneducated rather are intentionally many times kept uneducated; they receive far less education than men, due to both social norms and fears of violence. India has the largest population of non-school-going girls despite the constitutional guarantees and government promotion of free primary school education for both boys and girls up to age 14. This goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed, but primary education in India is still not universally achieved. Literacy rate in India according to census 2011 was found to be 74.04%. Compared to the adult literacy rate here the youth literacy rate is about 9% higher. The female literacy levels are 65.46% where the male literacy rate is over 80%[20].

It is however not that the governments had not felt the necessity and importance of the universal and quality education. Rather apart from the constitutional provisions there have been consistent efforts to improve the education status through the five year plans (FYPs), since the very beginning. The first four FYPs focused on the welfare activities for women's with priority to their education. Thereafter the fifth and the sixth made a shift from their welfare to entire development. Focus was made over the beneficiary oriented programmes to extend direct benefits to the women in the seventh plan, while the eighth plan made the shift from the development to empowerment of women. The ninth plan ensured the effective expansion of day care services and primary schools to promote developmental opportunities for the girl child for participation in primary education and supportive services for women. During the tenth plan programme named 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyan' was launched with an objective that all children below 14 years of age must be in schools and should complete five years of schooling by 2007. The eleventh FYP was named as India's educational Plan by the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. The NDC (National Development Council) places highest priority on education as a central instrument to achieve rapid and inclusive growth. The twelfth FYP too in the similar spirits intends work towards the education and economic development of women[21].

Status of Women Education In UP

Uttar Pradesh is the fifth largest Indian state by area. It is the most populous state in the country as well as the most populous country subdivision in the world. The state is also the fourth largest by economy, with a GDP of ₹708000 crore. The resources in terms of GDP is worth mentioning for this has been the most regular

excuse forwarded by the state agencies for not executing the development policies. Wherein women in India as a whole enjoy a lower status vis-à-vis their male counterparts UP has been particularly lagging behind in this respect. Women play subordinate role to males and are subjected to the rigours of traditional social structure. It is regrettable that the trends in health, nutrition and educational facilities have also been adverse to women and they suffer from social and economic exploitation since early childhood. The females in Uttar Pradesh being socio-economically backward are generally submissive and dependent[22]. The literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh according to census of India 1991 was at 57.36% which was below the national average (65.4%). Female literacy is dismal with their literacy rate being terribly low at 42.98% as against 70.23% for males. Literacy rate of SC females compared to general population is even lower (10.69%). Only one out of four in the 7+ age group was able to read and write in 1991. This figure goes down to 19 % for rural areas, 11 % for the scheduled castes, 8 % for scheduled castes in rural areas, and 8 % for the entire rural population in the most educationally backward districts. In terms of more demanding criteria of educational attainment on the completion of primary or secondary education, in Uttar Pradesh, in 1992-93 only 40 % of literate females could complete the cycle of eight years of schooling involved in the primary and middle stages. In the late 1980s, the incidence of illiteracy in the 10-14 age groups was as high as 61 % for rural females, and more than two-thirds of all rural girls in the 12-14 age groups never went to school. According to 2011 census the status did improve so far as the literacy level rose to 69.72%, where male literacy rate was recorded 79.24%, while female literacy continued to be relatively low was 59.26%[23].

Another barrier to education is the lack of adequate school facilities. There are not enough classrooms to accommodate all the school age children. Furthermore, the schools available often lack basic necessities such as sanitary facilities or water. In Uttar Pradesh, a survey found that 54 percent of schools did not have water supply and 80 percent did not have latrines. In 1993 Uttar Pradesh needed to build 284,000 additional classrooms to achieve full enrollment of children age 6 to 10. On the other hand, in states where population growth rates are low (e.g., Kerala), the number of primary-age children is beginning to decline and state governments can focus on improving the quality of education rather than increasing the supply of classrooms[24]. Educational development in the State does not show promising trends. Comparing the scenario of educational development in UP with India, UP secured 23rd rank in Education Development Index in 1998-99, but in 2006-07, it fell to 26th rank. The literacy rate in UP is less than the Indian average. Dropout rates for boys and girls are very high but less than the India average. Per capita expenditure on education in UP is considerably lower than that in India

as a whole[25].

Women Education policies of the BSP in UP: Against the backdrop of congress decline and heightened polarization among social groups in the mid-1980s in UP, the BSP emerged as a strong social movement supporting an upsurge from below[26]. BSP under the leadership of Kanshiram and Mayawati was formed mainly to represent the Bahujans or the *Dalits*, referring to people from SC, ST, OBCs and the minorities. In active politics, Mayawati has since early 1990s been the Chief Minister of the state for four times, three times in coalition with Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and in absolute majority in 2007.

Limited by its short span and the coalition nature the Mayawati government could not do much in specific context to women's welfare in its first three terms. However, it made considerable efforts to bring in the pro-*Dalit* reforms to the platform and make them work to justify its commitments, not disappointing its basic and mass followers. The BSP during its coalition tenures did introduce social policies, especially related to health, education, housing, employment and social welfare, targeting *Dalits* and other oppressed people. For example, in 1995, scholarships were provided for *Dalit* students up to Standard 8. This was expected to have benefited about 72, 00,000 students, and for that the government arranged Rs 1,110 million. As many as 53 new student hostels were to be constructed and several old student hostels to be renovated. The BSP government also arranged coaching centers for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students who wished to appear for civil services examinations at the State and Central levels. In 1997, Rs 700 million was allocated for setting up schools on the ashram model for the children of the Balmiki (SC) caste and increased the scholarships during this period[27]. In 2007, the majestic victory acquired by the party and Mayawati both got worldwide appraisals for its electoral strategy involving the '*Bahujan*' to '*Sarvajana*' drift and the '*Social Engineering*' concept. Thousands of *Dalits* who gathered in the State capital, Lucknow, on the sworn in ceremony of Mayawati as CM of UP expressed hope that atrocities against the SCs would decline drastically under the new 'single-party' regime. Many social activists and observers too expressed similar expectations that a single-party government under a *Dalit* Chief Minister in the country's most populous State would have a salutary effect on *Dalits*' condition elsewhere in the country too. There have been strong expectations from the BSP government to work significantly in favor of the women out of several reasons. Primarily, the victory of a party known for its minority leadership symbolized the streamlining of the minorities and the backward classes to the front line politics. It left behind the continued decades old hold of first, the Congress, then the BJP and SP in the state. Furthermore, Mayawati's victory was also looked upon as the victory of the women as a whole, which was even more significant out of her *Dalit*

identity. Coming out of the oppressed class and knowingly fighting for their rights and development, it was expected from her to represent not only the class but specifically the women as never before and address them accordingly. With respect to women empowerment in context of their education status the tenure was even more conducive as it fell within the 12th FYP that intended to work towards the education and economic development of women and also followed the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' of the tenth FYP[28]. These could help the state government to avail the benefits and assistance from the central government too and give its women the maximum possible support towards educational empowerment. The party manifesto for the 2009 Lok Sabha elections in specific context to the women empowerment mentions the government initiatives under the "Inheritance Right", "*Mahamaya Garib Balika Ashirwad Yojana*" and "*Savitri Bai Phule Balika Shiksha Madad Yojana*"[29]. Through these policies government made efforts to provide the women with economic stability and assistance for their existence and education. These policies in the long run were also expected to help reduce the gender ratio gap in the state.

The efforts through these policies are not non-praiseworthy but they render motivation and financial help to the families helping their daughters get schooling alone. They don't assure and are not enough to guarantee hundred percent enrollment and literacy of the girls. There's need for more rigorous efforts to improve the education infrastructure within the state that involves the construction of new schools with enough classrooms, stationary, teaching aids, play grounds and most importantly hygienic sanitation facilities. It also requires for enough numbers of efficient teachers and as far as possible female teachers for the girls which may decrease the reluctance of people in sending their girls to school. Stern measures inspecting the availability of proper mid day meal and individual assistance of the uniform and stationary to the students may also prove effective. Including the above aids it is of prime importance to provide and assure for the security of the girls necessarily, in the absence of which all above mentioned shall go in vain.

The BSP government expressed its inability to implement the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2010, passed by the union government, because the UP Government has no funds to implement the Act in the state[30]. The below average performance of the BSP government in this context can be cited out mainly in its disinterest towards the issue. Such reforms are a part of long term policies that do not render quick returns in the form of votes or seats in any of the elections that kept the party busy in thoroughly during the state term. After gaining absolute majority in UP state assembly elections 2007 the party was busy strengthening its inclusive politics through *Sarvajan* policy, building the *Dalit*- Brahman coalition. This was a unusual huge drift from being a Bahujan party to the *Sarvajan* party and

was sincerely attempted keeping in mind the 2009 Lok Sabha Elections, UP Assembly by- Elections 2009 and Legislative Council Elections 2010. Alongside the party was also keen to keep its *Dalit* community support intact, it was therefore conscious to provide pro- *Dalit* policies time to time to make the community assure that BSP despite its *Sarvajan* shift was primarily their party. With an exception of failure in the Lok Sabha elections 2009 the BSP was successful in its political front. Unfortunately though it has shown less concern and ability as far as the development of the state is concerned. More surprising was the fact that the government from the party knowingly of *Dalits* could not assure the community of the basic security too. "Within a month of the [Mayawati] government's assumption of office, seven *Dalits* were killed in Muzaffarnagar, while three *Dalit* women were raped in the same district". Similar atrocities against *Dalits* were reported from Rae Bareli, Mohanlal Ganj, Lakhimpur Kheri and Mahoba[31]. The government could not take the required steps for the upliftment of the poor and kept stagnant in managing the common needs related to human development of which education forms an integral part. In addition to this the programmes initiated by the government are unable to achieve the desired results with respect to quantity and more with quality. This is chiefly because where gender concerns are recognized; programmes and policies are usually restricted with adapting the programme to the existing pattern of gender relations, rather using the programme to address issues of gender inequality.

Women Empowerment for any civilized society and a growing polity is a necessity. Efforts for women empowerment must therefore be taken up seriously with an intention to achieve them. Any attempts towards it begin in lieu of the equality for the girl child. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education, nutrition, health care and related information. It is imperative to provide them with extra protection and support to ensure that their rights are acknowledged and protected and that they are able to avail the opportunities provided through the system and the law. Though undoubtedly centuries old traditions and cultural attitudes takes time to change, yet it is more than apparent that there has also been a considerable lack of seriousness in pursuing the adequate measures of change. Public policies in UP for human welfare and development were very much been influenced by the politics of the State. The social bases of the political parties clearly dictated the nature of public policy making. Moreover, the uncertainty of the social bases of political parties has stimulated such trends. In order to support, and gain the support of, specific social sections, various political parties adopted different agendas to channelize resources and material benefits to the social bases. Long term infrastructural needs of the people at large have not been taken up seriously and are left un- addressed like education of

girls as discussed in the paper. The public policies for human development and welfare were already mandated by the Indian constitution. Provisions for positive discrimination are already present in the Constitution but the spirit and the aim of adopting the public policies to benefit specific social sections to garner electoral support. This paper has attempted to elaborate the relationship between the social bases of political regimes, their public policies and how they affect and have been doing so in specific reference to the

education of the girls in the state. In this context, we can conclude that the public policies for education for girls are a significant and mandatory requisite towards Women empowerment. Steps have been taken to achieve and provide education to women but they are not enough. There's still a vast scope to strive towards the goal thus, there's hope that the current SP government and the others to come shall genuinely attempt to address and help women become empowered.

References:

- Chandra Ramesh (2004): 'Social Development in India', Vol. 5, Gyan Publishing House, India.
- G. Sandhya Rani; "women's education in India- An Analysis"; Asia- Pacific Journal of Social Sciences; Vol. II (1), January-June 2010.
- Jain Lakshmi(2008): 'Dropout of Girl Child at Schools', New Delhi.
- Literacy in India (2011): <http://www.census2011.co.in/literacy.php>
- Longwe, Sara H. (1990): 'Addressing Rural Gender Issues: A Framework for Leadership and Mobilisation' http://www.sarpn.org/documents/d0000055/P60_Rural_Gender_Issues.pdf
- Longwe, Sara H. (1990), From Welfare to Empowerment: The Situation of Women in Development in Africa, A Post UN Women's Decade Update and Future Directions.
- Posted by Samathain on April 16, 2009: Mayawati's promise to India: BSP Manifesto. <http://samathain.wordpress.com/2009/04/16/mayawatis-promise-to-india-bsp-manifesto/>
- Purnima; "Women's Issues in India: Role and Importance of Media"; Global Media Journal; Vol. IV, Issue I, Autumn 2010 & Spring 2011.
- Ramakrishnan Venkitesh and Mahaprashasta Ajoy Ashirwad: Victims Always, Frontline, Vol. 26, issue 24, Nov 21-Dec 4 2009.
- Sandhya Venkateswaran, (1995), 'Environment, Development and the Gender Gap', Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- Sen, Kalyani Menon, Shiva Kumar, A.K (2001), Women in India: How Free? How Equal? Report commissioned by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in India, New Delhi.
- Shyam Singh, BSP's Route to 2012, MAINSTREAM, VOL. XLIX, NO 15, APRIL 2, 2011.
- Singh Shyam, Kumar, V Anil (2012): 'Politics and Public Policies: Politics of Human Development in Uttar Pradesh, India' <http://www.isec.ac.in/WP%20287.pdf>
- Srivastava Achala (2011): 'Disparities of Women Development in Uttar Pradesh: A Factor Analysis Approach', Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow) <http://www.indiastat.com/article/28/achala/fulltext.pdf>
- Study on the "Discrimination of the Girl Child in Uttar Pradesh" by Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar, New Delhi
- Sudha Pai (2007), 'Political Process in Uttar Pradesh: Identity, Economic Reforms, and Governance', Pearson Education, India.
- Ramesh Chandra (2004): Social Development in India, p. 28, Vol. 5, Gyan Publishing House, India.
- Malathi Subramanian: 'Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics', p. 3, http://www.du.ac.in/fileadmin/DU/Academics/course_material/hrge_o8.pdf (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
- Sara H. Longwe (1990): 'Addressing Rural Gender Issues: A Framework for Leadership and Mobilisation', p. 6 http://www.sarpn.org/documents/d0000055/P60_Rural_Gender_Issues.pdf (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
- Literacy in India (2011): <http://www.census2011.co.in/literacy.php>, (accessed on 29 Dec 2013).
- G. Sandhya Rani (2010): "Women's Education in India- an Analysis", p. 8 <http://www.socialsciences-ejournal.org/3.5.%20Sandhya%20Rani.pdf> (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
- Achala Srivastava (2011): 'Disparities of Women Development in Uttar Pradesh: A Factor Analysis Approach', Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow), p. 1, <http://www.indiastat.com/article/28/achala/fulltext.pdf> (accessed on 2 Jan 2014).
- Study on the "Discrimination of the Girl Child in Uttar Pradesh" by Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar, New Delhi, p. 15 http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/discrimination_of_the_girl_child_in_uttar_pradesh.pdf (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
- Shyam Singh, Anil V Kumar (2012): 'Politics and Public Policies: Politics of Human Development in Uttar Pradesh, India', p. 6, ISEC Working Paper-287, ISEC, Bangalore, July, 2012.

- <http://www.isec.ac.in/WP%20287.pdf> (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
25. Sudha Pai (2007): 'Political Process in Uttar Pradesh: Identity, Economic Reforms, and Governance', p. 222, Pearson Education, India.
26. Shyam Singh, Anil V Kumar (2012): 'Politics and Public Policies: Politics of Human Development in Uttar Pradesh, India', p. 8, ISEC Working Paper-287, ISEC, Bangalore, July, 2012 <http://www.isec.ac.in/WP%20287.pdf> (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
27. G. Sandhya Rani (2010): "Women's Education in India- An Analysis", p. 8 <http://www.socialsciences-ejournal.org/3.5.%20Sandhya%20Rani.pdf> (accessed on 30 Dec 2013).
28. Posted by Samathain on April 16, 2009: Mayawati's promise to India: BSP Manifesto. <http://samathain.wordpress.com/2009/04/16/mayawatis-promise-to-india-bsp-manifesto/> (accessed on 29 Dec 2013)
29. Shyam Singh: BSP's Route to 2012, MAINSTREAM, Vol. XLIX, No 15, April 2, 2011.
30. Venkitesh Ramakrishnan and Mahaprashasta Ajoy Ashirwad: 'Victims Always', Frontline, Vol. 26, Issue 24, Nov 21-Dec 4 2009.

Lecturer, Political Science Department
DG PG College, Kanpur