EMPOWERMENT FROM THE ABOVE – RESPONSES AND IMPACTS OF SOCIAL SECURITY SCHEMES IN UP

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ABSTRACT

The issue of empowerment of the marginalised groups in India is very much related to the question of social change. People are not empowered because they are socially discriminated. Since social hierarchy in India is not separate from the economic hierarchy, people, who are enjoying higher social status also belong to economically well-off section of the society. Therefore, unless social discrimination is addressed in the country, economic discrimination is also not supposed to be eliminated, and hence, the very agenda of empowering the marginalised people remains unfulfilled. Empowerment of the marginalised groups is an important and prioritised agenda of the democratic government in India. The policy responses from the government to address the issue have mainly been evolved around the 'economic empowerment'. It is being assumed that if socially and economically marginalised groups receive economic benefits from the government that would enhance their economic status and they would also feel their social status improved. The question this paper addresses is whether policies that are targeting the economic empowerment alter the social empowerment of the marginalised groups which reflects upon the changes in traditional social structure to remove social discrimination.

Introduction

India is comparatively rare among developing countries in having maintained a long tradition of liberal political democracy, with only brief interruption, since Independence (Currie: 1996, p. 790). Despite having social and economic diversities, the country has maintained the competitive democratic political system based on the principle of popular representation. The formation of the Constitution had set the tone of a welfare oriented state to which equity and equality are streamline issues that are to be reflected in social policies. The policy responses from the Indian state have been received in same line. Being a poor country, India had to perform as a prompted welfare state. One of the reasons that maintained the identity of India as welfare state for long is the failure of the welfare policies in eliminating poverty. It has been observed that "democracies have been slow and steady in attacking poverty" (Varshney : 2000, p. 718). In principle, since poverty does not figure in the theory of democracy because it encourages

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inequality, there have been continuous efforts to eliminate inequalities, both social and economic.

Welfare state in India is well guided by the empowerment of the marginalised groups which became an important and prioritised agenda of various governments in India. The Indian Constitution reflects the commitment and the priority of India to establish necessary provisions for the upliftment of socially and economically deprived sections of the society.

The nature of welfare state in India is not validated only because the country has a huge chunk of poor population but it involves major question of social inequalities which are inherited in Indian culture. People are not empowered because they are socially discriminated. Since social hierarchy in India is not separate from the economic hierarchy, people, who are enjoying higher social status also belong to economically well-off section of the society.

Therefore, unless social discrimination is addressed in the country, economic discrimination cannot be eliminated; and hence, the very agenda of empowering the marginalised people remains unfulfilled. India, as being secular state, cannot disrupt the religious traditions which determine substantial part of existing social relations in India. Therefore, only option that is left before the Indian state is to address the issue of empowerment of marginalised groups through adopting policies and programmes that deliver economic benefits to these groups. But, the major question arises that whether Indian state has been able to achieve the goal of social equality while delivering economic benefits.

The assumption that this paper adopts in the view of above given argument is that policies that are targeting the economic empowerment alter into the social empowerment of the marginalised groups which should necessarily reflect upon the changes in traditional social structure and practices. This paper analyses implementation of these policies and programmes in six villages in Uttar Pradesh. Methodologically, the paper is based on the primary survey and observation. Information is collected through structured and unstructured interviews with the beneficiaries of the policies and programmes related to social welfare and security.

Data and Information are also collected through non-participatory observation of the author while staying in the villages during the fieldwork. First section discusses the nature of policies and programmes that are being implemented at the ground in response to improve economic and social conditions of the socially and economically deprived sections of the society. This section reflects how these policies are targeting at social and economic inequalities in UP. Second section looks into the responses from targeted sections analysing whether these policies and programmes are delivering what they are expected to deliver. Third section analyses whether these policies and programmes have been able to bring economic and social empowerment to the targeted sections.

Policy Responses to the Empowerment of Marginalised Groups

The policy responses from the national and state governments to address the issue of marginalisation have mainly been evolved around the 'economic empowerment'. Even though, there are certain schemes and programmes that aim to promote human development status, these schemes offer contingencies rather than focusing on building sustainable human development. Since, In India, number of casual labour force is high, first priority of the government has been to feed these people through immediate

consumerable contingencies. In this case, less attention is given to sustainability of human development of marginalised sections because considerable efforts and resources of the government go into casual assistance. Therefore, Indian policies, right after Independence, could develop policies of 'help on the spot'. Public Distribution System can be an appropriate example which provides gains and other daily needed things to the poor.

Table 1 gives an account of few major human development schemes and programmes which are being implemented by both Central and state governments. Now we should look at each of the components of human development that aim to empower marginalised and poor sections of the society. The main point of this analysis is to see whether the nature of the benefit is sustainable or not, and how far existing policies respond to existing problems. The argument behind this enquiry is that if benefits which are being provided through different schemes mentioned in Table 1 do not provide sustainability to the beneficiary, then after consuming benefits beneficiary will be at same position as he/she was before getting the benefit. The benefits should enable them to match themselves with those who have ability to grab major economic benefits through streamline businesses and public services.

In education sector, India does not enjoy higher literacy rates (64 per cent). In UP, literacy rate is 56.3 per cent. Female literacy rate of UP is 42.2 per cent which is lower than all India average of female literacy (53.7 per cent). About 36 per cent of rural males and 70 per cent of rural females in UP are illiterate. Only 15 per cent of rural persons and 37 per cent of urban persons are reported to have received education up to secondary level or above and only about 14 per cent of the urban people and 2.8 per cent of the rural people had received education up to graduate level or above. Aggregate dropout rate in class I-X in UP for 2005-06 is 42.26 per cent. Dropout rate of boys and girls are 39.5 and 47.36 per cent, respectively. In this respect, UP is in better position than average of all India which claims 60.41 per cent for boys and 63.44 per cent for girls. Dropout rate in lower social groups in UP is very high. For SC community, it is 72.56 per cent which is more than the all India average 70.57 per cent.

Let us see how existing schemes and programmes respond to the educational needs of marginalised groups of the country in general and UP in particular. To address the issues of low enrolment and higher dropout rate, two main major schemes- Mid Day Meal (MDM) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay (KGBV) - are being implemented. MDM provides nutritious day meal to school children of primary and upper primary level during school hours. The main objective of MDM is to attract children from poor sections of society to enroll and keep them coming to schools. Since poor families prefer their children to be engaged in labour activities rather than sending them to school; this scheme also tends to prevent the practice of child labour. Similarly, KGBV provides elementary education with boarding facilities to girls from poor families. The objective of KGBV is to check the dropout among girls. This scheme is being implemented in pre-identified backward blocks. There is another scheme which was started by the UP Government i.e. Savitribai Phule Balika Shiksha Madad Yojana (SBSMY) which targets to attract girls at the secondary level by providing a bicycle and ₹ 25,000 in two instalments in two years. Scholarship is an old scheme which offers an amount of financial help to students of pre- and post-metric classes to carry on their studies.

Table 1: Major Social Security Programmes for the Marginalised Groups in UP

Sector	Scheme	Benefits	Beneficiaries
Education	Mid Day Meal (MDM)	Day food for school children	Students of primary and upper primary classes
	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay (KGBV)	Boarding facilities at elementary level for the girls	75 per cent girls from SC, ST, OBC and minorities and 25 per cent from poor families of backward rural areas
	Savitribai Phule Balika Shiksha Madad Yojana (SBSMY)	A bicycle and ₹ 25,000 in two instalments	Girl students from 11th and 12th Class
	Scholarships	Vary from ₹ 25 to ₹ 740 depending upon the class and social affiliation	Pre- and post-metric students from all sections of society
Health	Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)	Maternal benefits: medical help and care during delivery and ₹ 1400 for rural areas and ₹ 1000 for urban areas	Pregnant women from BPL families
	School Health Programme	Medical check-up and medicine	Students of primary and upper primary schools
	National Health Insurance Scheme	Hospitalisation coverage up to ₹ 30,000	Poor families
Employment	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme	100 days employment for a person in a household	Poor families

Educational schemes and programmes respond to few important problems, but at the same time ignore other vital problems. The quality of education at the primary and secondary levels is one of the important issues. Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) 2009[1] shows that only 24.2 per cent students from 1st to 8th std. of government schools can read capital letters of English. Similarly, the Survey shows that only 18.7 and 17.6 per cent students from 1st to 8th std. of government schools can subtract and divide, while 14.1 per cent students cannot do Arithmetic. The bad quality education has been a prominent reason

for growing reluctance among people to send their children to government schools. Table 2 shows the perception of the people about the quality of the education in the selected villages. People are satisfied with the infrastructural facilities in government schools but are extremely dissatisfied with the quality of teaching. Remarkably, all the respondents (100 per cent) express their dissatisfaction with the quality of education being provided in government schools. In case of attendance of appointed teachers in schools, villagers are very clear that teachers are not very honest to their duties.

Table 2: Quality of Education

Issues	Good	%	Bad	%	Don't Know	%	Total
Condition of the school building	77	85.6	13	14.4	0	0	90
Quality of education	0	0	90	100	0	0	90
	Yes	%	No	%	Don't Know	%	Total
Do the numbers of teachers in the school/college meet local requirement?	24	26.6	26	28.9	40	44.4	90
Do teachers come properly?	4	4.4	64	71.1	22	24.4	90

Source : Primary Survey.

Table 3 presents perception of the villagers about the MDM. More than 90 per cent respondents opine that this scheme is badly managed. More than 80 per cent respondents say that this scheme is under severe corruption. When respondents use the term 'badly', they do not mean only corruption but many other issues are also involved such as: the schedule of cooking food, carelessness of the cook while preparing food, quality of food material, vegetables and sanitation. Many respondents complain that responsible teachers and other authorities like village pradhan purchase low quality food materials. Respondents also point out that the quantity of food that is served to children is not enough to meet the needs of the children and remaining uncooked food material is sold out by responsible functionaries.

Table 3: Functioning of the Mid-Day Meal

Issues/Responses	Going on well	%	Badly managed	%	Don't Know	%	Total
How the MDM is being implemented	2	2.22	83	90.22	5	5.55	90
Is corruption involved in the functioning of this scheme	Yes	%	No	%	Don't Know	%	Total
	73	80.11	5	5.55	12	13.33	90

Source: Primary Survey.

Scholarship is another educational security scheme aiming to attract children for education and to provide them monitory support to meet their educational expenses.

Table 4 gives a picture of how scholarship schemes are being implemented in the villages.

Table 4 : Functioning of Scholarship

Issues/Responses	Yes	%	No	%	Don't Know	%	Total
Is scholarship being provided timely to the students?	18	20	39	43.33	33	36.67	90
Do children get full amount of scholarship?	14	15.56	40	44.44	36	40	90
If no, is corruption going on in this scheme?	40	44.44	0	0	0	0	40

Source : Primary Survey.

Corruption is a major issue involved with the implementation of scholarship schemes. Considerable number of people (43.33 per cent) complain that their children do not get scholarship in time. Responsible authorities always delay in disbursing the scholarship. Similarly, 44.44 per cent people mention that their children do not get full amount of scholarship because of the corruption going on in the implementation of this scheme. School authorities pretend that they had spent their own money to get the clearance of these scholarships from higher government offices. Therefore, they deduct that amount from the amount of the scholarship which is to be given to the children.

Now, let us see how health related schemes and programmes are responding to the needs of the people. UP is one of the states which scores lowest in health related indicators. UP registered 60 per cent life expectancy rate at birth between 2002 and 2006, while the life expectancy rate of India for the same period was 63.5 per cent. Infant mortality rate (IMR) in UP in 2007 was 80 (16th among all Indian states), much higher than the average IMR of all-India (63). In 2008, the IMR in UP came down to 67, but it is still higher than the all-India level (53). Only Odisha (71) and MP (72) are behind UP. In 2005-06, 47.3 per cent children below the age of three years in UP were underweight and 85.1 per cent were suffering from anaemia, while the all-India averages for the same indicators were 45.9 and 79.2 per cent, respectively (Singh: 2010, p. 77).

Existing schemes and programmes are not enough to deal with health related challenges in the State. Though Central Government is implementing National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), a programme which provides health infrastructure facilities along with the child and women health development programmes, this programme has not delivered expected outcomes. JSY has been an exception. JSY has increased the number of institutional deliveries. But it is doubtful whether JSY has any impact on reducing Infant Mortality Rate (Jain : 2010, p. 15). One of the crucial parts of health services is proper training and skill development in health facilitators. NRHM Review Mission notes that

none of skill development trainings has reached the ground (Mehrotra : 2008, p. 53). The only scheme that seems to provide a sustainable health security is National Health Insurance Scheme. It offers health insurance to poor which provides emergency health expenditure of ₹ 30,000 which the poor cannot afford by themselves.

Despite major attention being paid on infrastructure development, field realities do not reflect any impressive picture. Only one village has Allopathic sub-centre for health services. One sub-centre has been constructed in another village very recently and it is yet to be inaugurated. Rest five villages do not have any Primary Health Centre (PHC) or sub-centre. The habitants of these villages are dependent on the PHCs at their nearest town. Distance of these towns from villages varies from minimum two km to maximum seven km. Availability of doctors, other medical staff and facilities of medicines and proper care are lacking in PHCs where villagers generally go for first medical care. For example, 76 per cent respondents note that doctors appointed in the PHC do not come regularly. Frequency of attendance of the appointed doctors at their duty place is very low. Responses on the frequency of doctors' availability in PHC vary, as 25 per cent say that doctors come twice in a week and 16 per cent say thrice in a week. Though 32 per cent respondents say that they cannot give exact figure about the presence of the doctors and supporting staff at the duty place, they are quite sure that non-availability of doctors in PHCs is a major problem that they often face.

None of respondents from all six villages feel that the facilities provided in the PHCs around their locality are at the level of their satisfaction. It pushes people to rely on private health services, even though private services are very expensive and do not suit to the budget of villagers and poor. PHCs have also

been given very important responsibilities for disseminating health related information including information about vulnerable diseases, sanitation, health care and existing schemes and programmes. But, the field survey indicates that PHCs are not doing this work as part of their responsibilities. About 98 per cent respondents say that PHC at their village, or nearest village, do not provide any information about health related schemes and programmes available for the common people in rural areas. Similarly, PHCs also have very important responsibility to organise training camps and workshops to make people aware about health issues. But PHCs are failing in doing that. Reflections from the beneficiaries interviewed for the study are as follows:

* 98 per cent respondents say that no training camp or workshop has been organised in their villages in the duration of last three years. Poor facilities and infrastructure at the PHCs affect choice of the common people to rely on the public health centres for their health care.

* 94 per cent respondents say that medicines and other medical facilities are bad.

* 71 per cent respondents say that they do not prefer to go to nearest PHC in case their relatives are ill owing to poor facilities and non-availability of medical staff on emergency call.

* Remaining 29 per cent respondents who prefer to go to PHCs do so not because PHCs are good in taking care of their problems but since they do not have enough money to afford expenses of private nursing homes and doctors.

* Out of 29 per cent respondents, only 10 per cent say that PHCs are good while, in contrast, remaining 90 per cent say

that they go to public health centres because they do not have enough money to pay for private hospitals.

Let us move to another important human development aspect – employment. Employment situation in UP has been very unsatisfactory. In UP, only 10.9 per cent of the working population has regular employment, while 62.9 per cent are self-employed. Among the self-employed, 65.9 per cent of people are engaged in agriculture, and out of them 53.1 per cent people are casual labourers. A total of 21.69 per cent people are casual labourers[2]. Presently, the government does not have any substantive employment generation scheme, except the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) which aims to provide 100 days employment to a household in rural areas. But, this benefit is not sufficient to feed a house where normally 5-6 members live and lacks in providing sustainable employment benefits to poor families. Implementation of NREGS has been faulty and unproductive. On the functioning of NREGS, 90 per cent respondents label it as mal-functioned scheme. While stating reasons for the malfunctioning of NREGS, 39 per cent respondents say that corruption is responsible for bad implementa-tion of the scheme; 22.5 per cent say that distribution of benefits under this scheme is discriminatory.

People's Responses : Have Policies of Empowerment of Marginalised Groups Delivered?

It is very important to see how people from marginalised groups feel after realising the implementation of such policies which, principally, aim to empower socially and economically disadvantaged groups in the country. This analysis contains three specific issues to be examined. One, whether benefits offered by such policies and programmes are reaching real beneficiaries. Second, whether

these benefits are adequate to meet the basic needs of the marginalised people. And third, whether the delivered benefits have translated into the real empowerment of marginalised groups. It is found that local politics plays an important role in determining as to who will take what benefit. About 50 per cent respondents accepted that they have taken help from different political leaders in ensuring benefits of ongoing social security schemes (Table 5). The intensity of the political intervention can be understood from the fact that 91 per cent respondents feel that without taking political help it is difficult to get benefits of ongoing welfare and human development schemes. Beneficiaries' intention to seek help from political leaders at the local level shows two patterns. First, most of the beneficiaries approached the leader of their own caste. Second, majority of beneficiaries took help from the leaders of those parties which represent the same caste respondents belong to. This fact shows that patron-client relationship is well integrated in the distribution of social welfare and security benefits.

Political intervention in the process of implementation of social security schemes is limited to only selection of beneficiaries. Politics do not help beneficiaries in avoiding administrative mal-practices like red-tapism and corruption. For instance, all respondents who have taken help from political leaders confirm that they paid bribe to government officials to secure benefits (Table 5). Therefore, results suggest that political intervention is becoming necessary to get benefits, no matter a person is eligible to get it; and administrative mal-practices have made their own reign irrespective of the political power and intervention.

Further, the greater question that comes on the way is whether the benefits that are being delivered to the marginalised sections of the society are sufficient to meet the needs.

Table 5 : Political Intervention in the Implementation of Schemes

	Yes	%	No	%	Asked but leader denied/don't know	%	Total	%
Have you taken help from any political leader/s?	44	48.8	40	44.4	6	6.6	90	100
If yes, do you feel that without taking help from political leader, you could not have received the benefit?	40	90.9	2	4.5	2	4.5	44	100
Have you paid bribe?	44	100	-	-	-	-	44	100

Source : Primary Survey.

Field experiences reveal that the quantity of the benefits is insufficient. Majority of beneficiaries do not find benefits adequate to meet their needs. For more than 86 per cent respondents said that provided benefits are not sufficient to meet their needs. Out of those who could find benefits insufficient, 57 per cent beneficiaries said that they had to invest more than what government provided. Rest have spent either less than or equal to the resources that they got from the government support. Interestingly, out of those who sought more resources to meet their needs, 29 per cent have borrowed from others and rest have invested self-earned resources. From these results it is clear that the benefits aiming at empowerment of marginalised sections are not adequate. And, since support from the policies and programmes are not adequate, it compels poor people to borrow from others which adds further misery into their lives.

Now, let us see whether policies and programmes that aim to empower marginalised groups are really empowering them. Though empowerment is an outcome which can never be felt overnight, no better than them (marginalised group) can tell whether they feel empowered or not. In this regard, it is worth to mention that in UP, *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP), a political party which claims that it represents Scheduled Castes (SCs), most marginalised section of Indian society, is in power. BSP has adopted the Sarvajan policy that aims to deliver social welfare and human development benefits to all sections of society with more focus on socially deprived sections. The philosophy behind this policy is to bring social coherence. Policy envisions that upper caste people would mingle with lower caste people and would prevail social harmony among them which would end social discrimination. Since implementation of polices and programmes in UP are being carried away under the slogan of *Sarvajan,* it is interesting to see whether the policy has brought any change in their social status. If social status of marginalised groups changes, economic inequalities would automatically go down. In India, economic inequalities are predominantly driven by social relations.

Table 6 reflects the responses from the SC community as well as all the respondents. One important point to be observed here is that people from marginalised groups realise that certain policies are being implemented for them. In this study, out of 90 respondents 49 belong to SC community. All SC respondents feel that they are getting benefits because they belong to SC community. Implication of this result is that there is a sense of realisation among the marginalised sections that they get space in the policy domains and there is an exclusive attention being paid by the government for their upliftment. But, on the issue whether these policies have really delivered the changes that would lead marginalised groups to the empowerment, responses from marginalised people put a question on the feasibility of these policies and programmes. While responding to the question whether people from marginalised sections who have taken benefits of various social welfare schemes feel that *Sarvajan* policy has resulted in any positive changes in the relations between SCs and upper castes, 92 per cent respondents answered negatively. It shows that these policies have not delivered social change. It means that marginalised sections, even though they are receiving various benefits, are discriminated socially, and therefore, economic inequalities are likely to exist.

Table 6 : People's Response Over Impact of Policies and Programmes

	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%	Total	%
Do you think that you are getting benefits because you belong to the SC community?	48	97.9	-	-	1	2.0	49	100
Do you feel that Sarvajan policy has resulted in any positive change in relations between SCs and upper castes?	1	1.1	83	92.2	6	6.6	90	100

Source: Primary Survey.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results presented in previous section show that policies and programmes that aim to empower marginalised sections have not been successful in achieving their goals. Problems that come on the way to achieve this goal are occurring at three levels. One, policies do not address human development problems fully. Many human development aspects are untouched by the existing policy initiatives. Second, the implementation of such policies is affected by administrative malpractices and attracts involvement of local politics which has a cost for real beneficiaries. Third, benefits that are being delivered lack sufficiency and sustainability. Let us discuss one by one.

As discussed in the fist section, schemes and programmes aiming at human development do not reflect upon the real situations. Both Central and State governments are implementing various policies and missions which are inadequate to address human development challenges that exist on the ground. An appropriate question emerges as to why it is happening. There are two issues

to look into in this regard. One, whether Indian state has narrowed its scope as a welfare state and is not allowing its treasury to be opened beyond a limit. In this context, Jayal's (1994) argument stands valid that India is not a complete welfare state, but is an interventionist state with a limited welfarist orientation. Jayal argues that the morale critic of the welfare state launched by neo-liberalism has been absent in Indian context. According to these critics, distributive measures under the umbrella of the welfare state go against the individual freedom and rights. Rights have never been central to the philosophy of welfare that underpin the welfarist initiatives of the Indian state. Since welfare is not expressed in the language of rights, its abandonment could arguably be a relatively simple matter, as there are neither legal/constitutional nor moral or political criteria defining the claimants of welfare rights (Jayal: 1994, p. 19-20).

Second issue is the politics of affirmative action and welfare. Indian Constitution allows Indian state to provide special measure to those who are socially and economically marginalised, and that has created the policy of affirmative actions. But this policy has become a political instrument than a welfare contingency. Since Indian polity is very diverse and fragmented, each State has its own political realm which is necessarily different from others. This diversity has prevented national policies to be implemented in uniform shape. Since any policy has to be adjusted into the political dynamics of the particular state and must bring incentives to the politics; aims and objective of the policy get distant shape while travelling from one state to another. This is one of the reasons which clarifies as to why some Indian States are doing well in certain areas of human development and social welfare, but at the same time, few States have failed. Therefore, it is the politics which shapes social welfare policies, not needs of marginalised groups.

At the implementation level, policies and programmes have to face local political dynamics too, irrespective of administrative malpractices, which make execution of policy initiatives difficult. The local politics may intervene in the process of distribution of public goods in two ways. First, it may work negatively, and may divert the flow of public goods towards those people who are not entitled to receive those goods. This kind of practice takes place either because of strong patron-client relationship or due to the prevalence of corrupt practices among politicians. Secondly, the local politics may work positively in terms of either providing information about existing schemes and programmes or facilitating eligible people to access those services. In this study, the first trend of political intervention is all-encompassing, while latter one is nearly absent. Local political dynamics change according to changes in the government at the State level. If a particular party is in power in the State, local leaders of that party influence the distribution of benefits of different schemes.

In addition to the political construction of policies of empowerment and influence of local politics, policies themselves attract criticism of not being adequate and sustainable to meet the basic needs of the people. This fact questions the eligibility of policies of empowerment. Empowerment means that a person should be able to live a dignified life in a society without lacking any basic needs that are necessary to fulfill the conditions of a dignified life. A person cannot be empowered by providing contingencies, but it should be made sure that these contingencies should enable a person to stand on his/her feet to avoid further contingencies. Most of the policies that are being implemented to empower marginalised provide short-term benefits which are consumable at one time. These policies lack sustainability.

Box 1: Suran Village- Local Politics and Distribution of Benefits

Suran is numerically dominated by the upper castes with sizeable part of SCs. Village Pradhan (chairperson) belongs to Brahmin (a high caste) community. Pradhan's family, and many other Brahmins of the village, were associated with the ruling party (BSP) at the time of last State assembly elections 2007. SCs who are integral constituency of the ruling party are unhappy with the functioning of panchayat and distribution of benefits as Brahmin Pradhan cares for his own people. Because, Brahmins are having political link with the BSP, SCs get stuck in going opposite to them but they are not happy with the way Brahmins treat them. One youth from SC community who is very active within the local party organisation said, "We are bonded with the party, we can not resist since local MLA is their people and on other hand it is the party which keep us together, but they do not bother us, they do what is suited for their interest". This kind of expression is the reflection of the way power has centralised in local dominant caste i.e. Brahmins and the way power is exercised. Since now upper castes are part of party they get benefit of hesitation from the side of oppressed castes who are politically associated with the upper caste under the banner of same party.

As one villager pointed out, "Pradhan gives benefits to those who are very close to him or his family or people from his caste". One villager further complained that the work scheduled under NREGS, is being provided to Pradhan's own people, and those who are not very well acquainted with them get very less work. Since, Pradhan is himself from the ruling party, common people or people from the BSP do not get scope to go against him. The domination of Brahmins in the village gets strengthened because of splits within the SC community itself. Nat (A sub-caste of SC which traditionally plays shows in the village for the amusement of the people) and Dohres (another sub-caste of SC) are two different groups which are against each other. Nat usually support Brahmins, therefore, they are away from Dohres. Being with the Brahmins, Nat gets more benefits of different schemes and programmes than Dohres.

While summing up the discussion it can be noted that policies of empowerment of marginalised groups have not delivered economic empowerment, therefore, marginalised groups are also not socially empowered. These policies have potential to provide benefits to the needy which can solve the problem at one time but lacks sustainability. Similarly, evidences show that these policies do not have ability to negotiate with the social traditions and practices which are major causes for the discrimination of huge chunk of population. Unless social discrimination is addressed, there is very little hope to empower those people who are at the margin of society and deprived of economic benefits.

Notes

1   Annual Survey of Education Report for Rural UP 2009, Assessment Survey Evaluation Research (ASER), available in www.asercentre.org, viewed on May 15th, 2010.

2   NSSO, 62nd round, Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, Report No. 522, 2005-06 and India Labour Report 2008.

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