

An Introduction to the Caste-wise Socio-political Status of Women of Sonbhadra District of Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Resham Lal

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, India*

ABSTRACT

In every society, numerous processes of change are operating simultaneously which bring about variations and modifications in its structure and functioning. However, the rate and direction of change vary from one society to another. Since the past few years there have been myriad changes and shifts in India's traditional society. Many determinants like education, urbanization, migration and other socio-cultural reasons have been influencing these changes in the conventional Indian society. Of these changes one that has received deep attention is the changing status of women. Women being exposed to education and paid labour force have been the two important modernization factors which have to a great extent led to change in the status, position and role of women. The article results from the field-based study of Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. The present article tries to summaries caste-wise discrimination, source of livelihood, socio-political status, and participation of women in diverse positions.

KEYWORDS: *Political Participation, Democratic Institutions, Panchayati Raj, Status and Stratification, Caste, Casteism, Patriarchy, Discrimination and Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION:

Sonebhadra is the second largest District of Uttar Pradesh, so far as area concern. Sonbhadra district came into existence in 1989. It is carved out from the Mirzapur district. It lies in the extreme southeast of the state and is bounded by Mirzapur District to the northwest, Chandauli District to the north, Kaimur and Rohtas districts of Bihar state to the northeast, Garhwa district of Jharkhand state to the east, Koriya and Surguja districts of Chhattisgarh state to the south, and Singrauli district of Madhya Pradesh state to the west.

The ancient reference of the district is not well mentioned in the chronics. The Valley of Son River abounds in caves that were the earliest dwellings of the primaeval inhabitants. It is said that 'Bhars' had settlements along with Cheros, Searis, Kols and Kherwars communities in the district. Up to the 5th century, there was the rule of 'Kol' kings on the Vijaygarh fort. This district was famous as the second 'Kashi' during the 11th to 13th century. In the 9th century B.C., the Brahmadutt dynasty was subdivided by Nagas. In the 8th and 7th century B.C., the present area of the district was in Kaushal and Magadha. Kushans and Nagas also held supremacy over this region before the advent

of the Gupta period. After the death of Harshvardhan in the latter half of the 7th century, it remained under the control of the Gurjars and the Pratihars until 1025 A.D., before Mohammad Ghazni drove them out. This area was under the administration of various Governors of Mughal emperors. Some of the forts, such as *Angori*, were under Madan Shah's control. This district has a significant role in the history of the freedom struggle with the Britishers. The history of the mutiny of 1857 finds mentioned in the historical events of the district. The southern region of Sonbhadra is referred to as the "Energy Capital of India." This region became industrial heaven from an area of forest and hills. Some of the mountains have limestone, and many of them have coal. There were some small rivers running through the area, and the major was the Son River.

The population of the district is 1,862,559 divided into 1,548,217 in rural and 314,342 in urban areas. The most populous tahsil is Robertsganj, with a 901,830 population, followed by Dudhi tahsil having 670,183. The least populous tahsil is Ghorawal, with a population of 290,546. The maximum urban population in Dudhi tahsil, 181,521, is followed by Robertsganj with 125,530 urban population, whereas the least urban population is in Ghorawal tahsil, which is 7,291. At the 2011 Census, the district has 16.88 percent of its population living in towns as compared to the state, i.e., 22.27 percent. The proportion of the urban population is highest at 27.09 percent in Dudhi tahsil, followed by 13.92 percent in Robertsganj tahsil and least at 2.51 per cent in Gharawal tahsil. The density of population in the district is 270 as compared to 829 in the state. In the rural areas of the district, the population density is 228.

The sex ratio in the district is 918, which is higher than the state average (912). In the rural areas of the district, the sex ratio is high at 927, while it is only 871 in urban areas. The rural sex ratio of the district is lower than the state average (894). The sex ratio among the three tahsils varies between 911 in Dudhi to 925 in Ghorawal. Among blocks, the sex ratio varies from 917 in Chopan to 952 in Babhani. Among towns of the district, the least sex ratio is found in Kanaudia Chemical & Industries Ltd., Renukoot ITS (770) and the highest in Dudhi Nagar Panchayat (924). The sex ratio of the population in the age group 0-6 is 925 in the district, high to 918 from the total population. The sex ratio in the age-group 0-6 of rural areas is 933 against 868 in urban areas. The sex ratio among eight blocks varies from 923 in Robertsganj to 956 in Babhani.

Sonbhadra district, having 64.03 percent of the population, is literate against 67.68 percent in Uttar Pradesh. In the district, 74.92 percent of the male population is literate as compared to 77.28 percent in the state. However, among females, the literacy in the district is 52.14 percent as compared to 57.18 percent at the state level. In the district, the literacy rate is 84.31 percent in urban areas as against 59.60 percent in rural areas. The gap in male/female literacy rate is 24.48 percentage points in rural areas as compared to 13.80 in urban areas. The literacy rate among blocks varies between 50.21 percent in Chopan to 67.04 percent in Robertsganj. Similarly, the literacy rate among towns varies from 66.0 percent in Villimar Kundi to 92.02 percent in Hindalco Industries Ltd., Renukoot ITS.

Caste-wise Stratification

Sonbhadra has traditionally been the centre of diverse castes, tribes, communities, religions, and traditions. However, the marginalized segment has been occupying the fringes of consciousness of the people living in this district. There seems to be a case of double discrimination of the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) in Uttar Pradesh, primarily in the District of Sonbhadra. The first level of discrimination is social- by being SC/ ST, they are identified with backwardness and

face numerous prejudices. The second level of discrimination is equally severe as the institution of the state itself does not seem to be clear about the identity of these groups to the extent of placing them sometimes in the category of STs and other times in the SC and still on other occasions enlisting them neither as SCs nor STs. One can well imagine a community that constitutes less than 20 percent of the state's total population, whose quality of life can shoot up with minimum but well planned and systematic strategizing. The Schedule caste and Schedule Tribe community in Uttar Pradesh, a marginalized social group in the state, has struggled to safeguard their rights and identity. In the era of globalization, not only their social, cultural, religious, economic, ecological, and political identity is at stake, but their legal status as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes has also been in flux, thereby bringing in uncertainty and confusion in the minds of the marginalized community as well as various stakeholders concerned about enhancement in their quality of life.

Women's struggle for equality took a big step forward with the coming of Indian Independence. Indian Constitution guarantees equality of men and women (Articles 14 and 15), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39-d). The Constitution allows special provisions to be made by the state in favour of women and children (Article 15-3), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 15 (A)-e), provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42). Through laws, the government of India gave equal status between males and females, such as the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 made a daughter an equal co-heir with a son. Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 permitted the dissolution of marriage on specific grounds. Social reform movements, freedom struggle, women's movements and Constitutional provisions made a tremendous impact towards changing the status of Indian women. Indian Constitution brought many promises and dreams for Indian women: the dream of an egalitarian, just and democratic society in which both the sexes would have an equal voice.

On the one hand, women are at the peak of the ladder of success. Women achievers can be located in socio-economic, cultural, educational, and other fields of modern India. But on the other flipside, they are mutely suffering violence, discrimination, marginalization, malnourishment, cruelty, rape and defamation afflicted on them by society and their family members. The majority of them are still in the grip of patriarchal social norms and subservient positions. In spite of the constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity, patriarchy asserts itself through legal loopholes and manipulations to consolidate age-old domination. Government programmes remained economical and political in nature, i.e., to increase economic and political opportunities for women. However, no programme has been launched till the date to address religious-cultural and traditional discrimination against women, probably the most important reasons for women's subservience.

Sonbhadra district, despite having abundant natural resources, energy suppliers, rich in biodiversity and forestation, a number of industrial hubs and places of diverse cultures and communities, the region suffering from marginalization, discrimination, vicious cycle of unemployment, migration, caste-based atrocities, violation of human rights and most of the population forced to live below the poverty line.

The district is home to the largest percentage of the population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as compared to other districts of Uttar Pradesh. On the development parameter, both communities are still marginalized and face exploitation by the government officials, police personals, contractors, *Baniya* (tradesman) and dominant caste.

Among Sonbhadra's population, the Other Backwards Castes is in the third position after SC&ST in terms of population, and their concentration is mostly picked locations in villages or urban areas, where they have up to a limit as agricultural land, occupational shops, traditional occupation, control over the market in Duddhi and Ghorawal tahsil. Nevertheless, the least number of OBCs are living as same as SC and ST's communities, namely *Lohar, Kumhar, Prajapati, Gosain, Bind, Biyar* and *Noniya*.

In Duddhi tahsil, *Baniya* (Rauniar, Kalwar, Teli and Sonar) are dominant. In Ghorawal tahsil Kurmi, Koiri and Ahir are the dominant castes. In Robertsganj tahsil, the upper caste, Baniya, Ahir, Kurmi and Koiri are the dominant caste.

The upper caste population in Sonbhadra is divided into two parts. One is north and west of the Kaimur plateau region, namely Robertsganj, Ghorawal, Chatra and Nagwa blocks. In these areas, the upper caste population have been living for centuries (it is true that they had come from other parts before centuries). Another flipside is southeast of the Kaimur plateau, such as Chopan, Babhani, Myorpur, Duddhi, Karma and Kon blocks, in these areas, the upper caste population came from the Gangetic plain regions since the 1950s. The upper caste migrants control agricultural land, natural resources and establish their religious-cultural hegemony over local inhabitants.

The district has a better position in sex ratio than other parts of Uttar Pradesh, but the literacy rate remains low compared to other parts of the state. The literacy rate of Sonbhadra's women is less than the other districts of UP, but the literacy rate is varied caste wise.

Caste-wise Women's Status

Most of the Tribal women work outside their homes and are engaged in various activities as daily labourers, agricultural work and making bamboo pots. Young girls of the Tribal community, most of the time they do not go to school regularly or become dropouts from school. Even low-income families do not always want to send their daughters to school because their helping hands in work would be reduced. The effect of patriarchy could be seen in most of the tribal people and so whatever money women get from their work they give it to their husband and the husband very often spends the money on activities like drinking. In fact, Tribal people are impoverished. Therefore, women of the tribal community also work with their husbands to fulfil their basic needs. They do not have any fixed occupation. Due to this, they face sexual harassment, rape, brutality at the workplace. Lack of awareness about nutritional requirements mostly leaves the Tribal women weak, frail and suffering from various diseases. The literacy rate of Tribal women in Sonbhadra is very less (30.97); due to this, they are unaware of their socio-economic and political rights. If they won the election such as *Pradhan, Block Pramukh* Chief of the block) and *Jila Panchayat Sadasya* (district panchayat member), someone else was running it (dominant caste). Women's empowerment does not matter because they suffer from triple burden as patriarchy, poverty, and ill-health.

The Scheduled Caste women's literacy rate is meagre (42.85%); due to this, they are unaware of their socio-political rights, exploited, tortured, raped by the family members or others. Their life expectancy is low due to child marriage, malnourishment, mortality and ill condition of physical and mental health. Due to illiteracy, they face unemployment, engaged in the unorganized sector, agricultural lands, ballast breaking factories and coalmines where they get minimum wages compared to the males. They face sexual harassment, rape, and brutality at the workplace most of

the time. The Scheduled Caste women are poor among the poor, remaining marginalized and weaker section. Child marriage is prevalent in the Scheduled Caste family. Even today, all the SCs face untouchability, or it could be said that untouchability is in prevalence at large. *The reality of this district is that the upper caste practices untouchability with the Dalits, but the Tribals also do it in the same way as the people of the upper casts.* There were very few female Pradhan (elected Chief of Village). If she won the election, someone else was running it (dominant caste).

The Brahmanism and patriarchy compared to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have influenced other backwards communities in Sonbhadra. Child marriage in this community has been prevalent at large. They think that girls should get married as soon as possible and get rid of their responsibility. They also believe that girls' job is to take care of the house and not study and write. On the other flipside boy's family think that the boy should be get married soon, the dowry he will get in marriage, the boy will do some business work, when the business starts going well, then the girls will be brought in four or five years later with customs, and then the family will run well. These types of thoughts have led to the poor literacy rate in girls and boys. The impact of child marriage, the girls, become early mothers, she suffering from ill health, child mortality, maternal mortality, anaemia, low life expectancy rate and face other problems.

Brahmanism remains very strong in the OBCs community; without them, no ritual can be done, whether it is marriage or death, all cannot be performed without rites. If there is a low-income family of OBCs community, then too cannot complete any work without any rituals, even his land is mortgaged. The influence of Brahmanism on OBCs' females, despite having constitutional rights, the socio-political participation of OBCs' females remains low if she gets elected in the local government system, the running it by her family member. Social participation of OBCs' females is a social taboo still in the present. An inter-caste marriage is taboo. If someone does this, then his community and other community also boycott him.

The so-called upper caste community in Sonbhadra are rich, well off and dominant in society. The composition of upper caste is mostly in urban areas and are less in rural areas. They are mostly in the white colour job, teaching, advocate, businessperson, contractor, police and property owners. They are dominant, influence other communities, and run the society on their own terms. The female of this community is much more influenced by the patriarchy and Brahmanism rites. Despite this, the female literacy and employment rates are high in comparison with the other communities of Sonbhadra. Child marriages are low, inter-caste marriages are socially taboo, and the social interaction of females in this community remains marginal compared to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women. The women of this society follow more discrimination than other communities. If a woman of another community touches them, they purify themselves. Although their social participation is less but political participation is high, they get elected as a local government body and state and national assembly.

If summarize the above as a whole in the context of females:

1. Girls child mortality and maternal mortality rate are higher;
2. Societal and patriarchal norms preferred the boys rather than girls in family succession and parental property;
3. Female's health conditions are ill, and they suffer anaemia, transferable disease (AIDS, HIV), malnourished and low life expectancy rate;

4. Child marriages are prevalent at large, inter-caste marriages are socially taboo, but widow marriages are permissible, divorce is a usual practice and remarriage is a common norm in Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and Other Backward Caste.
5. Literacy and employability rate are less, female participation in unorganized sector are higher, most of the workplaces are not safe for women where they face discrimination in wages, physical, mental and sexual harassment, rape and kill;
6. Economically women are poor among poor due to this; they have not purchasing power capacity, are dependent on their family members and are not making the decision independently;
7. Patriarchy and Brahmanism are in prevalence at large, societal norms and traditions cannot complete without rites;
8. Despite India got scientific, economic and political advanced, the untouchability and other discriminatory practices remaining intact in the society;
9. Despite having constitutional rights for women, women are less politically aware, they have been elected in political institutions but run it by others. They are the only puppet politically.

In last, changing the status of women in India is a challenging task. We need to acknowledge that gender-based discrimination is deep-rooted social malice practised in India in many forms for thousands of years. The malice is not going to go away in a few years or, for that matter, by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts. Formulating laws and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the time, these laws and policies just remain on paper. On the other hand, the ground situation just remains the same and, in many instances, worsens further. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination and women empowerment in India is the long-drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth, development and emancipation.

REFERENCE:

- i. Against Dalit Women in India, NCDHR, New Delhi.
- ii. Agarwal, S. (1999) 'Genocide of women in Hinduism', Sudrasthan Books, Jabalpur.
- iii. Agger, R.E. & Goldrich Daniel (1958), "Community Power-structure and Partisanship," *American Sociological Review*, August, p. 23.
- iv. Ahuja, Ram (2003), Social problems in India, Rawat Publication, Jaipur.
- v. Alavi, Seema (1998), Sepoys and the Company Tradition and transition in Nothern India 1770-1830, Delhi: Oxford University Press India, p. 5.
- vi. Ambedkar, B.R. (1946) "What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables," Thacker and Co. Pvt. Ltd., Bombay.
- vii. Ambugudia, Jagannath (2011), Scheduled Tribes and the Politics of Inclusion in India. Asian Social Work and Policy Review, Blackwell Publishing Asia.

-
- viii. Bagh, Sartik (2015), "Discrimination and Beyond," IJDTs, Vol. 03, Issue 01, Jan-June 2015, pp: 16-18.
- ix. Banerjee, R. (2008), "The Decline and fall of the Adivasi Homeland: A Tale of Two Worlds," *The India Economy Review*, Vol. 5 No.3.
- x. Baruah, B. (2013), "Role of Electronic Media in Empowering Rural Women Education of North East India," *Abhibyakti*, Annual Journal, Issue 1, p. 23.
- xi. Batliwala, The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Source
- xii. Chakrabarty, Manas and Yang L. Bhutia (2007), "Empowering Indian Women in the new wake of Globalisation", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 68, No. 01, p: 115.
- xiii. Chakravarty S (2013), "Women's Empowerment in India: Issues, Challenges and Future Directions," *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 5, No. 1 pp: 154-163.
- xiv. Deshpande, S. and Sethi S. (2010), "Role and Position of Women Empowerment in Indian Society," *International Referred Research Journal of Social Science*, p. 12.
- xv. Dhruva, Hazarika (2011), "Women Empowerment in India: a Brief Discussion," *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, Vol. 1, No.3.
- xvi. Dr. Yunus, Saba and D r.Varma, Seema (2015), "Legal Provisions For Women Empowerment In India", *International Journal of Humanities and Management Sciences (IJHMS)* Volume 3, Issue 5, p. 10.
- xvii. Karuna, Chanana (2004), "Gender and Disciplinary Choices: Women in Higher Education in India. Paper prepared for the UNESCO Colloquium on Research and Higher Education Policy Knowledge, Access and Governance: Strategies for Change, Paris.
- xviii. Kavitha, A. and Nagaraj G.H. (2011), "Women Empowerment through SHGs: A Case Study," *Southern Economists*, Vol. 50, pp: 9-12.
- xix. Md. Reja Ahammad, Md.Reja (2017), "Towards Empowerment of Dalit Women –A Brief Outline", *Anudhyan: An International Journal of Social Sciences (AIJSS)*, Volume2, Issue 1, ISSN 2455-6319, p. 4.
- xx. Meghalaya State Development Report-2015.
- xxi. Mehta, D. Hemangi Mehta (2011), A Comparative Study of Undergraduate Students on Role of Education on Women Empowerment, Saurasthtra University, Rajkot, Gujrat, p. 1.
- xxii. Roy, G. (2015), Study on Condition of Schedule Caste Women in India After Independence Special Reference to Bihar: An Analysis, *Proceeding of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 76, pp: 894.
- xxiii. Ruchi (2013), "Educational Status and Mobility of Scheduled Caste Women: With Special Reference to Chohala Village Community in Jammu City," *Acme International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol. 1, Issue11.
-

-
- xxiv. Russell, R V. & Lal, Hira (1975), *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, Cosmo Publication, Delhi.
- xxv. Sakhivel, T. (2015), "A Study on the Constraints Militating Against the Attainment of Empowerment of Women in India," *International Journal of Business and Economic Research*, Vol. 01, No. 01, p. 43.
- xxvi. <http://www.economictimes.com>, accessed date January 07, 2019.
- xxvii. <http://www.geocities.com/realitywithbite/hindu.htm>.
- xxviii. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3375426.
- xxix. <https://sonbhadra.nic.in/history/>
- xxx. <https://sonbhadra.nic.in/history/>
- xxxi. <https://ssi.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Internship-Report-by-Ms.-Tanisha-Khandelwal.pdf>.
- xxxii. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57677253>.
- xxxiii. Census Report of India 2011