

**Dr. B. R Ambedkar's Thoughts and Philosophy towards Gender mainstreaming and Empowerment in the contemporary India : A study in the tribal lands of Madhya Pradesh**

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**Abstract:**

Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was a great personality, thinker, philosopher, social reformer-cum-reconstructor and Nation builder, who highlighted various issues in pre-independence India, especially the liberation of the depressed and untouchable communities in the caste-ridden Brahmanical administrative society to bring out the social changes through Constitutional safeguards. He believed in social transformation through his emphasis on the human rights, state socialism and political democracy through awakening, awareness generation, political manoeuvres, upliftment and legislations with the application of his intellectuality and his role in the drafting of Indian constitution, which is basically social concern. After the attainment of Independence, Indian constitution-based on governance system carried out a number of changes in our social system towards class-based society and but still social inequality and injustice is propounded amongst the women due to cultural barriers and improper implementations of the policies, programmes and schemes in the gender sensitization, mainstreaming, emancipation and empowerment in the mainstream of development.

Attempt has been made in this paper to discuss in rational, empirical and scientific ways on the process of gender equality and empowerment with illustrations in real-life situation in the tribal women in the forest economy of tribal lands of Madhya Pradesh.

**Key words:** Ambedkar's thoughts, social inequality, Social justice, Gender mainstreaming, women empowerment

**Introduction**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was an Indian leader and founding father of Indian Constitution. He was very much influential person during the colonial era and post-independence period of India. He belonged to a Dalit (In English depressed) or in other words 'untouchable', which was traditionally the most underprivileged, oppressed and marginalized group in Indian society. His focus was social and political rights of these backward and weaker sections of the society, who are basically lying at the bottom or in the lower-rung of the social hierarchy and suffered the worst from unequal assignments and entitlements of rights. The untouchables suffered from social exclusion and discrimination involving certain rights which include civil, cultural, religious and economic rights and particularly the notion of untouchability, which is unique to the untouchable caste only as they are considered impure and polluting and unfit for social association and inter-relation with the castes above. Ambedkar rose to eminence as a social reformer as and subsequently social reformer-cum-reconstructor and a leader of the Depressed Classes of India. As such, he worked hard for their upliftment from the down-trodden position they were living in, as a result of social, economic, religious and political disabilities, sanctioned by religion and imposed by custom. The main aim and mission of

Ambedkar's life was to try to lead the Depressed Classes towards a higher social, political and economic status and to free them from the stigma of Untouchability that lay upon their foreheads. In other words, he desired to secure for the Depressed Classes, complete equality, which at par with the Hindus. He organised them and led them to agitate in a peaceful manner for the vindication of their rights. "Education, Organisation and Agitation" were the key-words of his Self-Respect Movement.

The Ambedkarian concept of social exclusion means a person or community as being excluded from social relations due to inferior caste. Thus, his analysis of the status of particular section of a society in terms of social exclusion, which means the alienation or disenfranchisement of certain people within a society. It refers to ways in which individuals may become cut-off from full involvement in the wider society. It is often connected to person's social class, educational status, relationships in childhood and living standards and how these might affect access to various opportunities. It also applies to some degree to people with a disability, to minority men and women of all races, to the elderly, and to youth. It is also tied to equal opportunity. At the present day this concept of social exclusion may be applicable to the women section, when we find a large section of women are deprived of the various opportunities and considerably backward in comparison to the men sections.

On the above issue, to resolve this social exclusion Babasaheb raised the aspects of social justice and social democracy. We can talk about social justice from different perspectives, like political, social, economic, and religious. Social justice is that sort of justice which prescribes certain ideals closely related to human society; it sustains the existence and continuity of the individuals, family, society and the nation; its implementation safeguards the interests of the weaker sections of society and removes all the serious unjust imbalances found between man and woman, so that the lives of all the citizens become improved and emancipated. As a result, every man, according to his own potentiality and merit, may avail of the opportunities for acquiring social goal of his own liking and outlook (Jatava, 2006:16). Social justice being multifaceted deals with various aspects of human life and society, focusing on the preservation of the rights of the handicapped, marginalized, and depressed people. It deals with the people who are intentionally made victims of exploitation, injustice and unsociability, e.g., bonded labourers and unpaid scavengers (ibid : 21). Dr.Ambedkar accepted that there are moral and legal considerations behind the concept of social justice. He also accepted justice as a guiding and evaluative principle. His concept of social justice was based on human values such as liberty, equality and fraternity (Ambedkar, 1990).

Ambedkar emphasized egalitarian institutions, considering in connection with caste system and social exclusion Ambedkar's concepts of egalitarian can be shaped into an institution or society, known as social democracy, which is a political ideology that supports economic and political interventions to promote social justice within the framework of capitalist economy and a policy regime involving society, by abolishing discrimination of the society to ensure emancipation, empowerment & development. His vision encompassed political, social and economic democracy. According to Babasaheb the principle of social equality was the cornerstone of a stable society Ambedkarian perspective differs from the present-day economic socialism, which contrasts with social exclusion and discrimination in

relation to the caste system and he raised the idea of “capacity deprivation, and not poverty in the outcome of the caste system. Hence, the social democracy becomes the anti-thesis of social exclusion (Ambedkar, 1948).

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Ambedkar sought to solve the problem of social disharmony through socio-economic upliftment of Depressed Classes. He wanted to incorporate legal safeguards in the Constitution of India and to bring regulatory reforms to bring equalities and to pave the way for positive discriminations towards depressed classes including women. He was concerned about the inhuman and subservient position of Hindu women as a result of the inequalities ordained in the religious texts. He urged for a common code for the Hindu Community that would do away with the rules of Hindu law which were scattered in innumerable decisions of various High courts. In the constitutions there are number of provisions are given in the article no. 14, 15(3), 16 (2), 19, 21 and 323 for giving them the rights as fundamental rights, non permissible sex-differences, property choices, consent for divorce, adoption of child, equal wage, choices of jobs etc.

### **Tribal women culture and identified issues:**

If we discuss the Gendernity and Genderhood within the above philosophy and thoughts of Ambedkar, we can cite a number of incidences of physical violence, mental torture, discrimination in employment opportunities and family disharmony due to hostile attitudes of the society as occurred every day. In tribal society context, women and nature are inseparable from each other as nature is governed by feminine principle –life-supporting, sharing and diversity and the women’s support and contribution in upholding the society are immense. In the various studies on the tribal women in India (Mann 1987, Chauhan 1990, Ghosh 1987, Majumdar 1973, Rivers 1973), they are shown as valuable human resources who contribute in domestic, social, cultural and aesthetic life. In tribal societies a woman supports the whole family from dawn to dusk starting from cleaning of house and utensils, fetching water, collection of fuel wood and vegetation, cooking and nurturing children and so on. In their activities they are found as collectors, users, protectors, conservers, sellers, managers of the available resources. Such multi-variant roles always give them a better status in comparison to their non-tribal women counterparts. In the social institutions we find some social liberalization. For instance, there is no child marriage and no stigma on widowhood. She enjoys the right to decide about her marriage etc. Instead of dowry there is bride price indicating high social status of the tribal women. A tribal woman can divorce and marry easily. She earns and is, therefore, to great extent economically independent. However, there are many facts which indicate a low status for the tribal woman. For example, the tribal women are paid less wage in

comparison to the male counterpart for the same work. Several taboos discriminating against tribal women exist in certain tribal groups implying impurity and the low status. The tribal women cannot hold the office of priest. There are taboos related to menstruation as in non-tribal communities. The Kharia women, cannot touch a plough nor can she participate in roofing of a house. The Oraon women are also prevented from touching a plough. The Todas of Nilgiri Hills do not touch a menstruating woman for fear of destruction of harvest. In certain tribes only the males can participate in ancestor worship. The Toda and Kota women in Southern India cannot cross the threshold of a temple. The Santal women cannot attend communal worship. Tribal women do not have property rights except in a matrilineal society, which is small portion of tribal population.

In matrilineal society the descent is traced through female lines, but political power generally rests with men. Land and other property are inherited through women, but its management is done by men (Dube 1990: 97). In Maghalaya there is Khasi saying “War and politics are for men, while property and children are for women”. Among them, the rulers, chiefs and power-wielding “elders” are all male, but women have important economic roles. The Rivers (1973), Dalton (1872) and Grigson (1938) have reported low status of women among Todas, Kharias and Maria Gonds with reference to certain taboos during certain periods and ceremonies. Majumdar (1973) has reported a higher status of tribal women on some indicators, while lower on other, while Shasi (1978: 63) has concluded that the status of tribal women varies from tribe to tribe.

The status and position of women is still sub-ordinate due to the patriarchal socio-cultural structure of the society. Existing socio-cultural characteristics like caste, marital status, economic condition, level of education, access to information, are the determining factors of the status/position of women in society

In the context of empowerment, the status of tribal women is reflected in the lower educational status, lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and higher drop-outs in the schools. The literacy rate among the tribal females is 34.76 per cent in 2001 census and 49.35 percent in 2011 census respectively, which is comparatively lesser than general females, that is 53.67 per cent in 2001 and 64.64 percent respectively. A very large majority of tribals (almost 90%) are engaged in agriculture; their other economic activities being food gathering (including hunting and fishing), pastoral, handicrafts, trade and commerce, and industrial labor. Rarely are they engaged in one occupation. The employment status of tribal women may be considered in terms of their work participation, agriculture, forests, non-agricultural activities and impact of development programmes. Their work participation is 33 percent in comparison to males which is 52 per cent. From the comprehensive analysis of the health status of tribal women (Basu 1993) it has been found that they have higher infant mortality rate, low nutritional status, lower life expectancy and a higher fertility rate.

#### **Tribal Women Livelihood issues:**

Livelihood is the most defining need for a human being. It reveals in many ways almost the entire gamut of life. Every individual or family requires to attain the sustainable livelihood as pronounced at the end of 1990s, that ensures access to basic resources and access to basic amenities to survive well. In the era of 21st century when the Millennium Development Goals



(MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are prompted the women have got much importance in their livelihoods concerned. Still in the modern era the impression of the tribal society in the minds of other people comes from the women sections. In the tribal economy women's contribution is maximum. In the agricultural activities their participation is 67 percent and in other they are involved in horticulture, fishery, animal husbandry, poultry, goatry, piggery and so on. They are absolutely involved in forestry activities. Forests play a significant role in their livelihoods. Their access to common property resources management start from various silvi-cultural operations, viz. collection, gathering, plantations, nursery works, harvesting, value additions and so on, which helps in meeting up their dire-needs and attempting sustainable livelihoods.

**Objectives of the paper:**

Looking into above ideals of Babasaheb and consideration of the present day social system and order, after huge social change in over seventy years' of independence, attempt has been made in this paper on the process of gender equality and empowerment in terms of B. R. Ambedkar's thoughts and principles, with special emphasis on tribal women livelihoods on the basis of empirical study in tribal lands of Madhya Pradesh.

**Gender mainstreaming and equality:**

Gender mainstreaming means integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programmes and projects. Women and men have different needs and living conditions and circumstances, including unequal access to and control over power, resources, human rights and institutions, including the justice system. The situations of women and men also differ according to country, region, age, ethnic or social origin, or other factors. Gender mainstreaming is a policy-making approach that concerns the both women's and men's interests and concerns. The concept of gender mainstreaming was first introduced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women. It was established as a strategy in international gender equality policy through the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, and subsequently adopted as a tool to promote gender equality at all levels. The aim of gender mainstreaming is to take into account these differences when designing, implementing and evaluating policies, programmes and projects, so that they benefit both women and men and do not increase inequality but enhance gender equality. Gender mainstreaming aims to solve—sometimes hidden—gender inequalities. It is therefore a tool for achieving gender equality. Gender equality issues need to be mainstreamed at all stages of policy making or project programming, but it is especially important to take it into account at the planning stage, when the problems concerns and needs of the beneficiaries are identified and the ways to address them are defined. Therefore, gender analysis and gender impact assessments are crucial tools for gender mainstreaming. These tools support the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming.

Women empowerment is a burning subject in the present-day world, especially in a developing country like India and that is the way to mainstream the women in our socio-economic process. The meanings of women's empowerment in a nut-shell are women's sense of self-worth for their right to have access to opportunities and resources; to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and to influence the direction of social change

nationally and internationally. because gender discrimination and disparities are generating the multiple forms of exploitation in the socio-cultural system ( Mc Ardle, 1989)

India has ratified various international conventions and human right instruments committing to ensure equal rights to women. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, programmes and plans related mechanism on one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India on the other. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms. The most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population, violence against women at the domestic and societal levels, discrimination against girl children and so on. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices. Consequently, the access of women belonging to weaker sections specially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to development programmes viz. education, health, productive resources is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.

In Indian constitution the principle of gender equality provides the first guidelines to empower women and simultaneously to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. In recent years empowerment has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission of Women was set-up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have laid a foundation stone for their participation in decision making at the local levels. In consequence, in many ways, this has accelerated the process of decentralization of power. Thus, 70 per cent of India's population is covered through these local governance institutions. It is fascinating to visualize how the rural community has been mobilized into an electoral process that empowers them to take decisions for themselves. Today, as per the latest information India has about 2,83,541 rural local bodies at the village level Gram Panchayats), and 7211 intermediary or block-level Panchayats, and 737 district level panchayats. Out of about 3 million elected representatives of these panchayats, there are approximately 13.45 lakh Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in PRIs which constitute 46.14% of total Elected Representatives (ERs). They share responsibility of the work assigned to them as representatives of their communities, which has, in a way, provided them an opportunity to understand the local issues in-depth, and to raise their levels of capability, awareness and skills. As a result of such efforts, village level development has been brought in at much faster pace by these women 'sarpanchs' (village leaders). Over the years, we have noticed that the Elected Women Representatives have become more articulate, conscious of their power, and have learnt to effectively tackle bureaucratic and political hurdles. They are also known to bring in greater transparency and efficiency to their daily administration and implementation duties. Since the earliest form of livelihoods, i.e. gathering-foraging activities, their role and responsibilities are still prominent as found among the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) , a special category of tribals having pre-agrarian occupation which was so designated in the Fifth Five year Plan and which has now been categorized as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in the Tenth Five year Plan. In the pre-agrarian tribal communities, the equity is observed among tribal men and women. In many conservation

movements such as Chipko in 1973, the ethos of tribal women is very much prominent and reflected. Further, in the follow-up of National Forest Policy in 1988 the tribal women have been considered as key stakeholder in participatory Forest Management. Considering their symbiotic relationship, they have been brought in the decision-making process in natural resources management and community development. A number of measures have been adopted to meet-up the daily requirement of fuel-woods, fodder, Non timber forest products (NTFPs) and medicinal plants. In planning and implementation their involvement has been emphasized as they face large number of problems. In employment and income generating activities, capacity building and skill development programmes have been organized. In the community mobilization and development, the local non-governmental organizations and Community-based organizations have taken significant role. It has been found that formation of Self-help Groups (SHGs) of tribal women is the best organizational process to generate livelihoods as well as provide equity and sustainability.

### **Ambedkarian Social Democratic Measures in Women Empowerment:**

He had aroused and awakened them against social injustice and installed in them the spirit of self-reform, self-emancipation, self-reliance, self-respect and self-confidence. He tried to free their minds of the inferiority complex that these people had because of their belief that they belonged to the lowest strata of the Hindu society, and which was inculcated in their minds by custom and usage, sanctioned by religion.

Since 1990s in the Participatory Natural Resource Management interventions and measures have been taken following the Ambedkar's ideals of social reforms and pro-democratic measures of institution building and profound participation in the tribal livelihood development in community forest management. Thus, policy has given due consideration to the important role played by tribal women as resource users and has been instrumental in empowering them.

In this respect, a study was undertaken in the 8 tribal dominated districts of Madhya Pradesh namely Raisen, Sehore, Dindori, Chhindwara, Jhabua, Betul, Sehore and Khargone. Six tribal groups have been studied in these districts which included the Gond, Korkus, Baigas, Bhariyas, Sahriyas, and the Barelās. The study has attempted to explore whether the initiatives undertaken by the forest department either through FDA activities or JFM activities has been able to empower women and what are the basic problems faced in the way to empowerment of women.

In the reality the picture is quite different. Women's participation and empowerment in forest governance and management are only for the name-sake. Most of the JFM committees were headed by men and women only hold membership positions that eventually had passive roles and no powers. They are only silent observers. Among the women of most of the tribal groups under study no such development approaches have been adopted so as to raise the status of them because of poverty and lack of opportunities and similarly no facilities have been provided to them for their empowerment excepting in the in two villages i.e, Bamnai and Guvasen, which are inhabited by the Gonds. No such effective approaches have been taken up by the Forest Department for initiating alternative livelihood generation. In some cases, as in the Bhariyas of Patakot proper infrastructures and health facilities have been provided by the PTG cell of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh. In all the communities

studied we find that the five dimensions of employment was developed only in the two villages i.e. Bamnai and Guvasen. In other villages initiatives were not taken into action for the community development. In paper mesh making activity of Bamnai and cocoon extraction activity of Guvasen village Forest department assessed the ability of the women and then after through proper training and exposure, they built up the capacity so that they have adopted new livelihood option, which are gradually reducing their dependency on the forest resources and empowered then more in terms of the four identified empowerment parameters i.e. Economic, Political, Social and Psychological. The scores obtained in these two villages were recorded higher than the other studied villages, where no as such initiative was taken up.

In terms of awareness of the rights and decisions of the women, the members played important roles in important decision-making process, particularly in species selection and plantations in villages like Guvasen, followed by Bamnai, Rampura, Khatpura and Kabir, but women's roles in micro-plan preparations, which is one of the most important tool for ensuring peoples participation, was not up-to-the mark in all the studied villages. Whereas in terms of Participation of women in the institution building of JFMC, it has been found that in 80% of the studied villages, the women members opined that their participation is passive. The women members felt that although their participation is there in the meetings but their opinions is mostly get overridden by the male counterparts. The women members felt that their participation in the general body meetings and executive committee members can be enhanced if their household chores are not affected and prior information of the meeting can be given to them in due time. In the studied JFMCs of Khargone, Sheopur, Dindori and Chinddwara district women's participation is low because of lack intervention by the forest department to mobilize women. In Khargone social taboos forbid women to participate in the JFM meetings and even women feel shy to attend such meetings. In cultural barrier the male members of the family also do not allow them to do so. Whereas in only two villages i.e in Guvasen and Bamnai women's participation in JFM meetings and proceedings are high.

In most of the study sites it was found that despite the fact that women are found to be more dependent on non-wood forest products for domestic use and means of income than men. They frequently have less voice in resource management decisions than men, and their prioritized requirements are often overlooked. Ensuring that women's interests and preferences receive full weight in plans forest management, in recognitions of their role in product collection, processing and marketing will help in the long run. Women are potential for securing the improved participation, which can be ensued through sensitization, motivating and training.

The study recommends that there is an urgent need to enhance women participation in JFM/FDA activities making it more gender sensitive. Women's interests and preferences should receive full weight in plans of forest management, in recognition of their roles in product collection, processing and marketing. Improved participation can be secured through sensitization, motivation and training and creating the right conditions for making the resources available to women.

JFM can play an important role in achieving the four dimensions of empowerment i.e. social, political, economic and psychological empowerments. Two case studies are given below to



depict the training and extension and institutional building & mechanism in mainstreaming and developing gender equality in the participatory forest management in Madhya Pradesh

**Women Empowerment in Natural Resource Management: Two Case Studies (Debnath 2016)**

**Case 1: Convergence of indigenous knowledge and government schemes in Sericulture activities in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh**

Guvasen forest village is situated at a distance of about 40 km from Betul in Chicholi range under West Betul forest division of Madhya Pradesh. The village is situated near the main road. The village is dominated by the Korkus. There are about 300- 400HH of Korkus and 25 HH of Yadavs and about 10-12 HH of Gonds. Table 1 gives a profile of the village

Table 1. Profile of Guvasen Village

Total population	Male		Female		Sex ration					
	399	49.6 %	405	50.3%	0.98					
Occupation	Agriculture		Agri-Labour		Non-agri-Labour		Forest collection			
	78	60%	32	24.62%	22	16.9%	40	30.8%		
Land holding	Landless		Marginal		Small		Medium		Big	
	13	10%	78	60%	39	30%	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Education	Lit		Primary		Secondary		Grad		PG	
	326	40.5%	260.82	32.4%	228.2	28.3%	Nil	Nil		

In the year 2012 the forest department under the UNDP-GEF project initiated an income generating activity for the women JFMC members of the village. A SHG of 20 women were formed for the activity of extracting threads from the silk cocoons. Ten machines were purchased by the JFMC fund of Guvasen FPC which was formed in 1996. These women were provided with training by the sericulture department. The sericulture department gives cocoons to the women members and purchases the silk thread from them. The payment is based on the grades of thread extracted. The women members involved in this activity earn monthly income of Rs 4000-6000. This activity was done in collaboration with the sericulture department of Madhya Pradesh Govt. . The department of sericulture provides cocoons to the women. In one day, women weave about 100-200gm of cocoons.



**Fig 7.1: Women members busy in extracting threads from cocoons**

Total population	Male		Female		Sex ration					
	398	51%	383	49.0%	1.03					
Occupation	Agriculture		Agri-Labour		Non agri-Labour		Forest collection			
	108	60%	108	60%	90	50%	36	20%		
Land holding	Landless		Marginal		Small		Medium		Big	
	69	38%	111	62%	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Education	lit		Primary		Secondary		UG		PG	
	572	73.2%	343.20	43.94%	286.00	36.62%	Nil	Nil	Nil	

This activity is undertaken in the room provided by the forest department at the free of cost. The Department has provided them the infrastructure and the Department of sericulture provides them trainings to undertake this activity.

The women who are involved in this activity are very happy and satisfied with the work and the income earned. This has greatly reduced their dependency on forest resources and the migration has also declined considerably. Women members have become more confident and feel more secured and independent. About 70% of the women were confident that they had the ability to demonstrate their skill to other women. Women were very proud of their skills and ready to demonstrate it to others. Women members come as far as Bhopal to sell their products in Van melas.

**Case 2: An innovative income generating activity of Paper mesh craft making in Bamnai**

Bamnia forest village is about 30-35 km from Obdullaganj Forest Division under Dahod range in Raisen district. This village is situated near the Bhopal – Indore main Road. The village is a multi-ethnic village of Gond, Korkus and Basods. The Eco-development committee of Bamnai was formed in 2006. This EDC come under Ratapani Wild life sanctuary.

The village is surrounded by rich miscellaneous forest of Teak, Saja and other species. Table 2 gives a profile of the village.

**Tabl.2. Profile of Bamnai Village**

In Bamnai women have grouped themselves into a SHG and are engaged in making toys and handicrafts from paper mesh/waste paper. The Forest Department imparted training for this activity through some NGOs/institutes. These toys are sold at herbal melas (van melas)



**Figure 7.2 : Figure Women making toys of paper mesh**

organized by the Forest department, which are held regularly at different places of the state. These are also exhibited in Delabadi Ecotourism center. This is a very cost innovative marketing mechanism initiated by the forest Department. The Forest department provides them raw material like waste paper, gum etc required for making toys. Their products are sold by the forest department and women members engaged in this activity get about Rs. 80/day. During the initial years this activity was a success and members engaged in this activity were appreciated and recognized for their work. This activity is running in a full swing under the initiation of the beat guard Ms Ganga Thakur since 2008. Besides their daily chores and other activities, they do this activity in their own convenient time sitting at home. As per the demand they make the materials and supply it either to the forest department or to individuals

Due to the active involvement of the beat guard in this activity the percentage of women members acquiring his training has also increased considerably. This activity has helped in increasing the income of the women members and reduced their dependency on forest resources to a great extent. Women are more confident about the skill acquired. They go along with the beat guard to Bhopal melas to sale their goods and demonstrate their skills.

Before these working women members were involved in fuelwood selling, now this has decreased completely. Women members have started taking interest in JFM activities.

### **Conclusion**

Ambekarian thoughts of social equality and justice can be applicable in the tribal women's situations. They are marginalized, oppressed and deprived in their socio-economic system. Ambedkar's focus on giving the social and political rights to the depressed classes was brought out in the socio-economic development since 1990s. There have been lot of initiatives in the participatory governance, in which gender mainstreaming and equality were the prior considerations. Joint forest management or in the broad sense the participatory forest management there was an watershed development when the centralized, controlled and custodial decision-making process was intended to transform into decentralized, devolving, need-based and labour-intensive institutions. So that the women get away from the social exclusion and deprivation towards a higher social, political and economic status through the development of multitudes of opportunities. This shows the clear paths of social justice and democracy.

In the gender mainstreaming and equality, tribal women development and empowerment approaches have been adopted so as to raise the status of them. In course of discussion the empirical study reveals that the initiatives undertaken by the forest department either through FDA activities or JFM activities has been able to empower women and what are the basic problems faced in the way to empowerment of women. In the reality the picture is quite different. Women's participation and empowerment in forest governance and management are only for the name-sake. Among the women of most of the tribal groups under study no such development approaches have been adopted so as to raise the status of them because of poverty and lack of opportunities and similarly no facilities have been provided to them for their empowerment excepting in the in two villages i.e, Bamnai and Guvasen, which are inhabited by the Gonds, where we find that the five dimensions of empowerment was developed only in these two villages In paper mesh making activity of Bamnai and cocoon extraction activity of



Guvasen village Forest department recognized the skill of the women and through proper training, capacity building and exposure, the women members were able to adapt to it as this livelihood option gradually reduced their dependency on the forest resources and made them more empowered while comparing with the four identified empowerment parameters i.e Economic, Political, Social and Psychological.

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