



RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTES: CONCEPTS, DIMENSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Sudhakara Karakoti

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations (PSIR), Gimbi Campus, Wollega University, Ethiopia.

Abstract

Historically, Scheduled Castes (SCs) have been subjected to various kinds of social indignities, disabilities, exclusion and discrimination. In the social milieu, they were excluded from participating in social and cultural activities. In economic sphere, they were not allowed to gain access to wealth and were condemned to do socially demeaning and dehumanized tasks. In the realm of education, they were out-rightly denied access to knowledge. In the political arena, they have been marginalized and relegated to the back seat.ⁱ The social exclusion and discrimination of Scheduled Castes that have been manifested in various forms such as violation of human rights,ⁱⁱ non-implementation of affirmative action in general and higher education in particular,ⁱⁱⁱ lack of representation and participation in media^{iv} etc have virtually derailed the ideals of social justice, equality, fraternity and citizenship rights of Scheduled Castes. Thus, the very process of empowerment of SCs has remained an elusive dream. In this context, the process of social exclusion and discrimination of Scheduled Castes has been a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Accordingly, some of the dimensions of social exclusion and discrimination of Scheduled Castes have been mentioned in the present study. The phenomenon of empowerment of marginalized groups in general and Scheduled Castes in particular is a highly complex and complicated process involving socio, political and cultural transformation. It is in this backdrop, it becomes an imperative to explore the multi-dimensional processes of empowerment in various realms of human life of marginalized groups to combat social exclusion and discrimination for inclusive development. Since, the present study explores the understanding of various conceptual nuances of the empowerment of SCs, it assumes academic importance and the following paragraphs elucidate these issues elaborately. The present paper, *Rethinking Empowerment of Scheduled Castes: Concepts, Dimensions and Perspectives*, discusses numerous conceptual nuances of the empowerment of oppressed sections particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs). The first part of the paper deals with various nuances of the meanings of empowerment including an analysis of the paradigm shift about the empowerment and capacity building of Scheduled Castes. The capability approach of Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum's framework of human capabilities and human development paradigm of Mahabub Ul Haq have been applied by identifying some of the relevant indicators to examine and evaluate the course of empowerment of oppressed sections particularly Scheduled Castes.

Keywords: *Marginalization, Caste, Exclusion, Human Development and Empowerment.*

Introduction

Empowerment has become a popular buzzword over the last three decades. The lexicon sense of the term empowerment is to enable people the power or authority to do something; to give people more switch over their own life or the condition they are in.^v Generally, empowerment also means to stretch capacity, to accomplish some physical or mental activity, to enjoy authority, to spring legal rights, to allow, to permit, to bestow or capitalize with powers. According to Human Development Report (2010)

"Empowerment-an increase in people's ability to bring about change-is central to the capability approach. It emphasizes the ability of individuals and groups to engage with, shape and benefit from political and other development processes in households, communities and countries. Valuable intrinsically, empowerment has also been linked to many development outcomes. But it is difficult to quantify levels and trends, given differences in views about what is important and the paucity of internationally comparable measures. We focus on the best available indicators, mindful that they present only 'simple windows on complex realities and limited ones at that.'"^{vi}



Empowerment is also understood in terms of enhancement of capacities in socio, economic, political and legal aspects of individual or groups in society. One of the meanings of empowerment is 'to stretch people extra control over their individual life or the condition they are in.'^{vii} In the words of Andre Beteille:

"The idea of empowerment has taken a hold over the minds of increasing number of persons in the last few years. It is now widely employed in the press, on television and in political, academic and even legal circles. There is talk about the empowerment of poor, of backward communities, of women and of other various other disadvantaged sections of society. Empowerment is seen by many politicians, publicists, social activists, and growing section of the intelligentsia generally as the only effective answer to oppression, exploitation, injustice and other maladies with which our society is beset... Empowerment is seen as a way of addressing the problem of rights that remained unenforced. Empowerment is also invoked in the context of economic weakness and insecurity, particularly marginalized, unorganized and other disadvantaged groups, classes and categories. It is then seen as a condition or an aspect of capacity building.... Empowerment through the expansion of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship is a laborious and unexciting process: it is, in Max Weber's famous phrase, 'a slow boring of hard boards. Empowerment through the class struggle was a different story altogether; but that story has now been played out and it offers hardly any new prospect. There is no doubt the prospect of empowerment through caste war; but that is something that will appeal only to those who have put their minds to sleep. So, in the end, the Indian way of securing empowerment for the un-empowered seems to be by the safe way of providing, as extensively as possible, quotas on the basis of community, caste and gender. But can the belief that quotas, no matter how extensive, can by themselves bring about a radical or even a perceptible redistribution of power be anything more than wishful thinking" ...^{viii}

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion and debate over the nuances of empowerment of the disregarded groups in general and Scheduled Castes in particular. It has been accepted as a feasible reply to the domination, mistreatment, marginalization, unfairness and deprivation of the relegated communities in order to combat social exclusion and discrimination. It seems that the concept of empowerment fits into many shoes.^{ix} However, there has been slight informed discussion on the term empowerment. Thoroughgoing analysis around it so far has been more contexts driven somewhat than theory driven.^x The term empowerment has varied meanings in diverse societal, artistic and partisan contexts. The crux of empowerment is that its newscasters change through the process of rearrangement of power.^{xi} An examination of local standings related with empowerment about the word comprise self-strength, self-control, self-power, self-relationship, independent choice, life of dignity in agreement with independent own values, capacity to contest for one's rights, independent choice making, being free, awakening etc. These descriptions are entrenched in local values and confidence systems.^{xii} In the Indian framework, the concept of empowerment advocates for social change from a hierarchical, (rigid social stratification) to an egalitarian social order (society based on the universal principles such as liberty, equality and fraternity). Tocqueville proposes empowerment as broadminded social change from noble governance to democratic governance.^{xiii} In this regard, the World Bank states the concept of empowerment in the following words

"The process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to these processes is actions which both build individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets. ...^{xiv}

Manoranjan Mohanty theorizes the idea of empowerment in the following words

"The concept of empowerment implies formal rather than substantive power and it involves an external upper-level agency to grant power rather than people below seizing it in the course of struggle. It both disperses power to isolated channels not amounting to overall sharing of power or it symbolically and formally entrusts power to a section without concretizing it in definite spheres. Above all, this concept is part of the political philosophy of the new economic globalization of western capitalism....In fact, the concept itself implies that an external agency has given 'power' to or 'empowered' another- a patronizing idea rather than power



redistributed through a process including a process of struggle...The formal empowerment shifts focus away from 'seizing state power' or exercising power in the entire society so that in all spheres there is a new egalitarian relationship."^{xv}

Empowerment is a multidimensional procedure. It aids people to grow control over their lives. It is a procedure that nurtures the capacity of persons to usage in their individual lives, their individual groups, and that aids persons and in their society, by acting on matters that they observe as important. Furthermore, empowerment is outcome of contribution in decision-making.^{xvi} To conclude, empowerment is a course of making consciousness and construction of capacities. It leads to greater involvement, to bigger decision-making power, better control on lives of relegated communities and transformative accomplishment. It infers a central rearrangement of power between diverse communities and in the present-day situation between men and women of all groups, which comprise families, communities and classes. Realistic empowerment should lead to transformation, assuring equality, entree to and control over creative resources and a change enabling liberation.

The Paradigm of Human Development: The Anchor of the Empowerment

The old-style thoughtful of development, as economic progress, enclosed the matters of health and education and gender equality. But, the human development newscasters that the governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and corporations must be stimulated to understand development in terms of indorsing education, health care, democracy and other values. Rather than mere economic growth, human development model highlights enhancing the capacities such as health, education, basic housing and freedom etc.^{xvii}

The strategies of human development paradigm convey human beings as the fundamental emphasis of development and thus change to "Peoples centric" strategy. This novel thought pressures development as an all-inclusive procedure casing economic, social, political, cultural and environmental sphere. Rendering to this approach, the elementary topics in development nowadays are equality and empowerment. These are to be accomplished through 'trickle-up' (planning from below) because of the failure of 'trickle-down' (planning from above) approaches like welfare approach, equity approach, etc. Lately, development has been regarded as a process of increasing actual liberties of people that they relish. The thinner opinion of development classifies development with mere growth of GNP, or with the increase in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advancement, or with social modernization. And development has been regarded as freedom. But freedom hinges on other factors such as social and economic preparations (facilities for education and health care, political and civil rights) i.e., the liberty to partake in public conversation and scrutiny.^{xviii}

Drawing on the visions of Mahabub Ul Haq^{xix}, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) hurled the model of human development in 1990. This human development paradigm newscasters in satisfying human needs and achieving social goals such as higher standards of education and health, wider openings for work and leisure, augmented capabilities and choices for individual beyond material well-being.^{xx} In this background, development needs the eradication of major sources of un-freedoms for instance poverty, oppression, poor economic chances, and systematic social deprivation, negligence of public facilities and narrow-mindedness or over-activity of suppressive States.^{xxi}

Martha Nussbaum: The Theory of Central Human Capabilities

Martha Nussbaum has set frontward a blend of central human capabilities by taking into justification the idea of capability of Amartya Sen. She emphases on human development by highlighting the implication of central human capabilities in the direction of reclamation of human personality in general and women in particular. In her proposition, human capabilities equate with what the citizens are really capable to perform and to be.^{xxii} In this connection, Nussbaum's definitions of capability functioning are somewhat distinct from capabilities of Amartya Sen. Amartya Sen conceptualizes the capability from the 'development' and 'deprivation perspective' in terms of standard of living, i.e., quality of life where as Nussbaum conceptualizes 'central human capabilities' in terms of 'gender perspective' from the lens of empowerment which is beyond Sen's concept of



capability. The goal of creation of these central human capabilities by Nussbaum is that this ought to offer the foundation for statutory principles and these central human capabilities should be cherished and executed by the governments of all nations. Nussbaum's capability approach pressures on legal and political rather than socio-economic applications.^{xxiii} These central human capabilities are vital for the empowerment of people in order to lead a decent and honorable life towards the recovery of human personality.^{xxiv} In this regard, Nussbaum recommends ten central human capabilities which are vital for the reclamation of human personality in general and women in particular.^{xxv} The ten central human capabilities of Nussbaum are being explicated in the following way.^{xxvi}

- **“Life:** Being able to live to the end of a human life of expected length.
- **Bodily Health:** Being able to have good health.
- **Bodily Integrity:** Being able to move freely from place to place, secure from assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
- **Senses, Imagination and Thought:** Being able to use the sense to imagine, reason and think; and being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression and religious exercise.
- **Emotions:** Being able to have attachments to things and people, to love those who love and care for us, not blighted by fear and anxiety.
- **Practical Reason:** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
- **Affiliation:** (A). Being able to live with others and engage in forms of social interaction and to have the capability for both justice and friendship. (B). Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.
- **Other Species:** Being able to live with a concern for nature.
- **Play:** Being able to laugh and enjoy recreational activities.
- **Political and Material Control over one's Environment:** Being able to participate in political choices, being able to hold property (land and movable goods) and seek employment on an equal basis with others.”

The proposal of these ten central human capabilities by Nussbaum implies and highlights the retrieval of human personality in general and women in particular. In this milieu, all these central human capabilities are important for the reclamation of personality of women in general and Scheduled Caste (SC) women in particular subsequently the Scheduled Caste women are subjected to triple burden or triple discrimination, i.e., caste, class and gender discrimination. In this situation, the goal of development in terms of augmentation of human capabilities provisions the notions of human freedom and self-determination. Succinctly, the energies to endeavor for construction of capabilities are being paralleled with the efforts of empowering people to select variety of responsibilities that they think valued and not to compel them into a favored total method of working.^{xxvii}

Amartya Sen: The Theory of Capabilities and Entitlements

Amartya Sen has delineated development in relations of an increase in “capabilities and entitlements”. Capabilities relate to what a person can do and to be. According to Amartya sen, the following can be mentioned as diverse appearances (components) of construction of capabilities and thereby empowerment of the deprived, oppressed and marginalized sections of the society.^{xxviii} Sen suggests basic human capabilities which are important for the empowerment of disempowered. They are being mentioned in the following way:^{xxix}

- **“Economic facilities,** i.e., opportunities to utilize financial resources for the purposes of consumption, production or exchange and freedom from hunger.



- **Political freedoms, i.e., opportunities for people to participate in political process and determine who governs them.**
- **Social opportunities i.e., opportunities for resources such as being adequately sheltered access to health, access to education.**
- **Transparency guarantees, i.e., the liberty for people to deal with each other under the state of transparency.”**

In this framework, it is important to comprehend that the capabilities are created by ‘entitlements’ of an individual with in society which are measured not only in relationships of income but also in footings of package of rights and opportunities available to an individual. These two together, mean both the available choice set and also the capacity to work out their right over the choice set. Needless to say, the larger the capability and entitlements of an individual in a society is equal to the higher level of development of that society. ^{xxx} Consequently, the improvement of these capabilities and entitlements is imperious to fight social exclusion, marginalization and deprivation of the marginalized groups for complete development of any society.

Mahabub Ul Haq: Human Development Paradigm

The key resolve of development is to rise the selections of the people. Theoretically, these selections can alter over time and can be immeasurable. In the words of Mahabub Ul Haq:

“People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in income or growth figures: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and a sense of participation in community activities. The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives.” ^{xxxi}

The human development model prepares a noteworthy package in inquisitive of the expected involuntary connection amongst increasing income and broadening human selections and such a connection hinge on the excellence and supply of economic growth, not only on the meagre quantity of such growth. A connection between growth and human lives has to be designed willfully in the course of thoughtful public policy such as public expenditure on social services and financial policy to reallocate income and resources. This kind of connection may possibly not happen in the monotonous working of the market place, which can extra marginalize the poor. There is terrible need of sensible public policy appropriate to transmute economic growth into the lives of the people. ^{xxxii}

Human development model anchors main rearrangement of economic and political power in order to transmute economic growth into the lives of the people by interrogating the prevailing power constructions. The larger connection amid economic and human selections can call for all-inclusive land reforms, broadminded tax systems, new credit systems to bank on the poor people, a key increase of basic social services to influence all the underprivileged population, the elimination of blockades to the entry of people in economic and political domains and the leveling of their access to opportunities, and the formation of temporary social safety nets for those who may be avoided by the markets or public policy activities. Such policy parcels are elementary and will vary from one country to another. But, some structures are common to all of them. ^{xxxiii} These common features are being stated below in the following method:

“First, people are moved to centre stage. Development is analyzed and understood in terms of people. Each activity is analyzed to see how many people participate in it or benefit from it. The touchstone of the success of development policies becomes the betterment of people’s lives, not just the expansion of production process. Second, human development is assumed to have two sides. One is the formation of human capabilities- such as improved health, knowledge and skills. The other is the use people make of their acquired capabilities-for employment, productive activities, political affairs or leisure. A society needs to build up human capabilities as well as ensure equitable access to human opportunities. Considerable human frustration results if the scales of human development do not finely balance the two sides. Third, a careful distinction is maintained between ends



and means. People are targeted as end. But means are not forgotten. The expansion of GNP becomes an essential means for expanding many human options. But the character and distribution of economic growth are measured against the yardstick of enriching the lives of people. Production processes are not treated in an abstract vacuum. They acquire a human context. Fourth, the human development paradigm embraces all of society-not just the economy. The political, cultural and social factors are given as much attention as the economic factors. In fact, study of the link between the economic and the non-economic environment is one of the most fascinating and rewarding aspects of this new analysis. Fifth, it is recognized that people are the both the means and the ends of development. But people are not regarded as mere instruments for producing commodities-through an augmentation of 'human capital'. It is always remembered that human beings are the ultimate end of development-not convenient fodder for the materialistic machine.^{xxxiv}

From above, the development has been understood in terms of welfare and wellbeing of people especially in terms of not only enhancements of human capabilities but also utilization of those capabilities for realizing their ends towards enriching their lives. This paradigm gives attention to the social, cultural and political factors apart from the economic factors by promoting those human beings are the final end of development.

Essential Components of Human Development

There are four significant mechanisms in the human development model. They are equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment. There is necessity to comprehend each of these mechanisms in its suitable viewpoint because these mechanisms distinguish human development model when compared to 'traditional economic growth models.' The four components of human development model and their theoretical shades are being understood in the following paragraphs.

1. Equity

If development is to enlarge selections of the people, the people ought to benefit from impartial access to chances and the development free of equity means a restraint of the selections of numerous individuals in a society. Reliant on how inadequate the development procedure is, it is able to take away the rights from whole sections of society. In this particular framework, equity must be understood as equity in opportunities, not necessarily in outcome. In a human development model, equity in access to economic and political chances must be measured as a elementary human right.^{xxxv} In the words of Mahabub Ul Haq:

"Equal access to opportunities is based on the philosophical foundations of the universalism of life claims of everyone. The human development paradigm values human life for itself. It does not value merely because people can produce material goods- important though that is. It values life because of its built-in assumption that all individuals must be enabled to develop their human capabilities to the fullest and to put those capabilities to the best use in all areas of their lives."^{xxxvi}

Equity in access to opportunities claims a vital rearrangement of power in numerous societies and these demands are registered in the following method:^{xxxvii}

- The dispersal of productive assets may require to be altered, especially through land reform.
- The dispersal of income may need a main rearrangement through progressive fiscal policy, aimed at transferring income from the rich to poor.
- Credit system may need an overhaul so that poor people's potential enterprise is viewed as sound collateral and the allocation of bank credit is not directed only by the prevailing wealth of the rich.
- Political chances may need to be matched through voting rights reform, campaign finance reform, and other actions meant at restraining the excessive political power of an old-fashioned minority.



- Social and legal blockades that limit the access of women or of certain minorities or ethnic groups to some of the key economic and political opportunities may have to fall.

Thus, equity is one of the influential notions that lie at the heart of human development model. This elementary idea has been legal through the ages. Every now and then, the 'conventional growth models' overlooked this truth in the past few decades. The notion of equity is conclusively preserved as a central constituent of human development model.^{xxxviii}

2. Sustainability

Sustainability cohorts the opportunity to relish the same well-being by the forthcoming generations as that of current generation now enjoy. It is a right of future generations that makes sustainability additional significant constituent of human development model. Sustainability is a lively concept which turns our changing world and it is not a standing picture with the world frozen at prearranged states. Furthermore, sustainability is a matter of distributional equity-of supply of development chances amid present and future generations which guarantees 'intra- generational and inter-generational equity' in access to chances. To begin, sustainability does not anchor supporting present levels of poverty and human deprivation. If the present is miserable and intolerable to the majority of the world's people, it should be altered before it sustains. In other words, what should be continued are valued life chances, not human deprivation. In simple words, this model anchors towards sustenance of human life.^{xxxix} The final crux of the human development model is that everybody must have equal access to development chances not only now but also in the future.^{xl}

3. Productivity

Productivity is one of the important mechanisms of human development pattern. This constituent seeks investments in people in order to empower 'macro- economic environment' for the people to grasp their maximum potential. Hence, economic growth is a section of human development models that is a significant component but not the entire structure. In this particular situation, productivity must be measured only as one constituent of human development model by giving equivalent importance to equity, sustainability and empowerment.^{xli}

4. Empowerment

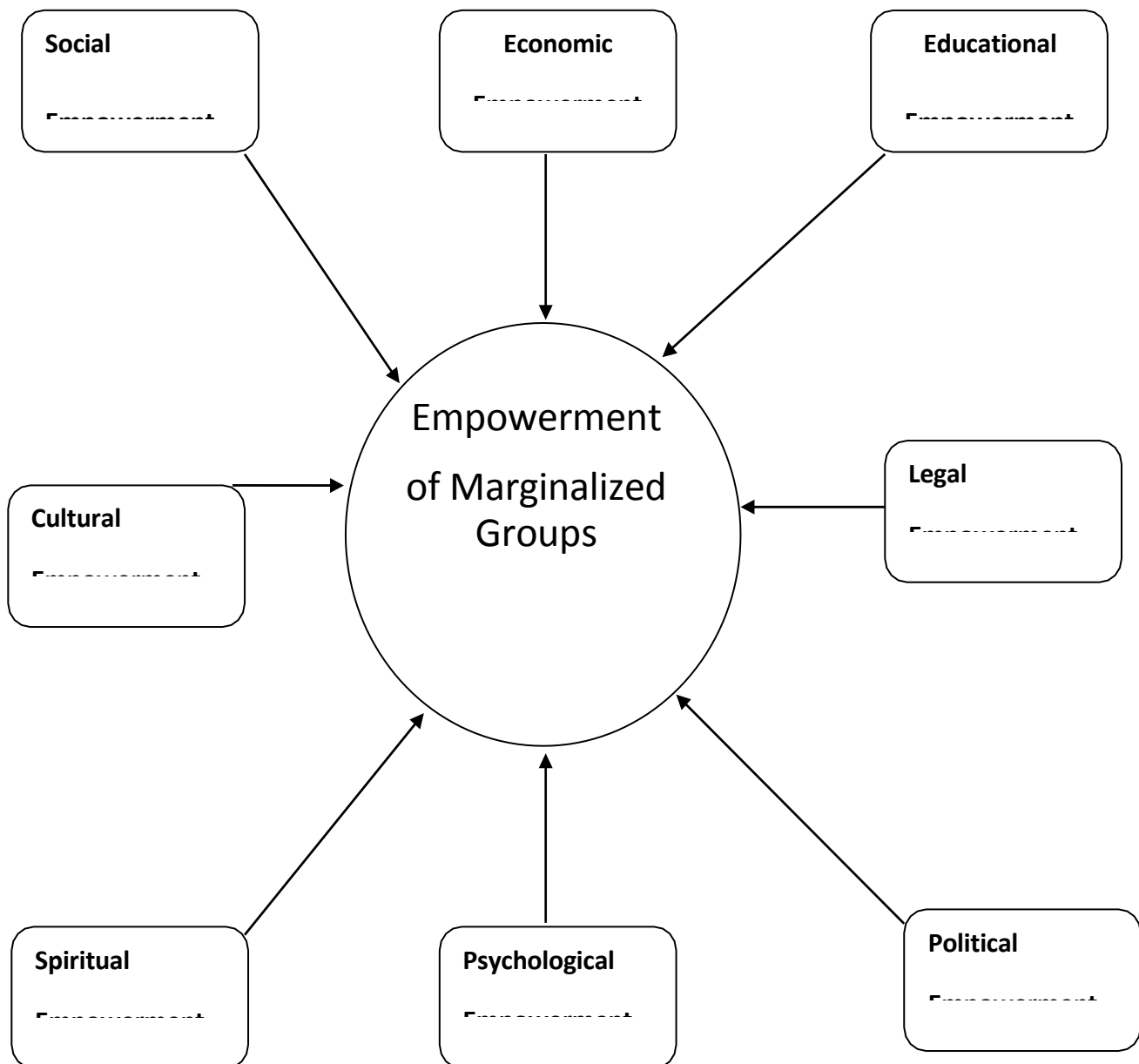
The idea of empowerment is one of the influential mechanisms of the human development model. The principal point of this model is to advance the people who must participate in the activities, events and processes in order to figure out their lives. The human development model is not an authoritarian concept. Furthermore, it is not based on aid or welfare concepts. The employing of poor people and poor nations on permanent aid is equal to worst policy preparation but the human development model envisages full empowerment of people.^{xlii} Empowerment is an inclusive idea. Its newscasters that people must be in a situation to workout choices of their own self-determination and the enhancement of their lives. It also means a political democracy in which people can influence policies and choices concerning their lives. The empowerment of people calls for action on several fronts. It envisions investment in education and health of people. Consequently, people can yield advantage of market chances. In order to make the playing fields of life smooth, it envisions guaranteeing an empowering atmosphere that offers everybody access to credit and productive assets. Moreover, the human development model covers all selections for instance political, social and cultural whereas the elementary requirements idea generally limits to financial selections.^{xliii} According to Mahabub Ul Haq, there are four traditions to make appropriate relations between economic growth and human development.

They are (1). Investment in education, health, and skills; (2). Extra equitable dispersal of income; (3). Government social expenditure and (4). Empowerment of people, both men and women.^{xliv} Thus, Mahabub Ul Haq recommends a human development model of equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment.^{xlv}

In the light of aforementioned theoretical explanations and various human development paradigms, the following hypothetical model is formulated explicating the dynamics of empowerment of marginalized groups.



A Multi-Dimensional Model Exploring the Dynamics of Empowerment of Marginalized groups India



Conclusion

The empowerment of oppressed groups is a multi-dimensional process involving the enhancement of capabilities in various realms of human life, i.e., socio-political, economic, cultural, legal, spiritual and psychological components as enumerated in the aforementioned diagram. To illustrate further, the social component of the empowerment stands for the eradication of social disabilities, human indignities and inhuman infliction of atrocities on marginalized for centuries. Political component encompasses safeguarding their legitimate civil, political rights. Economic aspect covers providing livelihood opportunities through gainful employment in order to promote decent material standard of living. Legal aspect includes creating a sense of awareness among the subalterns about their legitimate constitutional rights and provisions.



Educational aspect of empowerment entails the provision of good quality English education to the marginalized groups both at primary and higher levels. Cultural component comprises exhumation of hitherto submerged marginalized cultures by reviving the humanistic and egalitarian culture and relocating the cultural symbols of their historical icons. The spiritual component stipulates their right to religion and spiritual democracy. Lastly, the empowerment of marginalized groups in various aforementioned realms of human life does eventually lead to their psychological empowerment. As explained above, the process of empowerment of these social groups has always been a multi-dimensional one. Various social movements that have emerged in the course of Indian history have contributed immensely to the empowerment of marginalized sections in various realms of their lives. The emergence of various social movements has paved the way for empowerment of hitherto oppressed sections in India. And, especially the Bahujan movement led by Kanshi Ram and Mayawati played an important role towards the continuation of the legacy of the journey of empowerment of people in general and the majority oppressed communities (Bahujans) in particular is a perennial inspiration to the hitherto oppressed communities in India in letter and spirit.

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