

# **WATER ACCESSIBILITY AND MARGINALISATION OF DALITS**

## **SOME OBSERVATION OF RURAL GUJARAT**

**Jayshree Soni**

Centre for Social Studies,  
Surat.

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# Water situation in Gujarat

- ◆ Water shortage and crisis is one of the environmental degradation in Gujarat.
- ◆ It is a general belief that the water shortage of Gujarat is caused by nature, which is not true.
- ◆ In spite of the low and erratic rainfall, the combination of climate, physiographic and geology in different regions of the state did provide somewhat favorable conditions for water resources in most regions of the state about three decades ago.
- ◆ But in recent era, 85 % of its underground water has already been extracted and areas like North-Gujarat and Saurashtra have been declared as Dark zones.

- ◆ Most of the Gujarat's 18000 villages had own reliable drinking water source, when the state was carved out from the Bombay in 1960, only 1500 villages were without adequate source of drinking water. But today 15000 villages of North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch regions are facing acute drinking water shortage".
- ◆ The shortage of water experiences by state is largely man-made.
- ◆ Rising population, growth of irrigation, industrialization and urbanization, contribute towards the over use of underground water from deep aquifers that leads in drying up of shallow aquifers, creates severe imbalance in sources of drinking water in several parts of the state.
- ◆ The man-made water shortage and mismanagement of water resources deteriorated quality and quantity of water accessibility in different regions with different degrees of impact.
- ◆ Excessive salinity, excessive fluoride and excessive nitrates, resulted in a severe shortage of drinking water.
- ◆ The shortage of drinking water has serious implications for the well being of poor and weaker section of the society.

# Gujarat and Development

- ◆ Economically Gujarat is considered as a one of the prosperous states
- ◆ The enterprising population of Gujarat has brought the state to the forefront of economic development in the country.
- ◆ The state has not only acquired and maintained its fourth rank in per capita Net Domestic Product, but has also made a quantum jump of Development in the post-liberalization.
- ◆ The average annual growth rate of the state economy (at the 1980-81 prices) in the post reform period, i.e from 1990-91 to 1997-98 has been 8.65 per cent, which is among the highest in India.
- ◆ In terms of the growth rate of the per capita state domestic product too, the state is at the top with more than 6 per cent annual rate of increase (Indira Hirway, 2002, p.37).

- ◆ As per the latest information, Gujarat is going to reach on the growth rate 16 per cent, which is highest among the Asia (Divya Bhaskar, (Gujarati), 1 Feb. 2006)
- ◆ The critical question is, has this development treated all the groups equally?
- ◆ Has Gujarat been able to distribute its economic development equally to all castes and classes? Has economic growth lead into a higher human development?
- ◆ The performance in the sphere of "human development", particularly on the scale of social environment and equality is poor.
- ◆ Rapid economic growth does not translate adequately into human development.
- ◆ This creates fundamental issues related to the development model adopted by the state. Serious issues of environmental degradation are also surfaced on society level.

# Water and Social structure

- ◆ Any scarce item influence social structure and gets distributed in accordance with power of different groups, caste, class and gender, all the three stratification systems of the society have strong relationship with water.
- ◆ A significant aspect of water shortage is that non accessibility of water adding more burden on poor and weaker section of the society.
- ◆ As per traditional social order of Hindu society, the land rights and other commercial activities were operated by upper and middle castes, which established caste based inequality.
- ◆ Centuries and centuries, the practice of caste base inequality was the part of our society.



- ◆ After independence and rapid economic growth of Gujarat, has the state able to adequate the basic needs of drinking water to all the sections of the society without any caste base discrimination?
- ◆ After the six decades of independence, series of steps has been taken by state to bring the socio-economic weaker section with mainstream of the society, are they getting equal rights in terms of water accessibility, is the basic issues of inquiry.
- ◆ Therefore the purpose of this paper to examines the available water sources of the village and water accessibility to the Dalits in contemporary Gujarat.



# Status of Dalit in Larger Society

- ◆ Traditionally, according to the Hindu social order, they are at the bottom of the social hierarchy and considered as an Ati-shudra and Achut and are treated as a untouchables.
- ◆ As per historical roots, several centuries in a material base of a pre-capitalist agrarian economy, Dalit was a laborers working on the landlord's farm.
- ◆ There role was in-built in the village social structure and controlled by the landowner dominant castes.
- ◆ Religious rituals reinforced their dominant position and provided sanction to the system and SCs occupy the lowest position, perpetuates and maintains inequality.
- ◆ The Dalits perform the menial and degrading jobs, and seen as untouchables which lack them from many basic services and legal protection, denied access to water, food, healthcare, housing and clothing.

- ◆ After the independence constitutional provision of Reservation for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe to bring the weaker section in mainstream of the society was accepted by and large, though opposed by many congress leaders and even Jansangh.
- ◆ To participate in power structure, under the Article 330 and 322, 78 and 540 seats are served for SC in parliament and state assemblies respectively, but studies shows that, "the elected representatives have not secure effective power to even express the problems of their communities.

# Population of SCs in Gujarat

- ◆ As per census 2001, the population of SCs in India 1665.76 lacs (16.20%) while in Gujarat it constitute 7.10% (35.92 lacs)

# Women and Water

- ◆ As per traditional Gender based division of labour, drinking water collection is the duty of women, irrespective of the caste class, region and age.
- ◆ A significant aspect of water scarcity is that the burden of bringing water from distant sources has fallen on women, irrespective of their age.
- ◆ "Women in several rural and even in urban households have to face hardships in lack of easy access of drinking water and other domestic purposes.
- ◆ Interestingly, when the distance is even greater, animal power or auto vehicles are put to use for transporting water, particularly when men manage water collection.
- ◆ "Being water providers, women suffer the impact of depleting water resources most severely.
- ◆ These costs are (1) more time in water collection, (2) less water for drinking and other purposes, (3) loss of income from water intensive activities, (4) poor quality of water for domestic use which increase incidents of diseases, (5) loss of educational opportunities.
- ◆ Such hardship adversely affects her time, energy, mental, hygiene, status and her development."

- ◆ Therefore it is necessary to understand the close association between women and natural resources is more valid and primary in rural context.
- ◆ But does it hold true for all categories of women? It is necessary to look more critically at different categories of women.
- ◆ "The diversity among women: rural and urban, upper and lower caste and class, educated and illiterate, women of developed countries and underdeveloped countries, differ from one another so much so that, a general categorization is difficult.
- ◆ Of course, there are some common problems and characteristics that all women might share, but at the same time, there are some differences in priorities and role of women across time, space and classes.
- ◆ The accessibility of water and hardships of water collection also get connected with caste hierarchy.
- ◆ women group is not homogeneous. The position of Dalit women and position of upper caste women is not same.
- ◆ Therefore the purpose of this paper is to examine the position of Dalit's women in water accessibility.

# Issues

- ◆ How does the condition of water resources affect Dalits life in terms of accessibility of water? Are they getting water as their right?
- ◆ What is the role of civil society in water management to access the water to the Dalits.
- ◆ How Dalit themselves co-opt with their condition in a large society of upper castes.

# Methodology

- ◆ Eight villages from the constant drought prone and water scarce area are selected as cases.
- ◆ Two villages from each district of Ahmedabad (Bhal area) Amreli, Bhavnagar and Rajkot are selected for in-depth inquiry.



# Social Composition and Water Sources

- ◆ Data regarding caste composition population and water sources are presented in table no.1, table no.2 and table no.3.
- ◆ In all eight villages, the population of SCs varies in range from 6.5% to 43.8%.
- ◆ Available water sources is presented in Table no.3
- ◆ Data regarding caste and ownership of land is also prepared, but not included in this paper. As per data only in sangasar, SCs are comes under the land over category, which is marginal farmer, while in other villages land ownership is associate with Rajput, Koli and Darbar village wise.
- ◆ Village wise available water sources and social composition is presented in paper.

# Caste, Water and Status

- ◆ As per local hierarchy, ownership of private well, purchased water, water tap and water tank are found in descending order of status.
- ◆ The households, owing well are at the top in the status pyramid.
- ◆ In all eight villages, households with more productive units like land, have their own source of water, like well or underground water storage tank.
- ◆ They tend to get relatively safe and sweet water for drinking and other domestic consumption.
- ◆ This increases their status among other lower socio-economic groups.

- ◆ Purchasing water from outside the village, probably from well owners and those supplying water in tanker, is also a luxury to some families in each of the villages.
- ◆ Most among them have some regular as well as and extra income and saving for survival, particularly owing large land holding in Rajput, Patel and Koli.
- ◆ They refrain from lowering their status by sending women outside home for collection of water.
- ◆ Even than in each village, large numbers of households are fall in the lowest category of the status pyramid with an average of 80% of the households depends on public water tanks and/or tankers for drinking water and other domestic water consumption.
- ◆ Though fall in same category, the accessibility of water within the caste structure, creates discrimination and inequality among SCs and non-SCs.
- ◆ While collecting the water, yet the women of SCs are hesitate to stand in queue as per their right and waiting for the mercy of kind hearted women of upper castes to collect the water, which is not only taking their more physical time and energy, but creates a marginalization and inhuman approach.

# Water and Status of Dalit

- ◆ Data of all eight villages indicates extra hardship and humiliation of the women specific to the scheduled caste.
- ◆ In all eight villages, during focus group meetings, the SCs women demanded separate water spot or sumps for them to avoid quarrels with other non-SC women something that was always occurred at the time and locations of water collection.
- ◆ In Kanpar at the time of water tank allotment, separate tap was allocated to the SCs. This has been functioning for some years, when it was noticed the advantage of SCs women to get more water with less time due to their small numbers, compare to other non-SCs, slowly the upper caste group has started to collect water from the tap which was allotted for SCs.
- ◆ Subsequently they began to push them openly and appropriate away the separate tap was allotted to the SCs and hardly remember the rituals of purity.

- ◆ Otaria and Babapur have been somewhat different for the presence of Gandhian Nai Taleem institutions working since long has weakened the caste hierarchy and SCs women did not face much discrimination.
- ◆ Even then the SCs of both villages want separate water provision for their community due to latent humiliations of upper castes while collecting water.
- ◆ Virnagar and Chitliya also face group rivalries between upper castes and SCs on the issue of water collection.
- ◆ In both villages, differences among caste groups surfaced openly, during focused group meetings and women of the upper caste walked out, while women of the SC group started shouting on the issue of water collection from tankers.
- ◆ In Chitliya, during focused group meeting the SC women walked out.
- ◆ Both the communities were in favor of separate water collection points, which lead to infer that stratification along caste line plays crucial role.

# Water accessibility and Practice of Untouchability

- ◆ In all eight villages, though SCs population proporsnately different, the strong demand of separate water provision is come out unanimously.
- ◆ The inquiry of all eight villages, justified the fare demand of separate water provision is come out as a result of the concept of purity and pollution of non-SCs.
- ◆ Though the untohchability abolished legally, yet on issue of water, by and large, the discrimination for the water to Dalit is in practice by non SCs.
- ◆ The roots of separate demand of water provision are lying in traditional social order even after the six decades of independence though ranking first in field of investment, rural Gujarat practicing hidden untouchability with SCs group.

# Role of civil society

- ◆ At the end of the inquiry all representatives' members and village head concluded with only one opinion, "It is their personal matter and personal prejudices and personal quarrels and conflicts"
- ◆ None of them took it as a serious issue of social justice.
- ◆ Elected members from the Dalits have do not say in village affairs.
- ◆ In all eight villages none of the village head took any initiate to minimize the marginalization of SCs.
- ◆ Interestingly, in Chitliya, the position of Sarpanch is holding by SC woman, when she contacted, she was also wandering for water with two pair of vessels and asked the author to contact her husband rather than her. After some attempt she expresses her opinion for water provision.
- ◆ She doesn't know to whom and how to meet higher authority to apply for the water provision.



- ◆ She herself was following untouchability with non-SCs while going for water collection.
- ◆ She admitted, the SCs are getting less amount of water compare to non-SCs.
- ◆ In all eight villages, whether SCs are in majority or in minority, none of the village leader, head, elected member and any social activist took any steps to manage water distribution to all groups without any cast base humiliation.

# Summary and Conclusion

- ◆ Late Prof. I.P. Desai conducted a study in 1971 on, "Water facilities for the Untouchables in Rural Gujarat," with object of in what matters the untouchability is in practice which covered 64 villages of rural Gujarat, and found in 44 villages, no weakening of belief in pollution or in untouchability for common source of supply of water" (I.P. Desai, 1973).
- ◆ Again same study with same objective and area restudied by Prof. Ghanshyam Shah in 1997 and found, "after intervening of twenty five years, two villages were added to this list in practice of untouchability and water accessibility to SCs. (Ghanshyam Shah, 2000).
- ◆ Again with some what different objective and in different area, (but on relevant theme) the recent study also justifies the practice of untouchability and lack of water accessibility to Dalits. In another way all eight villages of this study are included in previous list of villages studies done by Prof. I.P. Desai and Ghanshyam Shah on the issue of untouchability and water accessibility to SC.

- ◆ The only difference between two studies, the separate provision of drinking water was a symbol of practice of untouchability shown by Prof. I.P.Desai and Prof. G.Shah
- ◆ While in recent study though the separate provision of drinking water abolished and became common to all caste, even than practice of untouchability is not weaken in rural part of the Gujarat.
- ◆ I all eight villages it has been found that the degradation of natural resources, like water, due to unsustainable development model of state and mismanagement of water sources, leads disempowerment of SCs particularly women, in drinking and domestic water sector.
- ◆ It is found that the depletion of water resources has added much burden on SCs and forced to bring water from distant and different places.
- ◆ It is a evident that the roots of the system are encompass the social structure of the society, with respect to each other social variables the deprived castes are far behind than other castes of Indian society.

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◆ It is evident that, many protest movement and revolt are emerged in favor of reservation in education and job, but not a single protest movement takes place from dalit group to safeguard the water accessibility as their right. It is also true that, the fear of atrocity used by dalits against upper caste, which only on Individual bases, which creates only hatrates and not aright.

◆ Except Virnagar, in all of the seven villages of this study had face discrimination and humiliation for water which reflected in their demands, while as observed the SC group of Virnagar acquire aggressiveness and conscious about their rights and started to dominate on other castes rather than to go marginalized and raise their voice against the traditional feudal social set-up and challenge the hierarchy based in equality and pollution and purity.

◆ It is true that, to the some extent, untouchability has been reduced considerably in some public sphere, which are directly manage by the state laws, but not as a thoughtful way of other upper castes.

◆ Definitely it reduces, but complete disappearance in terms of water accessibility is not taken place and kept Dalit in marginal position.



THANKS



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