

Triply Marginalized Dalit Women of India : A Study

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Abstract

Dalit women suffer multiple discriminations since they are vulnerably positioned at the bottom of the caste, gender and class hierarchies, they experience endemic gender and caste violence as well as extreme deprivation and disabilities as the outcome of the severely imbalanced social, economic and power equations. The position of Dalit women in the society is reflected by the nature and number of atrocities committed on them. Their performance with regard to human development indicators is much lower compared to their counterpart from rest of the women.

Dalit women suffer multiple forms of systematic discrimination, including verbal abuse, sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, naked parading, ingestion of human excreta, individual and gang rape. Dalit women suffer from severe limitations in access to justice and there is wide spread impunity in cases where the perpetrator belongs to a dominant caste. How much and what they eat and what work they do also differs significantly because of their caste. The health condition of Dalit women is alarming with high incidence of maternal and infant mortality. A large majority of the illiterate population comprise of Dalit women with 76.24 % of Dalit women being illiterate due to less access to education. Their participation in political governance is dismal. They are excluded from decision making. The process of globalization and neo-liberal policies has affected the Dalit women considerably.

This paper has attempted to find some solutions and has recommendations like awareness campaigns to help prevent exploitation of Dalit women, developing targeted programs implemented focusing on key development factors such as food security, health, education etc. Time bound investigation, charge sheets and court trials to secure speedy justice for Dalit women victims and land reform programmes benefitting them must be implemented.

Key Words: *Triple marginalization, sexual harassment, domestic violence, illiteracy, time-bound justice, land reforms, globalization.*

Introduction

Even as we are in the 21st millennium, caste discrimination, an age-old practice that dehumanizes and perpetuates a cruel form of discrimination continues to be practiced. India where the practice is rampant despite the existence of a legislation to stop this, 160 million Dalits of which 49.96% are women continue to suffer discrimination. The discrimination that Dalit women are subjected to is similar to racial discrimination, where the former is discriminated and treated as untouchable due to descent, for being born into a particular community, while, the latter face discrimination due to colour. The caste system declares Dalit women as 'impure' and therefore untouchable and hence socially excluded. This is a complete negation and violation of women's human rights.

Since independence there has been an affirmative action policy in India that has led to a first generation of Dalit doctors, scientists, lawyers, and public officials. Yet the great majority of Dalits are still condemned to the margins of life. They still live in caste apartheid with separate villages, places of worship, and even schools. It is a lethal system where, according to India's National Crime Records Bureau four Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and two Dalit homes are torched every day. Dalit women are often trapped in highly patriarchal societies facing severe discrimination from being both a Dalit and a woman, making them a key target of violence and systematically deny them choices and freedoms in all spheres of life. The convergence of these conditions leads to the wide-ranging and multiple layers of violence that pervade Dalit women lives, characterized by enduring violence in both the general community and in the family, from state and non-state actors of different genders, castes and socio-economic groupings.

Dalit women suffer multiple discriminations at the intersection of caste, gender and class bias. Though it is well known that the caste system is a lethal one, this paper attempts to detail how Dalit women remain triply marginalised in Indian society. This endemic intersection of gender-and-caste discrimination is the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations. Being positioned at the lowest social order of Indian society, scheduled caste women suffer from many forms of discrimination, including lack of education, economic disadvantages, social disempowerment, domestic violence, political invisibility, and sexual oppression.

Violence against Dalit Women

Dalit women are the most vulnerable and face untouchability, discrimination and violence much more than their male counterparts. The position of Dalit women in the society is reflected by the nature and

number of atrocities committed on her. Being a Dalit woman, abuse is used to remind her of her caste and keep her oppressed. On an average, about 1000 cases of sexual exploitation of Dalit women are reported annually and in the year 2010 alone, 1316 cases of rape was reported (NCRB 2010). Not only their performance with regard to human development indicators is much lower compared to their counterpart from rest of the women, also the instances of atrocities are far higher than non-Dalit women. Dalit women also face violence when they try to access rights and entitlements provided by the constitution and the government. In addition to facing discrimination and untouchability in accessing welfare schemes, women from Dalit community also faces sexual and other kinds of physical violence. The recent years has also seen a rising violence against Dalit human rights defenders, and Dalit women activists are all the more vulnerable in this scenario as the violence against them take the shape and form of sexual violence-rape, gang rape, being paraded naked etc. A significant proportion of India's Dalit women suffer multiple forms of systematic discrimination, including verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, naked parading, ingestion of human excreta, individual and gang rape.

Dalit women face considerable violence in the domestic front. Alcoholism and associated demands of money from men is very often associated with family violence. Other causes also are inability to bear children, not bearing male children, suspected extra-marital relationship, being good looking in some cases or ugly in others, denying sex to husband, demanding property, demanding freedom or asserting her space and rights. Patriarchal values are very evident in the violence where women are expected to be obedient, pure and keep to their place in life. (Jejeebhoy, Shireen. -1998)

The scenario in this twenty first century did not make any difference to Dalit women and they are still being discriminated and forced to work as prostitutes, also involved in human trafficking etc. According to a 2010 National Crime records Bureau data every 18 minutes, Dalit women are becoming victims of forced prostitution, murder rape etc. Not only they are abused and discriminated by upper caste men but they are also being abused by Dalit men. The triangular combination, (being women, Dalit and economically poor), have made the scenario worst for Dalit women. As Dalit men are becoming victims of various crimes and socio-economic conditions, they release all their frustrations and tensions on Dalit females, generally their wives, and therefore the condition is becoming more and more serious.

On account of their lower social status, sexual exploitation of SC/ST women is also high. There are some caste-related social customs and religious practices in Hindu society that exploit only women from Dalit communities. One of these customs is *devdasi* or *jogini*, involving religious prostitution imposed on

unfortunate girls who are married to a village god and then become the subject of sexual exploitation by upper caste men in a village. There are similar practices in states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra where Dalit women are designated *devdasis* or devotees of god. (Thorat, 2010)

Both for oppression and opportunism, caste-based sexual violence is meant to silence Dalit communities. Each attempt to achieve equality—going to school, getting a job, or voting—brings greater risk of reprisal. Because at its heart, caste-based sexual violence is about creating a climate of terror so that Dalits will fear challenging this system. This reprisal violence though has now reached record numbers with a recent study by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights reporting that over 67% of Dalit women have faced some form of sexual violence. This culture of rape is also a culture of impunity where upper-caste Hindu perpetrators of these crimes are protected within India's rape culture at all levels of the justice system. UN Special Rapporteur Ms. Rashida Manjoo relays in her recent report on the status of women in India that there is a "deeply entrenched patriarchal attitude of police officers, prosecutors, judicial officers." This coupled with the unsavoury reality that members of the police, judiciary, and public officials often collude with perpetrators to keep Dalit Women from filing claims and receiving justice.

Atrocities against Dalit Women

Asha a seven year old Dalit child who belongs to the Meliruppu village of Cuddalore district was brutally raped by another caste boy Kuppan from the same village on 23.05.2005. The child fell unconscious and had to be rescued by a team of Dalits who later admitted the child in a hospital. A case was registered after much protest from the villagers. However the police failed to register the case under the SC/ST prevention of Atrocities Act. The perpetrator was arrested and enlarged on bail. (Global Action for Dalits: Report 2005, Tamil Nadu Women's Forum).

Rajasthan Dalit Social Worker gangraped –January 24th,2006

In a chilling reminder of the Bhanwari Devi case, a Rajasthan anganwadi worker was allegedly gang-raped by her supervisors during a state sponsored training session. Instead of helping the 25 year old Dalit woman, the police tried to hush up the incident, declaring her mentally unstable and packing her off to a psychiatric clinic. According to the FIR the woman, an anganwadi sahyogini, was raped by three of her supervisors after her female supervisor took her to a room at the training center in Karauli, some 150km from Jaipur. The incident took place on the night of December 30th,2005. Her husband was told

three days later that she had been admitted to a hospital after a 'mental breakdown'. We brought her back to Karauli but the police refused to file our case. When they finally lodged an FIR on January 20, the S Paga in sent her with a constable to Jaipur to get her admitted to the SMS Hospital's psychiatric center. Her husband Ram Niwas Meena said that SP B K Pande denied the charge: 'We did not send her to the psychiatric center. We have arrested two accused and are hunting for the other two'. Home Minister Gulab Chand Kataria, who visited her in hospital today, said a probe will be held.(Hindustan Times 27.01.06).

Dalit Women tortured in Jail – Punjab

Three Dalit women from Muktsar district in Punjab have accused the police of torturing them, including administering electric shock to their "private parts" and confining them illegally. Talking to reporters at the BJP headquarters in Chandigarh on Friday, Amarjit Karur, Virpal Kaur and Rani alleged they were picked up by the police after they rejected the overtures of two drug traffickers to join the flesh trade. Amarjit alleged she and Virpal were detained for five days at the police station. "We were tortured in the presence of the SHO. We were stripped and electric shock administered to our private parts," she said, adding that she suffered a miscarriage due to this. Virpal said their families were silenced with threats. Both claimed they were let off without registration of any complaint or FIR after five days. They alleged the SHO was acting at the behest of the drug traffickers. Rani's claims were similar. The district BJP unit are not buying the DSP's claim that the women were picket up for trafficking poppy husk and plan to approach the Punjab Human Rights Commission, National Women's Commission and SC/ST Commission.(Hindustan Times 18.2.06).

Dalit Women denied Passport

Girija Devi, a Dalit woman who was scheduled to attend a UN seminar in the US, failed to get her passport. Opposition parties in the state have threatened to take up the issue in the assembly, Girija Devi, a 59 year old mother of four from the Musahar community, was scheduled to address a seminar on 'Women Environment and Development Organisation' in Bhojpuri. "It was the state government's fault. This was done to stop her from attending the UN convention to present her views" said RJD leader Shayam Rajak. Musahar Vikas Manch leader Amar Kumar Majhi said red-tapism was to blame. "The old Dalit woman was forced to run from one office to another. She would have done Bihar proud by speaking at an international convention" he said. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, "I will take action. Let me collect the facts".(Hindustan Times 28.2.06).

Death in Police Station, probe sought

Jaipur: The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights has demanded a CBI enquiry into the death of a Dalit woman in Chomu police station of Jaipur district on Thursday. The woman, Kamla, who was brought to the police station to meet her son who was in police custody on a charge of murder, had died of mental shock and agony due to police misbehaviour, an enquiry report by NCDHR and Centre for Dalit Rights said. The main opposition in the State, the Congress party had made a similar demand. Pradesh Congress Committee president B.D. Kalla in a statement on Friday demanded a judicial enquiry into the case. The party has alleged that the death had taken place at the police station following the ill treatment of the victim. The Chomu police last week had arrested Kamla's son Sumit on a charge of murdering a history sheeter Sikandar Khan. Kamla, a schoolteacher was taken to the police station on Thursday last by five constables, including two women constables to meet her son in the lock up. The police version is that the woman, apparently depressed over the act of her son had consumed poison at home before leaving for the police station. She gave a dying declaration to this effect but her family members had challenged this. The NCDHR team, which visited the spot, found the role of the police and administration "doubtful". (The Hindu 5.6.06).

Just to show an example of how frequent sexual violence and other sort of atrocities occur against Dalit women, a few news paper reports from only one month, July 2013 are given below. (IndiaResists – <http://indiaresists.com>)

1. 01.07.13 – **Haryana – Dalit woman axed to death after rape – Hindustan Times – www.hindustantimes.com/Article 1-1084873.aspx**
2. 02.07.13 – **Tamil Nadu – Divya to stay with mother till family accepts Dalit husband –The Hindu –www.thehindu.com/ article 4870383.ece**
3. 03.07.2013 – **Tamil Nadu – Dalit girl humiliated, ends life – The Hindu-www.thehindu.com/ article 4874141.ece**
4. 04.07.13 – **Tamil Nadu – Girl married to Dalit refuses to go back to husband – The Indian express-www.indianexpress.com/ 1137325**

5. 04.07.13 – **Andhra Pradesh – Fair probe sought into Dalit woman’s rape, murder – The Hindu** -[www.thehindu.com/](http://www.thehindu.com/article/4880746.ece) article 4880746.ece
6. 09.07.13 – **Uttar Pradesh – Dalit Teen girl attempts suicide after rape – The Times of India**-<http://articles.timesofindia.Indiatimes.com/40468352>
7. 13.07.13 – **Punjab – Dalit minor girl raped in Punjab- ZEE news** – [http://zeenews.india.com](http://zeenews.india.com/_861960) _861960
8. 15.07.13 – **Haryana – Dalit woman allegedly raped neighbour held -ZEE news** – http://zeenews.india.com_862236
9. 19.07.13 – **Madhya Pradesh- Man gets 7-year RI for raping minor Dalit girl – Business Standard**-[http://www.business-standard.com/article/](http://www.business-standard.com/article/11307180088) 11307180088
10. 22.07.13 – **Youth arrested for allegedly raping Dalit woman – Zee News** – http://zeenews.india.com_863807
11. 24.07.13- **Tamil Nadu- Child, woman hurt as dalits attacked Dindugal – The Times of India** - <http://articles.timesofindia.Indiatimes.com/21290116>
12. 25.07.13 – **Mentally challenged girl raped by teachers in Haryana; one held – Hindustan Times**- www.hindustantimes.com/Article-1-1097772.aspx
13. 26.07.13 – **Karnataka – Dalit woman raped and filmed at Buddhist ashram for six years; alleges other girls face similar treatment – Daily Bhaskar** – <http://daily.bhaskar.com/article/4330323-NOR.html>
14. 27.07.13 – **Punjab – Dalit girl goes missing, family alleges kidnapping – Business Standard** - http://www.business-standard.com/article/113072600693_1.html
15. 27.07.13- **Gang raped Dalit girl commits suicide in Ghaziabad –NY Daily News** – <http://india.nydailynews.com/newsarticle/6622b3673d3b11149a346e630b54d0dd>

16. 28.07.13 – **Punjab girl rescued, one held - Business Standard** -http://www.business-standard.com/article/113072700652_1.html
17. 31.07.13 – **Gujrat – Harassed Dalit woman sarpanch to face no-confidence motion on Aug.1 – The Indian Express** –www.indianexpress.com/1/1149060/
18. 31.07.13 – **Tamil Nadu – Family ostracized for inter-caste marriage with Dalit in TN- The Times of India** - <http://articles.timesofindia.Indiatimes.com/21499196>
19. 31.07.13 – **Tamil Nadu – Protect Dalit women, Dharmapuri SP told – The New Indian Express**- <http://newindianexpress.com/article1710391.ece>
20. 31.07.13 **Another dalit-vanniyar couple run into community hurdle -- The Times of India** - <http://articles.timesofindia.Indiatimes.com/21499544>

Access to Justice

In contravention of both national laws and international human rights standards that prohibit any physical, sexual or psychological violence against women, varying forms of violent acts specifically targeting Dalit women are occurring on a large scale across India today. Dalit women suffer from severe limitations in access to justice and there is widespread impunity in cases where the perpetrator is a member of a dominant caste, above the Dalits in the caste system. Dalit women are therefore considered easy targets for sexual violence and other crimes, because the perpetrators almost always get away with it. These are massive structural issues in the nation, which show that the marginalised still have no claims to justice and security of bodily autonomy. The impunity enjoyed by both dominant caste community and the state officials continues largely due to the insensitiveness and the continuous failure of the criminal justice administrative system. This is clearly illustrated in a recent national study of violence against Dalit women based on 500 cases:

- In 40.4 per cent of the cases, the women did not even attempt to obtain justice
- In 26.6 per cent of the cases, the victims were prevented to file cases
- In 1.6 per cent of the cases, the women were able to obtain informal justice

- In 17.5 per cent of incidents, the violence reached the notice of the police, but cases were left unaddressed
- Only in 13.9 per cent of cases was appropriate police or judicial action taken.
- A mere 3.6 per cent of cases have ever reached the courts while only 3 of the cases (less than one per cent) have ended in conviction. (Manorama, 2006)

Despite the existence of constitutional, administrative and legal provisions to protect women from all communities, and specific provisions for women in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989), women of disadvantaged groups are vulnerable to gender-specific abuses such as rape, stripping and being paraded naked. There was found non-implementation of the provisions set up to protect these very women against such abuses and to enable them to take advantage of the criminal justice system. Impunity for perpetrators remains one of the main obstacles to stopping violence/torture of women both in the community and by employees of the state. This pattern of non-implementation leads AI to believe that the government of India is failing to exercise due diligence in preventing these abuses. (Amnesty International Report-2010)

Economic Status

Of the total population, Dalit women constitute 16.3% of which 18% women live in rural areas. The women perform hard domestic labour which is unpaid and as agricultural labourers or casual labourers they continue to toil under the burning sun, with no protection or benefits that labour laws should provide, since majority of these women are in the unorganized sector. They do not even get the minimum wages that the state/country has specified, since they are unable to organize and demand for decent wage. Dalit women undertake manual, low paying, tedious, time consuming work. They earn less than one U.S. Dollar. The women have to walk miles to fetch drinking water and often the water is not safe and potable. Dalit hamlets are usually at the end of the main village or in the village outskirts.

They live in small huts and even the few who may have slightly better housing are devoid of basic amenities such as sanitation, light and safe and clean drinking water. The women work on construction sites, carrying heavy loads of construction material. They also work in brick kilns for long hours, as casual labourers to lay roads with hot tar in the burning sun, without sandals and any other protective gear. The women have to walk miles not just for collecting water but also fuel and fodder for their domestic chores. Dalit women are victims of bonded labour, they are abused, sexually exploited by other caste, humiliated and are easy targets of insult.

A study conducted come up with some shocking facts about the work of dalit women. What is horrifying is that Dalit women work more than bullocks and men. Bullocks and men work in a hectare in a year for 1064 hours and 1202, respectively, while women work for more than 3485 hours. The caste and patriarchal norms legitimise the poor economic conditions of Dalit women. She has to work to survive. She is powerless and has neither access nor control over resources. (Unheard Voices – Dalit Women - 2007).

In 2001, about 57 per cent of SC and 37 per cent of ST women respectively were agricultural wage labour in rural areas, as compared with 29 per cent for non-SC/STs. In urban areas, 16 per cent SC and 14 per cent ST women were daily wage labourers as compared with only 6 per cent from non-SC/STs. Only 21 per cent of SC women were cultivators compared with 51 per cent for STs and 45 per cent for non-SC/STs. SC/ST women also faced differential treatment in wage-earning, particularly in urban areas. In 2000, SC and ST women casual labourers received daily wages of Rs.37 and Rs 34 respectively, compared with Rs 56 for non-SC/ST women; the national average was Rs 42. Besides this, a large number of SC women are engaged in so-called ‘unclean’ occupations, like scavenging. Because of their association with these occupations, Dalit women face discrimination in the social and economic spheres. (S K Thorat, Professor of economics at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. Thorat, 2008).

Manual scavenging continues as an occupation in India, and most of the manual scavengers are Dalit women. The women are subjected to do this humiliating and degrading work, which further results in discrimination and social exclusion.

Nutritional Status

How much and what they eat and what work they do differs significantly by caste especially when they are Dalit women, new data from the National Sample Survey Office show. They consume lesser calories due to the poor availability of food for the Dalit households and even the available food is consumed more by the males in the family leaving very little for the females. Dalit women are deprived of the most basic of all amenities required for the dignity and modesty of a woman. They don't even have access to clean toilets and mostly depend on open air defecation. The impact of this triple marginalization on Dalit women can clearly be seen in their current national status in terms of; occupation, education, health, political power, extent of victimization through violence and access to forms of justice. Dalit women are in a worse position than Dalits in general, in terms of sex ratio, wages, employment, occupation, assets, education, health, social mobility and political participation (Bandhu cited in Rao, 2003).

The high degree of deprivation among Dalit women is reflected in other indicators of wellbeing — under-nutrition and health. About 65 per cent and 56 per cent of ST and SC women respectively suffered from anaemia compared to 47.6 per cent of non-SC/ST women. In 2004-2005, 23.2 per cent of SC and 28 per cent of ST children below four years of age suffered from malnutrition (based on weight-for-age). Of these underweight children, 54 per cent of SCs and 56 per cent of STs were severely undernourished. There is a significant difference between SC and ST children and non-SC/ST children, 13.80 per cent and 41.1 per cent of who are malnourished and undernourished respectively. While the Government of India has adopted the national goal of reducing the present infant mortality rate (IMR) to 60 by 2000, the SC's IMR, child mortality and under-5 mortality is 83.00, 39.50 and 119.3, respectively. Compare this with 61.8, 22.2 and 82.6 for non-SC/STs, respectively. Similarly, IMR, child mortality and under-5 mortality are 84, 46.3 and 126 among STs. About 72 per cent of births to SC women and 81 per cent of births to ST women took place at home; the corresponding figure for others is 59 per cent. (Thorat, 2010).

Educational Status

A large majority of the illiterate population comprise of Dalit women with 76.24% of Dalit women being illiterate. The girl dropout rate among Dalit families is increasing with girl-children are forced to work as child laborers, More and more girl children from Dalit communities are school drop-outs and working as child labourers. Dalit women are illiterate because they have less access to education which is an inherent part of the caste system. There are not enough secure facilities for education, taking care of small children and they join the adults to add to the income of the family. Dalit girl children are involved mostly in hazardous work like Beedi making, working in match factories and in the fire-works industry.

Traditionally dowry, which is not a practice of the Dalits has now became a bane. Due to Sanskritisation by the caste Hindus, the Dalits have begun to emulate the customs and rituals of the hindus. Dowry is one such custom. The Dalit families have succumbed to the societal pressures, added to this the fear of sending the girls to schools which are usually located in distant places deprive them of education. Girl children are deprived of access to education as belonging to economically weak families, are unable to pursue their education. They do not get uniforms, schoolbooks, special fees, and have to walk long distances to reach their school. This is a limiting factor for Dalit children.

Dalit women are excluded from decision making. They are not in a position to exercise their decisions. Lack of educational development is the main reason behind this. In 2001, the literacy rate among SC and ST rural females (aged 15 and above) was 25 per cent and 24 per cent respectively, compared with 41 per

cent for non-SC/ST women. The literacy rate among SC women in urban areas was 48 percent, compared with 54 per cent and 70 per cent for ST and non-SC/ST women respectively. The dropout rate among SC and ST women is also relatively high at every stage of education. The high dependence on casual labour, with relatively low earnings coupled with inadequate exposure to education, among SC and ST women induced a high degree of deprivation and poverty among them. (Thorat, 2008)

Health Status

The health condition of Dalit women is alarming with high incidence of maternal mortality and infant mortality. This is due to the fact that Dalit women are unable to access health care services. Due to denial and sub standard healthcare services the life expectancy of Dalit women is as low as 50 years. The infant mortality rate is 90 / 1.000. The sex ratio of Dalit women is 922 / 1000 compared to 927 / 1000 for rest of the population in India. Due to poverty, Dalit women are malnourished and anaemic. Early marriage and multiple child births cause the women to suffer from prolapsed uterus. Continuous bending and working while sowing and harvesting in agricultural causes acute back pain. They also develop skin irritation and allergy due to excessive use of pesticides. As they work barefoot and the soil is damp and wet, the women develop sores between their toes. Due to lack of awareness and medical care, many of them suffer from reproductive health complications, including STDs and cervical cancer with white discharges.

Dalit women are easy target for the Government Birth Control Schemes. Women face forced sterilization, are tested for the use of new invasive hormonal contraception like guinea pigs. They are forced to use long-acting, hormonally dangerous contraceptives. They do not get basic medical facilities. Pregnant Dalit women receive discriminatory treatment in hospitals and there are instances where doctors have refused to conduct the delivery of Dalit women. (Unheard Voices – Dalit Women -2007).

Political Status

In spite of the space (reservation) given to them at panchayat (village) level their participation is dismal in the local governance. Dalit women face direct impediments right from the time of filing nominations right up to announcement of the election results, including: caste and sexually-based verbal abuse; harassment, threats or physical assaults; property destruction; restrictions on freedom of movement; and illegal and fraudulent voting practices. Dalit women are excluded from decision-making. They are not in a position to exercise their power. Wherever Dalit women have contested, they have faced stiff opposition and even been brutally attacked. There are instances where Dalit women have been elected into local governance

and, through the reservation policy, nominated as the president of the local governing unit (Panchayat). But when these women have endeavoured to exercise their role, it has met with resistance, even to the extent of physical violence. The reservation for Dalits, particularly for women, is accepted in form but seldom in substance. Any change in the status quo is resisted. Dalit women's sitting on chairs is seen as threat to social hierarchy. So, the upper castes in the village vetoed chairs in the panchayat office (P. Sainath in Rao 2003). A Dalit woman president is not allowed to sit on a chair if the other caste members do not allow this. She is forced to be a mere figure head, while the functioning of the Panchayat is taken over by upper-caste members. Political parties in India speak much about equality of women but have totally ignored the Dalit women (Jogdand 1999).

Dalit women are excluded from decision making. They are not in a position to exercise their power. Wherever dalit women have contested, they have faced stiff opposition and even been brutally attacked. The 73rd amendment provides for mandatory reservation for Dalit women to be elected to the local governing bodies. They are elected but not able to exercise their power. Menaka (a Dalit woman and a village Panchayat President was killed in broad day light. Ranganayaki was deposed for solemnising an inter-caste marriage. Banwari was gangraped when she objected and reported to the authorities against child marriage in her village. Gowri was made to parade naked for hoisting a flag on Independence Day.

There are instances where Dalit women have been elected into local governance and through the reservation policy nominated as the President of the local governing unit called Panchayat. But when these women have endeavoured to exercise their role, it has met with resistance even to the extent of physical violence. A Dalit woman President is not allowed to sit on a chair if the other caste members do not allow this. She is forced to be a mere figure head, while the functioning of the Panchayat is taken over by other upper caste members. Violence therefore forms the core result of gender based inequalities, caused, intensified and facilitated by caste discrimination, acting as crucial social mechanisms to maintain Dalit women's caste-gender subordinate position to men and particularly dominant caste men.

Impact of Globalization on Dalit Women

Author of 'Untouchability' The Economic Exclusion of the Dalits in India, Smita Narula (2001) states that: "While a small proportion of Indians (of both sexes) can claim that caste Does not matter,...this freedom from caste is impossible for lower caste women],who endure a combination of poverty and gender discrimination that keeps them illiterate, low paid, malnourished, and unhealthy..."

The process of globalisation has affected Dalit women considerably. With the introduction of new farming techniques, such as mechanisation for harvesting and transplanting, women have lost their traditional work in the agricultural sector. Food crops have been replaced by cash crops. Horticulture has been introduced by big agribusiness corporations for export purposes. This has deprived Dalit women of their land and the common resources in the village. (*Paripex- Indian Journal of Research*, 255, Volume : 2 | Issue : 2 | February 2013 IS).

Women used to collect greens, fish, and shells from fields for their food requirements for free. This is no longer available to them. Abject poverty has driven large numbers of Dalit women into the sex trade to earn for their families. The globalization process has increased the feminization of poverty and this has affected Dalit women in every sphere of their lives. There is also large-scale migration from rural areas to the urban centres in search of better livelihood options. Women are left behind to bear responsibility for the family. More and more female headed households emerge and most of the male headed by Dalit women. Such situations push the women into further situations of impoverishment, making them more and more vulnerable to all forms of discrimination and violations. (*Unheard Voices: Dalit Women*,2007).

Recommendations

- Women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination are particularly vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence, forced and ritual prostitution, trafficking, domestic violence and punitive violence when they seek justice for crimes committed. Measures should be taken to increase protection from these crimes and to tackle impunity and discrimination in access to justice. Such measures can include police and judicial training and monitoring, legal assistance for prosecution of crimes, strengthening laws against domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, awareness campaigns to help prevent exploitation, and investing resources into education for women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination.
- State governments of caste-affected areas should initiate a process of dialogue with civil society organisations in framing policies, laws and programmes to eliminate multiple forms of violence and discrimination against Dalit women.
- Legal and structural mechanisms can only function effectively if the attitude and perception of people are changed. Law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, civil society and other stakeholders must combine efforts to enable such change and firm measures must be taken by state agencies to punish officials who neglect or violate legal and other statutory provisions.

- Court trials should be time bound to secure speedy justice for victims of violence and atrocities. This would be similar to time bound investigation and charge sheets for the police.
- Regular training and sensitisation for police personnel as well as periodic review and assessment of the implementation of relevant acts (such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act) at the local, district and national levels.
- Targeted programs for Dalit women must be implemented focusing on key development indicators such as food security, access to clean drinking water, health and sanitation, education, and decent employment.
- Women from caste-affected communities should be supported to increase participation at all levels of political governance as well as in other decision-making structures. The formation of high-level skills in capacity building training for Dalit women should be prioritised, in order to provide them with opportunities for employment in donor and other international organizations at the regional and global level, which will lead to increased development and financial support to eliminate caste-based discrimination.
- Proportional representation of caste-affected women elected into parliaments, legislatures and local governance systems should be mandated. Gender discrimination within caste-affected communities should be challenged through programmes of dialogue and sensitisation of men.
- Land reform programmes should be implemented properly like it is done in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Even in these states the objective of redistributing government owned land resources to the landless, has not been done targeting Dalit women. Distribution of land taken through land ceiling laws should be made to Dalit women. Special subsidies should be made available for women from marginalized communities on agriculture loans, land ownership tax, crop insurance etc.

Conclusion

Caste, class and gender discrimination prevents Dalit women from enjoying their basic human rights, particularly to dignity, equality and development. Atrocities and violence against Dalit women are both a means of sustaining systemic discrimination, as well as a reaction when particularly untouchability practices and caste norms are challenged or not adhered to. Impunity for this discrimination and violence is then used as a means to preserve the existing caste and gender disparities. Before Dalit women can enjoy their human rights, and before the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved, discrimination, violence and impunity must stop. Therefore Indian government must take necessary steps to support them in asserting their rights and to ensure Dalit women and girls are brought

on par with the general population in terms of overall development (e.g. poverty reduction) within a specific period. And the international community should undertake and support every possible measure to fight the wide spread discrimination, violence and impunity committed against Dalit women. Caste-based discrimination cannot be seen as just a problem of Dalits, or a problem of any specific country. It is a human rights problem affecting millions of people in India. The fight against the caste system is crucial for equality, and needs global support in order to promote equality and social justice for everyone.

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