



Social Status of Dalit Women in Rural India

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Abstract

Indian population is classified on many bases and these bases decide the social, economic and educational status of the individual, hence there is presence of discrimination in some form or the other in Indian society. Discrimination in many forms has been practiced in India since time immemorial, the abolition of which was one of the dreams of the framers of the Constitution. Discrimination was primarily based on caste and gender and affected the individual's financial holdings, education and employment opportunities. Educational qualification and financial welfare depended on the caste and gender of the individual. Discrimination on the basis of caste is one of the most prevalent forms of discrimination in India. India is known as the land of villages and this is indeed true because sixty-five percent of its population still lives in villages, as reported by the World Bank's collection of development indicators, which are officially, recognized Posted in 2018 by Sources. Most of its villager's population also originated from the rural as they or their ancestors moved to the cities, as per World Bank data in 1960, eighty percent of India's rural population. Therefore a person's educational qualification depended on the person's caste identity as the lower castes were considered petty workers, so no education was required for them, they were also considered untouchables and hence in educational institutions. They were discriminated against. Sitting with upper caste students is not allowed. The quota law in India gives the Scheduled Castes the right to educational institutions, government employment and places in legislatures. While these quotas were acknowledged as a major breakthrough in affirmative action, whether they actually improved the socio-economic conditions of disadvantaged groups is one of the most debated topics in contemporary times. Gender is another basis of discrimination in Indian society.

Indian society is patriarchal in nature and hence the role and rights of women are mainly focused on domestic and housekeeping. Traditional Indian families depend on women for their housekeeping. Women had no right to seek education or get jobs outside their homes. Pre-independence Indian society did not give any right on immovable property to women. Hence women were exploited economically and socially as well.

Keywords- : Rural, Dalit, Women, Social Status, Women Situation

INTRODUCTION

Most Dalit women are poor; they are landless daily wage workers; and they do not have access to basic resources. They are subject to patriarchal structures, both within the general community and within their family. Violence and inhuman treatment, such as sexual assault, rape and naked parades, act as a social mechanism to maintain the subordinate status of Dalit women in society. “Dalit women score at the very bottom for most social indicators in India, such as literacy (12%), longevity (42 years)”¹, health and political participation. Dalit women are placed at the bottom of the caste, class and gender hierarchy of South Asia. They face many kinds of discrimination – as Dalit, as poor and as women. The caste system declares Dalit women to be intrinsically impure and 'untouchable', which prohibits social exploitation. Human rights abuses against Dalit women are mostly done with impunity. “Dalit women lack employment options and other livelihood opportunities, more so than their male Dalit counterparts”² Police personnel often neglect or deny Dalit women their right to seek legal and judicial aid. In many cases, the judiciary fails to enforce laws protecting Dalit women from discrimination.

“The situation of Dalit women, who have less access to ownership of land, households and livestock, is significantly worse than that of Dalit men”³. Nearly three quarters of the country's 100 million Dalit women live in rural areas, where they face systematic oppression, social exclusion and direct and structural violence from their community as well as 'upper' castes. In India, Dalits - officially known as Scheduled Castes - make up one-sixth of the population. Discrimination against them continues despite constitutional restrictions on untouchability, and the enactment of specific laws including the Protection

of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Many Dalit families living in rural areas are unable to send their children to school due to geographical or economic constraints. “Dalit women are met with physical, verbal and sexual violence from the landlords when they try to assert their economic right to wages or land and their right to sexual integrity”.⁴ Furthermore, young women are often married off at a very young age and are thus unable to continue their education, resulting in high illiteracy rates and an inability to be self-sufficient and contribute financially to the family.

Research Methodology

The methodology of literature review and analysis of official data bases on human development indicators for Dalit women was followed. A comprehensive review of the existing theoretical and empirical literature dealing with gender discourse of Dalit women in general and in particular was undertaken, with the help of current data from official sources and some studies (which are limited in number), the project also attempts to capture the economic and social status of Dalit women and examine them in the background of theoretical discussion, and also, analysis of the current economic, education, health and political status of Dalit women. Based on insights from theoretical and empirical literature, the project indicates the need for a preliminary survey based study to develop an appropriate perspective on the group specific problem of Dalit women.

Discussion

We describe some of the main issues with special focus on the status of Dalit rural women in India. Caste-affected women in rural settings face a number of serious challenges, including lack of access to resources, land, basic services and justice. Due to the intersection of caste, class and gender, Dalit women are subjected to direct and structural violence. In particular, structural violence and lack of access to resources perpetuate their poverty and undermine their dignity. “In India, Dalit women are often met with violence when attempting to assert their rights in areas such as access to housing, drinking water, the

public distribution system (PDS), education or open spaces for open defecation.”⁵ They have the highest poverty levels, are landless and depend on the dominant caste for employment, wages and loans. Their access to resources or even their efforts to access them are often met with violence. Due to the intersection of caste, class and gender, Dalit women are subjected to direct and structural violence. In particular, structural violence and lack of access to resources perpetuate their poverty and undermine their

dignity. Dalit rural women have very limited access and control over land, which in turn leads to food insecurity. They also lack access to water and other communal resources; Women are attacked when they are in non-Dalit areas in an attempt to use those. Moreover, Dalit women lack employment options and other livelihood opportunities as compared to their male Dalit counterparts. “A significant proportion of Dalit women have lost their lives in the absence of basic health services. The mortality rate in India is the highest among Dalit women”⁶. Dalit rural women have to face many problems just like in India. Privatization coupled with increasing encroachment of land, forests and water at the community level has made life more difficult for Dalit women living in rural communities.

Dalit women who have less access to land, house and livestock, their condition is much worse than that of Dalit men. When the effects of caste and gender discrimination are combined, Dalit women are pushed to the lower rungs of the socio-economic strata. Access to and control of land can be an important factor in achieving food security and increased income. However, Dalit women have limited access to land and have no control over it. Due to cultural norms, they do not own land, even if it is within their family. Furthermore, Dalits generally do not own land, but work for the landlord of an influential caste. The socio-economic and political power of landlords in rural, agricultural areas, and the status of Dalit women as employers allowed continued caste and gender violence without punishment. . “In the private domain Dalit women are assaulted for not being dutiful wives, not bearing children or male children specifically or not bringing enough dowry into the marriage”⁷. Dalit women face physical, verbal and sexual violence from landlords when they try to claim their economic rights and sexual integrity rights over wages or land. By forcing Dalits from their land, the dominant caste can perpetuate the cycle of poverty and violence by depriving them of the resources they need for income and food. Since Dalit women have less access to power and resources, it also exposes them to being coerced and bonded. Furthermore, when a Dalit woman owns land, she is often accused of being a witch. Witch hunting is a serious problem in rural communities where a Dalit woman can be either evicted from the land or

expelled from the community. This practice is employed as a 'land grab' tactic and is used by non-Dalits as well as Dalits. This further demonstrates that Dalit women are facing violence, discrimination and subjugation from every group.

Dalit women face verbal, physical and sexual violence in the public and private sphere. This includes verbally and physically attacking the public for various reasons, e.g. When attempting to access public resources or seeking justice after another incident of violence. “In India, violence against Dalit women is being practiced on the basis of discriminatory social, cultural, economic, religious and political tradition and beliefs”⁸. Dalit women in the private sector are harassed for not having dutiful wives, especially for not producing children or male children, or for not bringing enough dowries for marriage. Dalit women face violence by members of the community in connivance with police personnel, their in-laws and their families. Between norms of female subjugation and cultural norms in relation to the "natural" caste hierarchy, women are constantly attacked and taken advantage of. Dalit women are often victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The sexual and physical integrity of Dalit women are threatened and violated from an early age. Because of the caste hierarchy, Dalit women have a perceived right over the bodies of men of the dominant caste, while gender inequality and subordination norms play a significant role in perpetuating marital rape and caste-based sexual assault.

Dalit women are considered sexually available to men of any major caste. Additionally, the use of forced temple prostitution and trafficking are of major concern to young Dalit girls. Sexual exploitation of Dalit women is a common occurrence because of their low socio-economic status and members of the dominant caste take advantage of their power and authority over them.

Violence is being committed against Dalit women in India on the basis of discriminatory social, cultural, economic, religious and political traditions and beliefs. If women protest their practices, they are usually punished with violence. “Sixty percent of Dalit women experience family or other gender-based violence, whether physical, sexual, psychological, social or cultural”⁹. Dalit women also face hardship due to child marriage, bigamy and dowry system which continues despite being officially illegal. Alcohol abuse and subsequent domestic violence is also a significant problem. Not only do they face the most discrimination because of the practice of wives living with their husband's family in India; they also have

to face social exploitation. It is not uncommon for members of the so-called 'upper' caste to pretend to be in love with Dalit girls, and then abandon them on the basis of their caste soon after pregnancy or marriage. Dalit women face violence at home, in public places and even at work on some occasions. Charges of witchcraft result in the victimization of large numbers of Dalit women, sometimes facing severe physical abuse. Similarly, Dalit women are most likely to be victims of inter-caste marriages. 'In a submission to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, three Indian NGOs reported that 86 per cent of women who were victims of violence in the three states surveyed were unable to gain entry into the legal system and their cases would not appear in any official figures'¹⁰.

There is a consistent pattern of delays in reporting and irregularities with respect to criminal procedures, which lead to widespread penalties and create serious barriers to justice for Dalit women. Impunity sends the message that gender and caste based violence is tolerated and thus perpetuated as there is no effective redress for the perpetrator. Another tactic is for the accused or a member of the dominant caste to file a counter case and make false allegations against the woman or her family. These cases are often investigated more rigorously than the original case filed by a Dalit woman. They face direct violence because of their involvement, support, or proximity in conflict; They are disproportionately victims of sexual abuse because of their low social status; And similarly they have to face financial crisis after the loss of husband or other family members or destruction of property. The conflict has caused mass internal displacement. Many male members of the family left their homes, leaving women behind to manage household, and care for children and elderly household members. Dalit women were compelled to do all sorts of work traditionally performed by men such as ploughing the farm and roofing.

In addition to their own gender function, women without a male counterpart face new responsibilities in the face of violence and trauma. The situation of Dalit women has worsened after India's internal conflict, as they have to bear additional social, economic, physical and psychological burdens. All of these factors affect their ability to organize, advocate, influence and participate effectively.

Conclusion

One of the most brutal features of gender inequality takes the form of physical violence against Dalit women. Incidents of such violence are not only remarkably high among the poor and the less developed economics but also in wealthy and modern societies. Feminist position needs to be worked on Dalit women themselves on this issue; otherwise the debate turns into rape men's fantasies. Fundamental problems affecting the role and opportunities of Dalit women, Their helpless dependence does not create enough employment in these sector employment opportunities, limited skills, illiteracy, limited mobility and lack of autonomy

There are many schemes from the state and the center for the upliftment of Dalit women. But the benefits of such schemes and programs hardly reach them. Indian The bureaucracy is hopelessly insensitive, incompetent and corrupt. Thus, the funds which are Set by the government for their welfare, hardly able to bring any significant change

Their life they remain helpless, neglected, exploited and they are the worst. The issue of Dalit women is important. In the context of new social movements the importance in contemporary Indian society has been silenced due to the narrowing of their democratic space today.

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