

Review Of Research

Abstract:-

This paper focuses on The Indian society is based on a unique socio-cultural phenomenon – the caste system, which is essentially a religious system, sanctioned and sustained by Hinduism. In India and other countries in South Asia, people have been systematically discriminated against on the basis of their work and descent for centuries. Over 200 million people are Dalits, also known as untouchables or outcasts. They experience violence, discrimination, and social exclusion on a daily basis. Economic growth in India has been strong over the past decade. However, the caste disparities are increasing. There is no caste system outside the Hindu context. Casteism is a cruel social system, which poses the major cause of most evils in India, for it suppresses the untouchables, the Dalits and denies them the opportunity to grow as humans. While expounding Vedic religion and Upanishadic philosophy, we realize that a large number of Indians are guilty of treating millions of their fellow countrymen as less than humans beings. present the devastating effects of the caste system on the educational, social, and economical status of Dalit women in modern India. My aim is to highlight the harsh reality of the suppression, struggle and torture Dalit women face every day of their miserable lives. The hardships of Dalit women are not simply due to their poverty, economical status, or lack of education, but are a direct result of the severe exploitation and suppression by the upper classes, which is legitimized by Hindu religious scriptures. Dalits are discriminated and suppressed by their castes in society and Dalit women are discriminated and suppressed by their caste as well as their gender in family and society.

DALIT WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE :A SOCIOLOGICAL EVALUATION

KEY WORDS:

Dalits, Devdasi untouchability, Violence, Gender equality, Globalization, Millennium Development Goals, empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

Dalits are commonly clustered together in segregated hamlets at the edge of a village. They are a small and vulnerable minority in any given region, making resistance to exploitation and violence very difficult. Dalits constitute over 16 percent of the total Indian population. The 1991 Census estimates the total Dalit population in India at 138 million, and in Karnataka state as seven and a half million (7.5), or 16% of the total state population. Dalits are not only a socio-cultural group but often represent an economic class as well. The 1971 census figures show that over half of the Dalit workforce were landless agricultural laborers, compared to 26 percent of the non-Dalit workforce. A number of social studies have revealed that Dalit women make up a large number of the professional sex workers. Studies reveal that 90 percent of those who die of starvation and attendant diseases are Dalits. Their untouchability and poverty support each other - their untouchable status accentuates their economic exploitation and their poverty strengthens their polluting social status. Untouchability was made a legal offence by the Indian Parliament in 1955. However, untouchability as a social institution was and is kept alive by the use of brutal force.

The caste Hindus insisted on enforcing the inferiority of the Dalits in many ways, and if they tried to improve their standards of living they were cruelly persecuted. Perhaps the most effective weapon which helped in the perpetuation of the untouchability was the institutionalized bias and denial of access to educational resources. Untouchability is related to the oppression of upper caste women as well, as it became an effective means of patriarchal/Brahmanic control over high caste women's sexuality which was essential for maintenance of caste privilege. At the same time, the potential threat to these systems of domination that the rape of upper caste females by lower caste males represented, was negated by defining offspring of such unions as untouchable. These same ideologies allowed upper caste men to violate low caste women's sexuality with impunity and without consideration of issues around caste purity and female honor. Even the process of Sanskritization or approximation to upper castes' code of conduct, did not help Dalits to cross the barriers of untouchability. Dalits all over India have tried to change their lifestyles, marriage practices and caste names but to no effect.

There are large numbers of reported atrocities on Dalit women that can be found recorded in various newspaper articles, journals, and government reports in India many of which can be viewed on www.ambedkar.org. The majority of the stories we read and hear are of bright young Dalit girls who are punished by the upper caste teachers in rural areas of India, for daring to score good grades. Feeling rejected most girls in these situations drop out of school and have nowhere to turn but towards manual scavenging and other repulsive jobs (News Archives). According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the majority of the educated people are of the upper caste, many of which may practice caste-based discrimination. Therefore, Dalit girls feel discouraged to enter education and we see the lowest literacy rate for Dalit girls compared to the total population of educated upper caste girls (National Commission n.pag). The Annual Report of University Grant Commission for 1999-2000, shows that Dalits in general have very low participation rates in higher education (Annual Reports of University n.pag). Before entering into the subject of the Dalits of India, it is necessary to identify the communities who are Dalits. This is all the more necessary since after independence when a lot of castes were recognized as Scheduled Castes in which besides Dalits many other backward castes were included. It is a fact that all the Scheduled Castes were not Dalits or untouchables and were not given the same treatment by caste Hindus that they gave to Dalits. Descent based discrimination based on caste imposes social exclusion on persons belonging to Dalit castes, and their physical separation from the dominant castes in housing patterns, strict enforcement of the prohibition of inter dining at public places, seating arrangements in educational institutions, particularly schools and forces the performance of degrading occupation like manual scavenging and carrying of night soil by women. Descent based discrimination based on caste results in the violent appropriation and sexual control over Dalit women by men of the dominant caste, evident in systematic rape of Dalit women and perpetuation of forced prostitution in the name of religion through Devadasi system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the Socio-economic status of Dalit women.
2. To identify the Problems and challenges of Dalit women.

METHODOLOGY:

The present paper examines the indicators of women's research is mainly aimed at Dalit women and family life: a sociological evaluation. A two-step methodology was followed for this article, comprising literature review, and analysis of secondary data. Each of these steps of the methodology for this study is described in detail below. In order to achieve the research aim and objectives, the article is mainly based on secondary data drawn from the publications of books, monthly journals, magazines and articles.

Meaning of Dalit: The Dalit is derived from Sanskrit language where it is used both as a noun and adjective. As a noun, Dalit stands for all three genders: Masculine, Feminine and Neuter. It has as its root *dal*, which means to split open, to crack, etc. when used as a noun or adjective, it means burst, split, broken down-trodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed etc. (The practical Sanskrit, English dictionary Delhi, 1989); There is also a word *dal* in Hebrew language, which means broken, crust, down-trodden, split etc., (M.E.

Prabhakar, 1988), and may be used in two senses: it may refer either to physical weakness or to a lowly insignificant position in society (Elsa Tamex, Bible of the Oppressed, 1983: 70). In other words, Dalits are people who are broken, crushed and torn apart. They are extremely poor and lowly. The term Dalit can be used for any oppressed group or people.

Ruth Manorama, an active member of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women, once stated that in a male dominated society, "Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class and gender" in which she sums up the plight of Dalit women, highlighting the fact that Dalit women are a distinct social group and cannot be masked under the general categories of "Women" or "Dalits" (News Archives).

Male Dominated society: Dalit women suffered unimaginable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape. The laws in the Manusmriti and other Vedic scriptures close all economic, political, social, educational, and personal channels through which Dalit women could be uplifted. The horrendous Laws in the Manusmriti were incorporated into Hinduism because they were favourable only to the Upper castes, which form the majority of India. Even today, in modern times, we see the severe oppression and exploitation of Dalit women. The Laws of the Manusmriti have a devastating effect on the level of education reached by Dalit women

Family Role: Because of the girls remain uneducated, they got married very early. Marriage in the high reproductive stage with high fertility rate, children care more. Because of the unlimited family, the burden fell on the young girls which affected their health. They were not able to assist in family matters to their husbands. But now the situation is different. The girls manage to plan their family, educate the children, assist the husbands in family matters and office going and professional girls improve the economic conditions. On the whole the family becomes socially developed because of the education of the girls. Education among women increased inter caste marriages, which is definitely a sign of development. Government also encourages inter caste marriages among dalits and high caste by incentives.

Social and Economic Condition of Dalits: The Dalits in India, wherever they are, suffer the stigma of untouchability and the violation of human rights. Society does not treat them as human beings. The basic human dignity, self-respect and freedom to live as human beings, freedom to speak, freedom to choose any occupation and freedom to develop their talents – have been totally denied to these people for centuries. They (Dalits) are considered to be polluted beings. The pollutions – purity principle operates so strongly that their touch, their mere shadow, and even voices are believed to pollute the caste Hindus. Ambedkar did yeoman service for the uplift of the Dalits by carrying out a life-long struggle against the evils of Hinduism. His dream was to lead them to a life of dignity, meaning and self-respect. From the very beginning, he devoted much of his time to bring about a radical social democracy. He fought valiantly to get equal rights for his fellow Dalits.,,For him political freedom was meaningless unless it was accompanied by social and economic freedom. Political freedom without social and economic freedom could only create contradictions for the Indian notion." His mission to bring about a radical transformation in the living conditions of the Dalits, who were condemned for centuries to live a most dehumanized life in the society. According to him without changing the social marginalization of the Dalits, pursuing political and economic goals would not bring about the desired results. He encouraged the Dalits to get involved in the politics so that social and economic freedom may be achieved gradually.

Woman's position in the family: In Indian society, woman's position in the family is secondary. This is more so in the case of Scheduled Caste woman. Though she may be a wage earner, she has to consult her husband, father, brother or an elder from her family for anything pertaining to her. What is the position of the Dalit woman in the family Of course, it is subordinate like other women in India. For every decision, she waits for the man's opinion (he might be a father, brother, husband, a son or even a male friend) In a family, there is paternal domination even though a woman may be an earning member, she cannot feed or allow her maternal relatives to stay in her family. On the contrary, the relatives of her husband are hailed warmly. To serve them is her most important duty. To earn for the family is another essential duty. Moreover, she has to give money to her alcoholic husband to satisfy his addiction. Thirdly, she has to do all the domestic work. She gets up early in the morning at 4 o' clock and goes to bed at 11 o' clock at night. Male members in the family do not help her for they think it is degrading for the male to do such work. The result is that she has to expect help from other female members and this evokes a quarrelsome response in the family. Otherwise she has not only to forget the very thought of educating her female child but also to deprive the child of her childhood rights. In illiterate Dalit families a woman is always treated with such low esteem that she has a status of nothing more than a mere slipper worn by the men .

Occupation: The contribution of SC women to the economic development of our country is significant especially in the agricultural sector. They are exploited by the higher caste landlords. They are paid very marginal salary for the hard work in the field for the whole day. In leather industries the tanning process is considered to be an unclean job which is done only by socially backward class. Traditional artistes get very more benefit because the middleman exploits them. The condition of scavenger and sweepers is very deplorable and they the most vulnerable sectors among SC. The working condition is very poor and the remuneration is also very poor.

Devdasi System: Married to God before puberty, the devadasis (servants of God) may of whom live in the temples become sexual servants to the villages' upper-caste men after their first menstrual period. In some villages devadasis are kept as concubines but the men she bought them. In others they are public shuttle, who can be used by men free of charge. Indian can't seem to shake off one of the crudest traditions of its hidebound caste system. Dedications of devadasi girls have been supervised by village priests in southern India for thousands of years. The British tried to outlaw the tradition, and the Indian government has banned it too. But according to human-rights activists, as many as 15,000 girls in rural areas are still dedicated to God each year. "The parents simply don't see any other possibility," says Pailey "Somebody has to be dedicated, or the goddess will be angry." Religious duty often ends up as prostitution; many dalit women leave the villages to earn money in the filthy brothels of Bombay. Activism and education are starting to change attitudes.

Violence Against Dalit women: Certain kinds of violence are traditionally reserved for Dalit women: extreme filthy verbal abuse and sexual epithets, naked parading, dismemberment, being forced to drink urine and eat faeces, branding, pulling out of teeth, tongue and nails, and violence including murder after proclaiming witchcraft, are only experienced by Dalit women. Dalit women are threatened by rape as part of collective violence by the higher castes. However, sexual assault and rape of Dalit women and girls also occur within their own communities. For Dalit men, the suppression and rape of women could be a way to compensate for their own lack of power in society. The Devadasi system of temple prostitution is the most extreme form of exploitation of Dalit women. Dalit girl children are forced to prostitution. The majority of cases of violence against Dalit women are not registered. The lack of law enforcement leaves many Dalit women unable to approach the legal system to seek redress. Women are often also unaware of the laws and their ignorance is exploited by their opponents, by the police, and by the judiciary system. Even when cases are registered, the lack of appropriate investigation, or the judge's own caste and gender biases, can lead to acquittal.

Violence in the Family: Similarly, Dalit women faced violence in the family over a range of issues, suggesting the assimilation of the larger patriarchal caste system's norms by particularly Dalit men, with negative implications for Dalit women's personal lives and interactions in their community.. As previously mentioned, the internalised ideology of brahmanical patriarchy, with its notions of women's "honour", "purity" and "obedience", produces and influences the causal factors for violence in the family. Female foeticide and infanticide stemmed from gender discrimination, combined with poverty or a response to the child being born of an illicit relationship. By comparison, child sexual abuse was primarily seen as the result of husbands asserting their perceived right to sexual relations with their child brides.

Gender Equality:Female infanticide is more prevalent among the uneducated dalit families. Educational development among SC women is very marginal because only girls were not sent to school because of the responsibilities at home. Therefore the gender discrimination starts at the very early stage in the life of a dalit girl. Normally girl children are retained at home to look after the siblings. Another thing is the compulsory marriage of the girls at very early age after which the education is stopped. Generally in the male-dominated society, polygamy is allowed and more so in many dalit families. Because of this the position of the women deteriorated. Joint family system, polygamy, property structure, early marriage, and permanent widowhood were hurdles for the development of all women in early period. But in the twentieth century, after the Mahatma Gandhian movement to educate women, slowly changes occurred in the position of women. But here, rural women were more blessed than urban women because divorce and remarriage were allowed for them. Mainly Sudras (i.e. low caste people) allowed divorce and remarriage for their women.

Globalization and Dalit women:The process of globalization has affected Dalit women considerably. With the introduction of new farming techniques such as, mechanization 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 agrobusiness corporations for export purposes. This has deprived Dalit women of their land and the common resources in the village. Formerly women used to collect greens, fish, and shells from fields free for their food requirements. This is no longer available to them. The abject poverty condition has driven large numbers of Dalit women into sex trade to earn for their families. The Globalisation process has increased the feminisation 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 centers in search of better livelihood options. Women are left behind to bear the responsibility of the family. This further adds to the existing burden that Dalit women are trying to cope with. More and more female headed households emerge and most of them are Dalit women. Such situations push the women into further situations of impoverishment, making them more and more vulnerable to all forms of discriminations and violations.

Social change Among the Dalit women: Compared to the women of other social groups, Dalit women are more awakened and aware of their existence in the society now a day. They have revolutionary mind. They are participating in all kinds of social gatherings organized on various social issues. Dalit women are always ahead in the huge procession on the Dhamma Chakra Parivartana day. They are seen in large numbers on the Diksha Bhoomi at Nagpur. Dalit women today are living like burning flames in the society. To name some of them, Mayawati and Phoolan Devi are championing the cause of Dalits through their political activities. The political awakening is definitely more among Dalit women as compared to the

women of the higher castes. They are very conscious in the matter of their right to vote and keeping in mind the qualification and work of the candidate rather than the symbol.

Getting Organised as Dalit women: Since the late 1980s, therefore, Dalit women have increasingly felt and articulated the need for a separate platform – created, developed and controlled by themselves – through which they could forge their own identity, fight for their rights and find solutions to their particular problems as Dalits and as women. Conscious that the call for a separate platform could be interpreted as a divisive move by both Dalit men and non-Dalit women, the proponents of such a special forum emphasise that their initiative must not be mistaken for a separatist movement. Rather they assert that there is need for strong alliances between the Dalit movement, the women's movement and the Dalit women's movement if their common vision of social, economic and political equality and justice for all is to be realised. The National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) was launched by Dalit women themselves and committed itself to undertake several tasks to bring about positive changes in the lives of Dalit women, such as legal action against caste based atrocities, political empowerment of Dalit women, economic empowerment against growing pauperisation, building self-confidence and leadership.

Political Participation and Empowerment: Rural women are politically marginalised, but rural Dalit women are given even less of a voice in the decision making process. In India, there is a quota system in place for Dalits to have seats in the local panchayat (town assembly), but the role Dalit women play is consistently subordinated to their male counterparts. Dalit women who attempt to utilise their power in the panchayat are met with male and dominant caste backlash, pressure and sometimes violence. Many times Dalit women are told they are not even allowed to sit on a chair, but must take their place on the floor. In the majority of instances a Dalit woman has no ability to exercise her voice in the panchayat because her husband represents her and makes the decisions while she is forced to stay at home until he can usurp the panchayat seat for himself.

Millennium Development Goals and Dalit Women: In 2000, 189 countries accepted the Millennium Declaration and agreed to take the necessary action in order to attain eight specific goals; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The realisation of human rights of Dalit women will have a major positive effect on the realisation of the MDGs. In India, 60 million children do not attend primary school, the majority of these children are SC girls, India's child mortality rate is one of the highest in the world and with its vast population and a rate of 540 maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births, India accounts for more than 20 per cent of all global maternal deaths. A greater availability and accessibility of health care for women, including SC women, is needed. Certain kinds of violence are traditionally reserved for SC women; extreme filthy verbal abuse and sexual epithets, naked parading, dismemberment, being forced to drink urine and eat faeces, branding, pulling out of teeth, tongue and nails, and violence including murder after proclaiming witchcraft, are only experienced by SC women. They are threatened by rape as part of collective violence by the higher castes. Sexual assault and rape of SC women and girls also occur within their own communities. For SC men, the suppression and rape of women could be a way to compensate for their own lack of power in society. The Devadasi system of temple prostitution is the most extreme form of exploitation of Dalit women. SC girl children are forced into prostitution.

Present position: The present position is better because of education, literacy rate for boys 31.48%, girls 10.93%. Now they have lot of self respect, aware of their rights, organisations to voice their feelings. The creamy layer is well aware of the Government welfare schemes. Among SC dalits executive positions in associations are occupied only by men, very poor representation by women. Feedback about the welfare programme is very essential. The coaching programmes conducted by the Government for dalit women are beneficial in training many women to compete in the competitive exam. These programmes also do not reach the needy dalit women because they are cornered by the very few creamy dalit women. This should be monitored properly and the schemes should be reached by the most deprived and constantly struggling dalit women. Because these dalit women are neglected by socially advanced communities and also by the better off among the dalits, which leads to an unhealthy socio-economic condition. There should be some scientific basis to pick up the poorest and they should be equipped with facilities. There are some pre-examination coaching centers giving trainings for dalits which are doing very good service to train them in vocational line, for competitive exam, in medical and engineering field, railway recruitment boards, bank recruitment, etc.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

This study was designed Dalit women are placed at the very bottom of South Asia's caste, class and gender hierarchies. They suffer multiple forms of discrimination – as Dalits, as poor, and as women. The caste system declares Dalit women to be intrinsically impure and 'untouchable', which sanctions social exclusion and exploitation. The vast majority of Dalit women are impoverished; they are landless wage labourers; and they lack access to basic resources. They are subjugated by patriarchal structures, both in the general community and within their own family. Violence and inhuman treatment, such as sexual assault, rape, and naked parading, serve as a social mechanism to maintain Dalit women's subordinate position in society. They are targeted by dominant castes as a way of humiliating entire Dalit communities. Human rights abuses against Dalit women are mostly committed with impunity. Police personnel often neglect or deny Dalit women of their right to seek legal and judicial aid. In many cases, the judiciary fails to

enforce the laws that protect Dalit women from discrimination. 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 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 to undertake and support every possible measure to fight the widespread discrimination, violence and impunity committed against Dalit women.

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