



STATUS OF DALIT WOMEN IN PERAMBALUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

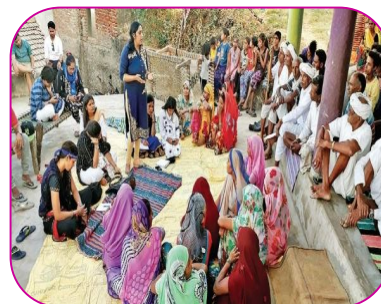
This paper tries to highlight the status of dalit women in India in a fastly globalizing world. The distressing effects of the caste system on the educational, social, and economical status of Dalit women in modern India. The aim of the paper is to highlight the strict reality of the suppression, struggle and suffering Dalit women face every day of their miserable lives. The hardships of Dalit women are not simply due to their poverty, economic status, or lack of education, but are a direct result of the simple exploitation and destruction by the upper classes, which is authorized by Hindu religious scriptures. Dalit women of India have been living in the culture of quiet throughout the centuries. They have remained silencer expectations to their exploitation, oppression and barbarity against them. They do not have any control over their own frames, earnings, and lives. The extreme expression of violence, exploitation and cruelty against them is visible in forms of hunger, malnutrition, disease, physical and mental pain, rape; illiteracy, ill-health, unemployment, insecurity and inhuman treatment. The collective forces of Feudalism, Casteism, and patriarchy have made their lives just a hell. An overwhelming majority of them live under the most hazardous conditions. In the present age of modernism and post-modernism they are still living in darker age of cruelty.

KEYWORDS: Women, Dalit, Exploitation, economic, social, health, education, poverty, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

In India, 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 outsiders. They experience violence, discrimination, and social elimination on a daily basis. Women from Dalit community are also not an exemption for the devastating effects of the caste system. They are subjected to demolition, struggle and torture in 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 simple exploitation and suppression by the upper classes, which is authorized by Hindu religious scriptures. Ruth Manorama, an active member of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women, once specified that in a male dominated society, "Dalit women face a three-way burden of caste, class and gender" in which she sums up the difficulty of Dalit women, highlighting the fact that Dalit women are a different social group and cannot be screened under the general categories of "Women" or "Dalits". Despite of heavy odds they still struggle to put an end to their suffering to ensure a sunnier future for the generations to come.

The situation of Dalit women in India needs superior attention. They are one of the largest socially isolated groups anywhere in the



world, and make up 2% of the world's total population. Dalit women are categorized against three times over: they are poor, they are women, and they are Dalits. Dalit women establish semi of the ca. 200 million Dalit population, and 16.3 of the over-all Indian female population. The outdated prohibitions are the same for Dalit men and Dalit women. Though, Dalit women have to deal with them more often. Dalit women are discriminated against not only by people of developed castes, but also within their own communities. Men are overriding in Dalit communities. Dalit women also have less influence within the Dalit movement itself. Women are active in large numbers in the movement but most leadership situations in the organizations, local bodies and associations have until now been held by men.

Dalit women are also traditionally reserved for certain kinds of violence. Risky 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 announcing witchcraft, are experienced by Dalit women more often. Dalit women are vulnerable by rape as part of collective violence by the higher castes. However, sexual attack and rape of Dalit women and girls also happen within their own communities. For Dalit men, the destruction 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 thrilling form of exploitation of Dalit women. Dalit girl children are forced to prostitution. The popular of cases of violence against Dalit women are not registered. The lack of law implementation leaves many Dalit women unable to approach the legal system to seek compensation. Women are often also unaware of the laws and their ignorance is exploited by their challengers, by the police, and by the judiciary system. Even when cases are registered, the lack of suitable investigation, or the judge's own caste and gender prejudices, can lead to discharge. Dalits women thus have handled suppression, exploitation and torture for the past two thousand years.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In a male dominated society, Dalit women suffered unimaginable domination, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no outflow. The laws in the *Manusmriti* and other Vedic scriptures close all economic, political, social, educational, and private networks through which Dalit women could be raised. The horrendous Laws in the *Manusmriti* were incorporated into Hinduism because they were advantageous only to the Upper castes, which form the majority of India. Even today, in modern times, we see the severe oppression and mistreatment of Dalit women. The Laws of the Manusmriti have a disturbing effect on the level of education reached by Dalit women.

There are large numbers of reported atrocities on Dalit women that can be create recorded in several newspaper articles, journals, and government reports in India many of which can be viewed on www.ambedkar.org. The popular of the stories we read and hear are of bright young Dalit girls who are penalized by the upper caste teachers in rural area of India, for daring to score good ratings. Feeling excluded most girls in this situations drop out of school and have nowhere to turn but towards manual scavenging and other disgusting jobs.

According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the common of the educated people are of the upper caste, many of which may exercise caste-based discrimination. Therefore, Dalit girls feel dejected to enter education and we see the lowest literacy rate among Dalit girls equated to the total population of educated upper caste girls. The Annual Report of University Grant Commission for 1999-2000, shows that Dalits in general have very low involvement rates in higher education out of Privatization of schools and colleges, risky poverty, non-affordability of expensive fees for the private schools. The demand for an rise in the Dowry for educated girls as well as mortification and bullying by the high caste students and teachers are also found to be the reasons for low input rates in higher education. Thus, the fate of the majority of Dalit girls is very unattractive. According to India's Ministry of Labour, 85% of the Dalit women have the most tough occupations and work as agricultural laborers, scavengers, sweepers, and disposers of human waste. Many of these women work for negligible wages under the upper caste landlords, since it is planned that by the National Commission for SC/ST that 85% of the Dalits are landless.

When the Dalit women refuse to work for preposterously low wages or fail to follow their harsh orders it results open violence, mortification, beatings, rape, and jail. There are also a number of cases where the houses of Dalit women have been burnt down. There are many cases like these, all of which cannot be conversed here. The worst exploitation of Dalit women includes a lifetime of suffering, torture, and rape. Justified by the Vedic scriptures, the *Devdasi system* (also known as temple prostitution) was presented by the High caste Hindus, and it still occurs in some parts of India (Thind; Agarwal; Narula). According to the *Human Right Watch Report* in 1992, an estimated 50,000 girls were sold every year to Hindu organizations that are elaborate in the Devdasi system. These girls are called the “female servants of god” and are sexually oppressed (Thind n.pag). After a lifetime of living as a prostitute and retainer, the women in their later years are sold to brothels, where they are more tortured and often die of neglect or AIDS.

The 1992-93 Annual report from the Ministry of Welfare shows 1,236 reported cases of rape on Dalit women and the National Commission for SC/ST shows that nearly 10,000 cases of human right violations on Dalits are testified every month. But what is even more upsetting, is that only one out of often of the cases are reported annually whilst, nine go unreported. In addition to this, according to the Human Right watch Report, roughly 115 million children are in slavery and 2.6 million children are held as bonded labourers (Narula). After fifty-five years of India’s independence and despite the admirable laws in place to protect Dalit women, they are still suffering unthinkable atrocities from the high caste Hindus. It is supposed that thousands of these cases go unreported and unpublicized because the poor Dalits that live in rural areas, who are the poorest victims, have no control on power, wealth, justice, laws and the media . The only way these Dalit women can escape the sticky cycle of poverty, abuse and oppression is through education. Through education more Dalit women can come to know their basic human rights and they can then raise an even tougher speech against abuse and exploitation from the upper castes. In this context, the present study on “Status Of Dalit Women In Perambalur District “would like to find out or questioning into the development of Dalit women in educational, health and economic realms.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Dalit women in India constitute 80 million or 48 % of the overall Dalit population, 16.3 % of the overall female population in India, 81.5 % of Dalit women live in countryside. They, along with their male counterparts, constitute a sizeable social group based discrimination and untouchability arising out of the caste system. Dalit women are mainly discriminated on the basis of their caste (which is lower than others - outcaste) poverty and gender. There are about 250 million Dalits in India.

The Dalit women have to handle with the discrimination due to the caste hierarchy and untouchability on the one hand and risky economic deprivation and poverty on the other coupled with political, legal and religion-cultural discrimination. Dalit women continue to be illiterate, malnourished, in poor health, overworked, oppressed and victimized by a number of factors, including their own family and community. Dalit women also do not have to access to resources such as land, water and so on. Hence, Dalit women end up working as bonded agricultural labourers with low/under paid wages, inspite of their knowledge and skills in farming. The extreme perennial economic withdrawal has also resulted in illiteracy, malnourishment, poor health conditions, besides this they are also overworked, oppressed and victimized by a number of factors, including patriarchal attitude within the family and community.

Dalit Women’s everyday fight is one of existence, survival and justice. The everyday discrimination is spread by mental and physical violence. Forever, the principles of ‘high and low’, ‘purity and pollution’ has not left any scope for varying Dalit women’s position. Thus, any move by Dalit women to enquiry the system, or challenge inequality to change the life situation has resulted in retribution with abuses such as beating, rape, naked parading, branded as witches and harassed for murder. This further associates in punishing the whole community by burning of houses, destruction of properties, valuables, crops etc. The bottom of the Dalit Women’s struggles for survival is rooted in her being at the lowest rung of the Caste hierarchy. However, there is meager improvement in the socio-economic condition of Dalits in the past 50 years, which is not sufficient when compared to non-Dalits. Of course, much more wants to be done. The urgent need is

to have a national model survey on Dalits. Every fourth Indian is a dalit. There is no proper survey to give the accurate number of Dalit women in India. The present study will come up with harsh reality of dismal social and economic position of dalit women of perambalur district and lacunae in achieve the social position by them.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study socio-economic conditions of Dalit women in Rural Area.
2. To study the economic, educational and health status of the Dalit Women in Rural Area.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The researcher selected Perambalur District to study the status of Dalit women as this district has recorded 2nd least Scheduled Caste population among the districts. In this district, Perambalur taluk has more sc population comparatively than the other taluks of the district. Hence, the researcher has selected six villages in Perambalur taluk purposively. They were Kurumbalur, Palayam, Sencheri , Chettikulam, Echampatti and Alampadi .

To explore this study on Status of Dalit Women in Rural Area a tool descriptive research design was used. For this study the Researcher selected totally six villages by using a purposive sampling method. From six villages, 30 sample respondents were selected at the rate of five dalit women in each village by using simple random sampling. The selected villages were having significant proportion of socially disadvantaged group like SCs, STs, BCs and other upper castes. As the most of the Dalit women in the villages are illiterate, the researcher analyzed them about the subject undertaken by him. On the bases of respondents' answers the questionnaire was filled.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Dalit women are one of the most marginalized segments in the society. The condition of dalit women is more vulnerable than non-dalit women. Dalit women are suffering from multi- disadvantages. They are a) Being Dalit i.e. socio-economically and culturally marginalized section and b) Being women and sharing the gender based inequalities and subordination. The below given table discuss the socio economic conditions of the subjects of the research universe.

Table: 1- Distribution of respondents by socio-economic variables

Sl.No	Age	Respondents	Percentage
1	Below 20 years	5	16.6
2	21-30years	14	46.6
3	31-40 years	4	23.3
4	41 and50	3	13.3
	Total	30	100
	Education	Respondents	Percentage
1	Illiterate	4	13.3
2	Primary	11	36.6
3	Secondary	10	33.3
4	Higher secondary	4	13
5	Graduation	1	3.3
	Total	30	100
	Marital status	Respondents	Percentage
1	Married	22	73.3
2	Un married	4	13.3
3	Widow	2	6.6

4	Divorce	1	3.3
5	Separated	1	3.3
	Total	30	100
	Religion	Respondents	Percentage
1	Hindu	26	86.6
2	Dalit Christian	4	13.3
	Total	30	100
	Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
1	Agriculture	5	16.6
2	Collie	15	50.0
3	Petty Business	2	6.6
4	House wife	6	20.0
5	Private service	1	3.3
6	Govt.Service	1	3.3
	Total	30	100
	Nature of family	Respondents	Percentage
1	Joint Family	8	53.0
2	Nuclear family	13	27
3	Extended Family	9	20
	Total	30	100
	Income Per Month	Respondents	Percentage
1	Less than Rs.5000/-	21	70.0
2	5001-10000	2	6.6
3	10001-15000	1	3.3
4	House wife	6	20
	Total	30	100

From the Table No-1, it is understood that less than half (46.6%) of the respondents were belonging to the age group of 21-30 years and only 13.3% of the respondents were between the age of 41-50. Of the remaining, 16.6% and 23.3% belong to below 20 years and 31-40 Years respectively.

The table reveals that 36.6% have completed secondary education followed by 33.3% of the respondents who have completed their studies up to secondary education. Our study also reveals that only 3.3% had a chance to have Graduation. This apart 13.3% and 13% were belong to the category of illiterate and Higher secondary. Though vast majority of our study subjects belong to the category of literate, only 3.3% have completed the graduation. The remaining were did finish only schooling which is not sufficient enough to accomplish neither economic nor social status on par with the women of other caste groups.

It is also evident from the table that 73.3% were found married followed by 13.3% of the respondents as unmarried. Of the remaining, 6%, 3.3%, and 3.3% of the respondents were comes under the category of widows, divorce and separated respectively.

With regard to religion is concern, 86.6% of the respondents were hailing from Hindu religion and the remaining were (13.3%) dalit Christians. The study also shows that around 50% of the respondents were being as collie for their daily bread followed by 16.6% of the respondents who have taken up Agriculture as their occupation. This apart, 6.6% of the respondents found with petty business and 3.3% of respondents were found earning through government job and the similar chunk were also in private service. This reveals that most of them were fighting with tooth and nail survival by being collie.

The table indicates that more than half (53%) of the respondents were from joint family system and the remaining 27% from Nuclear family system. Only 6% of respondents were living in extended family with members belonging to either one of the spouse parental family.

It is also crystal clear that vast majority of the respondents (70%) were earning less than Rs.5000 Per month. Only 6.6% and 3.3% were earning between Rs. 5001and Rs. 10000/-.This shows the incapacitation of dalit women to earn more despite of their present educational status.

Table No-2: Distribution of respondents by the economic and educational status

Sl.No	Awareness about constitutional provision of Equality	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	19	63%
2	No	11	36.6%
	Total	30	100
	Discrimination Faced	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	23	76.6
2	No	7	23.3
	Total	30	100
	Type of Faced Discrimination	Respondents	Percentage
1	Place of Birth	3	10
2	Caste	19	63.3
3	Sex	1	3.3
4	No Discrimination	7	23.3
	Total	30	100
	Family Financial Responsibility	Respondents	Percentage
1	Husband	17	57
2	Wife	6	20
3	Both Husband and wife	4	13
4	Father in law	2	7
5	Mother In law	1	3.3
	Total	30	100
	Habit of Savings	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	12	40
2	No	18	60
	Total	30	100
	Having f Personal Bank Account	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	9	30
2	No	21	70
	Total	30	100
	Studying Family Members	Respondents	Percentage
1	Only One	16	53
2	Two	8	26
3	Three	6	20
	Total	30	100
	Type of Educational Institution	Respondents	Percentage
1	Govt. School/Colleges	23	76.6
2	Private school/ Colleges	7	23.3
	Total	30	100
	Reservation For Admission	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	4	13.3
2	No	26	86.6
	Total	30	100

Table No.2 indicates that majority of the respondents (63%) did have awareness about the provision that ensures equality among Indian citizen despite of the differences have upon caste creed, sex

and religion and only 36.65 of the respondents did not have any awareness about it .this speaks the ignorance of the dalit women about the constitutional provision of equality.

Table also speaks that vast majority of the respondents (76. %) confessed that they were the subjects of discrimination in their residential areas by the caste Hindus and only 23% points about non discrimination .Of the total who expressed discrimination, 10% did say the place of birth as point of discrimination by other caste groups and 63.3% as caste and only 3.3% refers about “sex ‘as a base for discrimination.

Anent to the question of handling financial responsibility of the family, majority of the (57%) of the respondents said that their husbands were doing so and 20% said they themselves maintaining .Of the remaining 13%,7% and 3.3% were said that together by spouse ,father in law and mother in law have taken up the financial responsibility of their family respectively .

Table also reiterates that 60% of the respondents did not do any savings out of their family income and only 40% have spoke about savings from their income for future needs and requirements. Albeit 40% of the respondents do savings out of their family income, only 30% had personal bank account and the remaining did not have personal bank account. This highlights the poor financial status of the dalit women.

Table also speaks that only 53% of the sending only one member of his family to get an education either to school or college followed by 26.6% of the respondents who sends two members from their family to educational institutions for getting 3RS. Of the remaining, 20% of the respondents did send 3membersfrom their family to get instructed in the educational institutions.

Of the total respondents, vast majority (76.6%) of the respondents going to government Institutions to get an education and the 23.3%make use of private institutions for getting an education. .It is also obvious that only very meager (13.3%) percentage of the respondents made use of reservation for getting admission in the educational institutions and the remaining were not made use of the reservation facility for getting admission in the educational institutions.

Table No-3:
Distribution of respondents by health status and impact of education on their status

	Change in social status with other caste women upon wards education	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	16	53
2	No	14	46.6
	Total	30	100
	Equal status upon education	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	22	73
2	No	8	27
	Total	30	100
	Personal development upon education	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	26	86.6
2	No	4	13.3
	Total	30	100
	Increasing earning upon education	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	21	70
2	No	9	30
	Total	30	100
	Do you encourage for Education	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	24	80
2	No	6	20

	Total	30	100
	Awareness about Nutritious food scheme for Pregnant women	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	23.	76.6
2	No	7	23.3
	Total	30	100
	Place of Delivery	Respondents	Percentage
1	Govt. Hospital	19	63
2	Private Hospital	4	13.3
3	Home	7	23.3
	Total	30	100
	Under Gone Family Planning	Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	26	86.4
2	No	4	13.3
	Total	30	100

Table No-3 refers that more than half of the Respondents (53%) opined that social status of the family will get elevated out of wards educational status and the left out (46.6%) of the total respondents did not feel so.

It is also very clear from the table No-3 that vast majority of the respondents (73%) had a strong faith that educational accomplishment of the respondent fetches equal status to them compare to the other high caste women .

Vast majority (73.3%) of the respondents of the study area also have had a belief that the individual income of the members of the dalit community will get increase if the educational status increases and the remaining were not so and felt that mere education was not enough to earn more as many of their residents were not settled despite of their higher education.

It can be comprehensible from the above table that vast majority of the respondents (80%) opined that they will encourage the eligible members of the community to get good education for their bright future .and the remaining were having negative expression about encouraging the eligible members of the community to get good education.

With regard to awareness about nutritious food scheme for pregnant women, vast majority (70%) did aware and benefitting out of it that and only very small (30%) percentage did not so. The study subjects of the universe revealed that more than half (63%) of the respondents did deliver babies in the government hospitals followed by 23.3% who did deliver in home with the help of local attendants . Only very less (13.3%) have had delivered at private Hospitals

To the question thrown on family planning to the respondents , vast majority (86%) of them affirmed the family planning undergone and the very small(13.3%) percentage) were not so as they yet to get married .

CONCLUSION

In modern India, Dalit women are having devastating effect of the caste system on the educational, social, and economical status. 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 of the society. As a consequence ,Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class and gender” and highlighting the fact that Dalit women are a distinct social group and cannot be masked under the general categories of “Women” or “Dalits”.

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