

## DEVELOPMENT OF DALIT WOMEN IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Traditionally, India is known for the caste-based social system and its foundations are from Hinduism. The hierarchal based social order has the foundations from Manu/ Manu Dharmshastra. While addressing the nature of the caste system J.H. Hunton observes that it is exclusively an Indian phenomenon and that no other society in the world can be compared to caste-ridden society of India ([http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/8562/8/08\\_chapter%203.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/8562/8/08_chapter%203.pdf)). This social structure is not just based on purity and pollution: it has also accorded other aspects of human life which is coupled with landlessness, poverty and involvement in degrading occupations. Therefore it is an exploitative structure.

The hierarchal system has implicated certain groups are untouchables by birth and made it hereditary and they were treated most inhuman way for centuries. Under this traditional scheme of caste system the untouchables who are at the bottom of the society facing vulnerability and discrimination in the most heinous way. The people identified with untouchability were never treated as human beings and denied basic human dignities like self-respect, freedom to live as human beings, freedom to speak, freedom to choose any occupation and freedom to develop their talents. They simply exist as objects of pleasure for the high caste or means for their welfare and luxury and they suffered from a stigma of 'untouchability' which is unique phenomena to these people or groups.

In a caste-ridden society like ours, the untouchable families mostly in rural areas lead their life without any assets, and they are mostly landless agriculture laborers or small artisans. It has been noticed that 82.8 percent of the land of our country is owned by the caste Hindus. It is said that only a 7 percent of the land is owned by the Dalits and among them nearly 70 percent have less than one hectare ([http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/8562/6/06\\_introductions.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/8562/6/06_introductions.pdf)). Studies even suggest that the competition in India is not based on talents and natural aptitudes but on the basis of the caste in which one is born. In such situations majority of them are unemployed or underemployed, and even if they are employed they get the very meagre amount of wages from their employer. Due to these prevailing conditions, they fall into a debt trap and resulted in them into bondage (*Status of Dalit women, P: 11*). Dalits are denied basic necessities like drinking water and public places by the powerful and the upper castes which are the worst form of dehumanisation. They are left with no voice and face. They are the victims of violence and atrocities both at home and outside.

To reduce the gap and promote social justice and economic freedom in the society, the government of India passed number of legislations in favour of these groups that is known as Affirmative Action Policies. Along with these affirmative action policies, it has also created certain constitutional safeguards to these sections under Article 17 deals with abolition of untouchability,

Article 341 for the Scheduled Caste for ensuring their fundamental rights as Indian citizens, and the Directive Principles of State Policy authorizes the state to protect these socially marginalized group from any further discrimination in the society based on their caste. In addition to these, the government of India has enacted certain special laws to remove discriminatory practices against the Scheduled Castes and also to ensure their social and economic empowerment. Anti-discriminatory measures like the Untouchability Offence Act of 1955 (renamed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act [PCR] in 1976), and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA) of 1989 were enacted to prevent crimes and atrocities against Dalits. Permanent national commissions have been set up to safeguard their rights for both SCs and STs as well as for women (*Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal and Wandana Sonalkar, p: 46*). Despite all these laws the vulnerabilities have been reporting in their day to day life. In India, across castes women considered to be inferior to men and being Dalit women she has to face much more vulnerabilities than their men folk. The Dalit women problems are different from Dalit men. Being Dalit women, she faces three types discrimination than their men folk. As a Dalit, she faces untouchability, being a woman she faces gender discrimination and as a woman she cannot work equally with men and earn lesser wages which are inner side of the discrimination (*Mahey, Sonia, p: 1*). Along with she also faces discrimination within the community and their men folk (*Ruth Manorama*). By simply applying, these laws will not render any relief to the Dalit women. Based on the above understanding, the proposed paper on 'Development of Dalit women in India: Problems and Prospectus' would try to study the following:

1. *What are the socio-religious factors that have influenced the marginalization of Dalit women?*
2. *To what extent the feminist movement played a positive role towards Dalit women?*
3. *Have the Dalit women utilized educational and political policies of government sufficiently to improve their socio- economic conditions?*

The paper is based on secondary data which consists of books, articles, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) Reports, and government reports and also from census data. The paper has three sections, the first section is on historical background, and the second section is in the feminist movement and their role in the upliftment of the Dalit women and the last section will be of government programs and their impact on Dalit women.

Dr B.R Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian Constitution and social reformer of modern India made a pioneering contribution to reform Hindu social order. In 1932, through 'Annihilation of Caste', he questioned the Hindu social order. He fought relentlessly throughout his life to reform Hindu social order and particularly to improve the conditions of the underprivileged and women in Indian society. He wrote extensively to counter the views of gender relations sanctioned by *Shastras* and upheld by Hindu traditions. In his writings like "*The rise and fall of Hindu Women*", "*The Women and Counter-Revolution*", "*The Riddle of women*" and "*Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*" have analysed the manner in which gender relations are artificially constructed under Hindu social order which not only moulds the upper caste mindset towards their women but also conditioned women to behave in a feminine way i.e., more of a passive and submissive behaviour that

would be suiting for domestic and family responsibilities (*Bijay 2014, p;*). In this backdrop, the reality of suppression, struggle, and torture Dalit women face in their everyday life is much more severe. All these hardships are not based on their economic or educational status, it was directly imposed on them by the upper caste Hindu patriarchy and that has been legitimised by the Hindu religious scriptures.

## BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Bharati's* (2014) paper on the exploitation of Dalit women and its portrayal by Telugu Dalit women poets in their poetry. The paper suggests that the Dalit women get exploited in the name of caste and sex. It further says both the Dalit women and Afro-American girls are viewed as sex objects without any compunction on the part of the males of the dominant culture. The author argues that the oppressive system took a long time to accept the Dalit men's ability and creativity in literature and it would be much more difficult for Dalit women poets. *The author has compared the non-Dalit feminists with US feminists. In either case caste or race and class are not considered as important targets by them. However, in the case of Black feminists and Dalit women feminism anti-imperialism, anti-caste and anti-racist ideology are the prime targets. It suggests that until 1980 majority of the Telugu Dalit women writings were Aryan and Christian perspective. The atrocities on Dalits in Andhra Pradesh has changed the Telugu Dalit women writings as reaction these incidents. To portray the Dalit women condition, the author has used all the available Telugu Dalit women poetry. While concluding the paper, the author concluded with an observation that the Dalit (male) intellectuals and leaders along with non-Dalit men and women look at Dalit women only as women, an object of exploitation but never miss a chance to exploit Dalit women in every possible way. Hence Dalit women poets have to fight for the rights of Dalit women through their poetry.*

*Dinesha's* (2014) paper on the political reservation at the local level. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has created space for Dalit women in PRIs. This act also empowered them to redress their grievances. However, in reality, they are not fully involved in decision-making process due to a number of problems like caste based discrimination on Dalit women representatives have a common event in certain areas in rural areas. The bureaucratic indifference towards these elected representatives. The same act did not ensure them to function effectively. The study also noticed that lack of education they failed to take independent decisions on many issues. Another important point is that wherever Dalit women function effectively in such places they get most vulgar and abusive language and sometimes allegations also from their opponents.

*Ashalatha(2013)* explains the position of Dalit women in Indian society. They are a socially largest segregated group in the world. As a Dalit woman she considered to be Dalit among Dalits and suffer three-fold oppression — On account of gender, On account of caste i.e., 'untouchable', and finally on account of their class - as she hails from the poorest among the marginalised communities. *The paper argues that the so-called Hindu religious books are solely responsible for their visible miseries.* It also submits that the process of globalisation has brought many severities to her life like mechanisation of harvesting and transplantation has forced the Dalit women lost their traditional work in the agricultural sector. *The abject poverty has pushed them into the sex trade to earn their livelihood.* Hence government intervention is necessary to develop them and their girls at par with the general women for an overall development and reduce the poverty among these groups.

Roy Burman (2012) state's that the tribal women status is better in comparison to women in general society. The artificially constructed Hindu social order that characterises the Hindu culture is generally absent among the tribal groups. Though the tribes to have son preference, but never practice female infanticide or sex determination tests. To reveal the status of the tribal women in the society, Roy-Burman gave examples of *Kasis, Moppilas, Todas of Nilgiri, Jaunsaris*. He has elaborately discussed different marriage practices and the position of women. Since the tribal women were considered to be an asset and there is the practice of bride price during marriages which is quite common among them and which is a sharp contrast to the general caste-Hindu practice. He made quantified Judgment of tribal women and their economic activities like fishing, weaving and selling fruits and forest products in the weekly markets. The tribal area of *Betul in Madhya Pradesh*, the collection, and marketing of firewood is the domain of tribal women. The North-Eastern region, particularly the *Protestant Church* has brought a significant change among the tribal women.

*Badri Narayan (2004)* deals with the cultural repression of Dalits, their place in Hindu society. He has narrated the rise of Dalit leadership in North India, especially in Uttar Pradesh. The author says the Dalits also replicated the upper caste formula of glorification of the past memories and images which have brought a sense of pride among Dalits and also political consciousness. The past glorification has forced them to construct a positive identity and self-respect in a world of a challenge by power, conflict and competition and support to fight for fame and power. In the method of glorification, he has used three women heroes (Viranganas) of the 1857 rebellion, namely, Jhalkaribai, Udadevi and Mahaviridevi and their images and contributions were used effectively to build Mayawati image. The same method has popularised Mayawati's charismatic image on one side and encouraged the growth of leadership among the Dalits on the other. To build grass-root level political consciousness among Dalits, the Dalits used two methods, one is popular tales and another one is the plight of Dalits in the literate section of the society, who in turn disseminate them to the illiterate people orally. He also argues that the statues that have been installed in public places, specifically in places where the Dalit population is more has generated deeper impact on Dalits. Lastly, he says that the way *Bhartiya Janta Party* has used the gods, heroes and other cultural resources to mobilise their electoral support in a similar way the *Bahujan Samaj Party* has also used their past glories. He says that Dalit memories and images gave an alternative reading in which it may be regarded as replication in the form of dissent rather than following the process of Sanskritisation. (*Badri Narayan (2004) Women heroes and Dalit assertion in North India: Cultural subordination and the dalit challenge, Volume 5/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006,186 pp.*)

*Ammu Josep's (2004)* paper is a review of 'Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives'. The reviewer says the book is a "*modest attempt and it further says that the existing movements (feminist movement or the Dalit movement) failed to address Dalit women problems in such circumstances this volume is a great contribution to highlighting their problems and generate some consciousness on their issues. An attempt was also made in the volume to explain the term Dalit. The term signifies a change and revolution against exploitation and oppression and brings consciousness. It says the Dalit women have both quality to generate leadership as well as consciousness to the Dalit and the feminist movement. Since they have the quality to generate leadership, visualised an autonomous and independent platform to enable and address their special needs and forge their own*

identity as Dalits and as women. In such situation, the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) was launched in August 1995; the founders made it clear that it doesn't want fight separately rather it called for a strong alliance between the Dalit movement and women's movement. This evolved an understanding and linkage between three set of players. The paper also suggests that the early phase of women's movement was dominated by the upper caste-women from urban centres and therefore their actions and perceptions were very limited. Because of their privileged position, they failed to recognition the patriarchy as an ideology of social system and institutionalising gender-based differentiation and discrimination. It was Dalit women assertiveness made other women in the movement change their voice and concern and set their priorities. There is no doubt that Dalit women were primarily responsible for bringing about this positive development within the women's movement. Due to this, the 5<sup>th</sup> National Conference has given highest priority to Dalit and Tribal women issues. This implies that they are clearly moving beyond the presentation and analysis of their cause in Dalit Women in India and arguing their own case both realistically and forcefully.

*Mahipal (2004)* says the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act has facilitated to function as self-governing institutions and it provided adequate space to Dalits including Dalit women to get elected these bodies. While discharging their roles and duties, they faced a number of problems. To identify and address these problems, a one-day workshop was conducted at Haryana Institute of Rural Development (HIRD) in collaboration with National Commission for Women (NCW). Nearly 118 elected representatives (ER) have attended the workshop. In the workshop, almost all the Dalit women representatives have raised their concerned and the problems faced by male members of the panchayats and village people belonging to higher castes. On the whole, illiteracy and lack of awareness have constrained them to function. It also concludes that most of the village ERs are not aware of various schemes specifically meant for the welfare, education and economic development of the Dalits. Wherever the Dalit women representatives were literate, they were more assertive than the others. On the whole, it can be treated as the beginning to end of indivisibility of Dalit women sarpanches in local governance.

*Vimal Thorat (2001)* opines that the Dalit women's issues are consciously ignored both by the Dalit movement as well as women's movement. Many times Dalit movement/politics identify with caste politics and it deliberately resists the gender dimension of the caste. This indicates the patriarchal attitude of side-lining or ignoring the women from decision-making bodies. Her paper highlights the problems faced by Dalit women in her day today life and it further says that Dalit women not only suffer from gender inequalities but inequalities within inequalities. Though Dalit women have worked with women's movement from its inception but they repeatedly found a reluctance to tackle Dalit women's issues. Nevertheless, the Dalit women's articulations are growing. With the formation of the National Federation of Dalit Women in 1995 has created space for their voices and issues. The paper also presented case studies of elected Dalit women *sarpanches* from Haryana and Rajasthan.

*Gopal Guru's (2000)* paper is on marginalisation. His paper has raised three questions? Why the process of marginalisation is operating among the Dalits? How & Why it continue to exist among Dalits? Lastly, is it a culture specific? Among all, the political marginalisation is the most important because no political party is with Dalits and their issues during the elections. He further says if Dalits are elected to political hierarchy, they would only get plum portfolios. This practice is there

from the days of Dr. Ambedkar. The cultural marginalisation enforces the Dalit students and teachers at educational institutions to behave in ghettoised manner. Due to this, they didn't get access to the large teaching community. He has discussed a very important subject like public employment opportunities. In public employment, Dalit and Dalit women generally aspire to menial jobs like sweepers, scavengers, and coolies. Similarly, in the field of politics, the Dalit leaders try to replicate the same cultural hierarchy against the Dalit women whose participation in the political process is never promoted and never liked by the Dalit patriarchy.

*Swaroop Rani (1998)* opines that the Telugu alphabets gave chance to the 'untouchables' to attack the centuries-old oppression. The castes that were denied basic humanity have stormed into literary avenues and ruling the Telugu literature. The writer try to make some clarification on who is a Dalit and what is their poetry? Whose poetry is Dalit poetry? Before Joshua, there were a number of revolutionary poets and it was only Joshua who was considered as first Dalit poet and his 'Gabbilam' (the Bat). He was the trendsetter in Telugu Dalit poetry for condemning the caste system. It was Ambedkarites who wrote poetry against this oppression. Their poetry not only confined to the literary activity it also exposed the day-to-day humiliations faced by the Dalits.

The paper says that poetry written by Dalit women can only bring greater impact than the poetry written Dalit male poets or upper caste women poets. There are references on 13<sup>th</sup>-century poet Mollain the *Ramayana*. The paper also highlighted on contemporary Dalit feminist writers. There are narrations from Challapalli Swaroopa Rani's '*Mankenapuve*' and '*Vegas Chukka*, Darisi Sasi Nirmala's '*Dalituralu and muttugudda Kapputunn*', and '*Vijayalakshmi's PaniPil*'. All these poetic narrations are dealing with how Dalit women are treated in outside her home. There are other poems that have explained uncivilized practices like *Jogini*, *Devasi*, *Basvi*. Finally, the paper concludes that all these poetic writings should move from poetry to short stories and novels to bring a change in the system and society.

*With this brief literature the paper tries to study the socio-religious practices impact on Dalit women and also assess the feminisms role in developing the Dalit women and lastly how the education policies and political decision have impacted in their development.*

## **SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES:**

The Hindu *Sastras and puranas* have just denied educational and wealth rights to women. However, in the case of Dalit women, it not only denied these rights and they never treated Dalit women as human beings rather treated as sex objects and promoted child marriages. The same *Sastras and Puranas* have even considered the killing of a dalit woman is a minor offence.

The socio-religious practices have serious implications on Dalit women. Under this custom, temple prostitution continues to exploit Dalit women. It is one of the controversial practices in Telangana, Maharashtra, and parts of northern Karnataka. Though this practice is banned by law every year the young Dalit girls are dedicated to/ married secretly to the goddess and marked as *Devadasis*. These girls are then sexually exploited by the upper-caste landlord and rich men of the village and most of the *Devadasis* in Karnataka belongs to untouchable madiga community. A recent study shows that almost 94 percent of the girls who dedicated to village goddess are less than 15 years. Once they are devoted to village goddess, they are more like commodities over which others can transact. Despite the

Devadasi prohibition act in all these states and the number is keep increasing. In 1993-94, in Karnataka, their number was 22,873. In 2011, their number has gone up to 23,787. This shows that all the rehabilitation schemes have failed curb Devadasi practice in the state. (Pinto, 2014, pp.68-73).

## PURITY AND POLLUTION:

Dalit women are relegated to a life of inequality from the moment she born on the earth. Because of her caste background certain occupations and specific works continue to be assigned to her on the basis of her hierarchical status (Sharma, <http://ijellh.com/?s=Violence+against+Dalit+Women%3A+A+Human+Right+Concern&lang=en>). Despite a law on prohibiting use of manual labour to dispose the human excreta, the manual scavengers are exiting in many parts of India. As per 2011 census more than 8 lakh people engaged in clearing night soil by hand and they earn less than Rs.2000 per month. Remunerations of these workers are meagre and work guaranteed is nil (Acharya, p: 2). This type of works only forced the Dalit women for more deprivation, social exclusion and discrimination.

The same purity and pollution has excluded Dalit women are hardly employed as cooks in upper caste homes. *Banerjee and Sabharwal (2013)* pilot study presented a few hard facts in this regard. In a sample of 216 women with respect to access to the labour market of Delhi suggests that only 37.40 percent of Dalit women are engaged as cooks while in the case of general women it is more than 62.6 percent. This suggests that Dalit women face difficulties in getting employment for cooking and other household jobs because of the notion of purity and pollution (Sabrwal, 2015, p.254). The same pilot study concludes that the Dalit women are mostly employed as domestic helpers like sweeping, mopping and dusting works. For details see the table.

Table: 1 Discrimination in hiring for type of work

Type of Work	Dalit Women	Upper-Caste Women	Total (N=216)
Cooking	37.40	62.6	100
Washing utensils	41.0	59.0	100
Washing clothes	57.3	42.7	100
Cleaning (dusting, sweeping, and mopping)	62.5	37.5	100

Source: *Banerjee and Sabharwal, 2013; data computed from fieldwork, March to May, 2013*

The same purity and pollution concept has barred the Dalit women not employ as Mid-day meal cooks in Government schools. In this connection, a news item was reported in Indian Express (6<sup>th</sup> Nov.2015, Bangalore Edition), that the upper caste people have stopped sending their children to a government school in Kolar just because a Dalit woman was given the responsibility to cook as Mid-day meal in the school. A similar story was also been reported where the present Chief Minister Siddaramaiah studied school in Mysore district. Due to sustained efforts supported by official intervention children of all castes in the school eating food prepared by a Dalit woman. (The India Express, 6<sup>th</sup> Nov.2015, Bangalore Edition).

## FEMINISM AND DALIT WOMEN

Brutal patriarchy and their oppression, gender discrimination and sexual violence are the important factors for the feminist movement in India. It is also true that these forms and methods have forced the women to be treated as unequal citizens across the world and more particularly in India. In these circumstances, feminism was developed in the 1970s, as a new platform to raise the voice and share their experiences that all women sufferings were essentially the same and they want to establish equal economic, social and political rights for women (Singh.2014, p.39). Due to this, the mainstream Indian women's movement continue tolled by the privileged/dominant caste, and educated women and this may be the possible factor for non-representation or marginal representation of Dalit women's voices in the women's movement. According to **Sharmila Rega quoted by Singh** (2014), there was thus a masculinisation of and a savarnisation of womanhood, leading to a classical exclusion of Dalit womanhood”(Singh, p.40).

According to Prasad quoted by Tomar (2013), we have been denied the right to articulate our own visions of emancipation. Our energies have been co-opted to working out the visions of dominant others who have shown scant respect of our world-view or philosophy of life, by not enabling us to articulate them or work towards achieving them. (Tomar,2013, p.2). It further suggests that Dalit women are perceived as 'Others' because of the centuries old Brahmanical values and also the patriarchal nature of society in which high level of exclusion, invisibility and structural and domestic violence. On the other, the globalisation has brought involvement more and more privileged and professionally educated young people whose services have been hired for women's issues unlike earlier where the affected women groups or NGOs who were spokespersons for women issues of diverse nature. (Stephen Cynthia).As the ground situation is against to Dalit women, many activists and scholars including Ruth Manorama argues that the modern feminist movement has recognised the patriarchy is the sole factor for all kinds of sufferings for women and they try addressed domestic violence and dowry deaths which again urban middle-class issues and it never addressed the caste based atrocities, rape while working in the fields and the sexual assault by the upper caste men. As Stephen says that the Indian feminists only considers the violence caused by patriarchy and they have not given much importance to the caste-based violence. In such situation, a new wave of feminism was developed in the 1990s with individual identity a focal point. They rejected the universalization of experiences of women belonging to different castes and classes. This led the emphasis on the independent identity of Dalit women. As Gopal Guru says in his article 'Dalit women talks differently', suggests that to understand Dalit women it needs to delineate both the internal and the external factors that are linked their life and livelihood. The internal factors Dalit patriarchy or control and the external factors are castes, caste based atrocities, rape and unequal wages.

According to Shweta Singh, the Dalit women struggles are similar to the movement led by black American. In both the situation, their interests were represented by others or had a token appearance in the rights movements. Like Dalit women, black women were doubly oppressed, because they were women and because they were black. Though they had played an equal role in the movement for liberation from slavery they never got a similar status as men even after slavery was abolished. Scholars have tried to put more emphasis on their struggle against racism and not enough on their



participation in the women's movement. In this background the Bell hooks argue "while White women's organisations could concentrate their attention on the general reform measures, Black women had to launch a campaign to defend their 'virtue'" (hooks 1981: 165). In this way, we can see that Indian Dalit women suffered a fate similar to that of their black counterparts. They had little influence while struggling for their rights and rightful social position (P.41).

The idea of feminism in India was started to achieve the sisterhood but in their approach and activity, the Dalit women presence is almost negligible. Due to this, the Dalit women representatives might have thought of having their own organisational set up to address their problems in the society (Sharma. J.K. Violence against Dalit women: A Human Right Concern, P.7, <http://ijellh.com/violence-against-dalit-women-a-human-right-concern>, Accessed on 18/11/16). The anti-Mandal agitation was also an important factor for the birth of Dalit feminism in India. During anti-Mandal agitation, most of the feminists were against the implementation of Mandal commission recommendation to the OBC community. The logic behind to oppose the reservations to the OBC community was that the nation is already implementing 22 percent reservation to the SCs and STs and again if it implements 27 percent to OBCs the chances of job opportunities to upper and middle class and caste men folk may reduce and it may affect them in getting employed husbands or brides. Hence they declared that they were against all kinds of reservation to save the nation from the hands of the 'unmeritorious' groups. Upper-caste women in this context represented themselves as 'non-submissive', 'assertive' as they say that they have the social responsibility to save the nation by using the rhetoric of merit. This assertion of upper-caste women has caste and patriarchal connotations especially in their argument and lamentation over the death of merit due to reservations. This implies that they support caste-based social system which strictly forbids exogamy to advocate caste-endogamy and secondly it also implies that they are economically and socially dependent on their respective husbands/upper-caste men. Moreover the assumption that Dalits are unmeritorious also shows their caste prejudice. This protest brought the significance of caste question within the category of women. (Understanding Dalit Feminism, by T. Sowjanya, p.3, <http://tiss.academia.edu/SowjanyaTamalapakula>, Accessed on 18/11/16).

Dalit feminism opposes Marxism as it never recognises the caste and gender rather it recognises only class. While in India caste and patriarchy is the stumbling block for all kinds atrocities against women and more particular on Dalit women.

Dalit feminism is the outcome of Dalit women's experiences. Atrocities committed on Dalit women in the name of religious customs, cultural and social norms are the main concern of Dalit feminists (Narayankar, Tej).

## **EDUCATIONAL IMPACT ON DALIT WOMEN:**

The responsibility of the government has increased after independence particularly in promoting the educational interests of the Dalits. In that process, the government made an attempt to increase the number of primary schools in the initial period. However, the same trend could not continued in 60s and 70s due to increasing importance on quality education. Between 1983 and 2000, improvements in access to education for all have been made, although the difference between Dalit women and general women remained constant. In this period, the enrolment rate of Dalit boys has grown from 47.7% to 63.25% whereas upper castes males enrolments has jumped from an already

relatively impressive 73.22% to 82.92%. The same progress has not been observed in the case of Dalit women from 15.72% to 32.61%, when compared to their upper-caste counterparts whose enrolment climbed from 43.56% to 59.15%. Although large scale improvements have been noticed in enrolment rates in India, statistics show that very little progress has been made in decreasing the education gap between castes (The Dalits of India: education and Development, by Erik Fraser. <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/06/23/the-dalits-of-india-education-and-development/>). Besides low literacy rate, another problem Dalit women face is a high drop-out rate from school. The percentage of drop-outs at the primary, middle, and secondary levels in 2009-10 was quite high compared with the upper-Caste girls. Because of the high drop-out rate at the primary and middle stages, enrolment at the higher stages of school and college level is extremely low.

### **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF DALIT WOMEN:**

Political participation always helps the people take favourable decision in favour of their groups or castes. As the trends suggests that the participation of women in general and Dalit women in particular remains dismally low at national level. Data on Lok Sabha (lower house of the Parliament) from 1971–2004 reveal the dominance of SC men in politics. The fourteenth Lok Sabha had a total of seventy-five MPs from the SC social group, of which sixty-five were men and ten were women. There is a slight improvement in the percentage share of the women parliamentarians from the SC background, although they continue to be underrepresented when compared to the number of Dalit men and uppercaste women. The fifteenth Lok Sabha general election for the 543 electoral constituencies was held in 2009. A total of 8,070 candidates contested, out of which there were 7,514 men and 556 women from different social groups. Within the 556 contested women, only fifty-seven got elected: twelve Dalit women, five from Scheduled Tribes, and forty from the upper-caste groups. These data clearly highlight the lower political representation of women—and in particular Dalit women—at the higher levels of governance (Sabharwal, Lal, and Ojha, 2013). The figures for the sixteenth Lok Sabha are: 66 women M.P.'s, of whom eleven are from the Scheduled Castes and five from the Scheduled Tribes.

### **CONCLUSIONS:**

Since independence, the process of democratization has increased the responsibility of the government manifold. Education is the potent (independent) variable to the development of human resources. The Ministry of Education at the Centre has been renamed as the Ministry of Human Resource. Keeping this in mind, the Right to Education has been given the status of Fundamental rights, and necessary provisions have been made for the children (up to 14 yrs.) to have free education, if parents fail to provide so. Education or human resource is understood in a binary framework; if people are not resourceful, they are liabilities. In the absence of the social security system in place, it's imperative to be resourceful and self-reliant. The demand for education has grown mostly because of technological advancement in economy that has forced us to live in software society. In this race for the survival of the fittest, Dalits, of course, are lagging behind necessary resources, but they are aware

of what makes Dalits discriminated and exploited. The efforts of cultural industry will provide Dalits with “feel-good” fictions, but the critical school will keep on questioning the growing gaps, better say disparity, between the principles embodied in the Preamble and the practice of the same Constitution when it comes to Dalits. The Dalit unrest (including Dalit feminism) has questioned the very legacy of law and order. The so-called (elite) feminism is growing on Facebook and in literary festivals. On the contrary, the Dalit feminism is gaining ground not only in reaction to caste and/or patriarchy, but also in sociological imagination linking individuals to larger history of social structure.

Dalit women constitute a social force and represent a cultural symbol and enjoy a distinct historical background. They are estimated to contribute 80 per cent of the total labor to strengthen the economy. Ambedkar rightly said, “Rights are protected not by laws but by the social and moral conscience of society” (*Bandhu.2003, pp.109-110*). Dalit women have been fighting for liberation. They are not voiceless and capable to raising their voice. The growing violence against Dalit women needs be addressed so that Dalit women can come forward to the development of the nation. Gender discrimination is injurious to social solidarity. Therefore, society must address this burning issue and help them get into the mainstream of society. It would be better to voice of the voiceless and fulfil the larger goals of democracy.

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