VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATIONS DONE AGAINST DALIT WOMEN – A CHALLENGE TO HUMAN RIGHTS

MISS. LATA JAYRAAJ
RESEARCH SCHOLAR,
CESS, HYDERABAD.

ABSTRACT
In India, women are considered as Shakti, since mythological times. Goddesses are being worshipped in the major religions of India, but still they are considered as weaker section of the society in India. This raises a lot of question about the attitude and our thinking of our society. Women, usually looked as a weaker sex and forced to play secondary role in the society and are often neglected, discriminated and oppressed. These discrimination and oppression has adversely affected the development process. And the worst hits are the Dalit women, who are oppressed among the oppressed. Their life has world of difference between theory and practice. Government of India abolished untouchibilty but the practice is followed in some part of India. The practice of untouchability had virtually dehumanized a significant section of Indian society, that they lost their persona and all the basic human rights ad fundamental rights. Indian society is a male dominated society, all men dominate women. And so it is very obvious that Dalit women are dominated by both Dalit men and upper caste men also. She has to fight against all kind of atrocities and poverty. Because of this weakness, physical and financial, she has to face two-way struggle- one in house and one outside world- which have both hierarc hic and patriarchal system in India.

Introduction
Indian society historically had a rigid, occupational based hierarchical caste system. In particular, those who are performing task which is called as unclean, are termed not just as low caste but as untouchable, which resulted in great injustice to the members of the concerned caste because they are discriminated in every aspect. Dalits are still subjected to discriminations based on the ground of Untouchability. They are worst sufferers of poverty, illiteracy, humiliations. The word Dalit usually stands for oppression and Untouchability and occupies the extreme and the lowest position in the hierarchical division of Indian society. One of the most oppressive aspects of the caste system has been the practice of untouchability. Not only were they placed bottom of the class hierarchy but were made to lead a life of slavery and humiliation. They were forced to live outside the village, to live a life in an inhumane condition. Government of India abolished untouchibilty and introduced a new secular constitution, and under the law, untouchibility was made an offence. The caste based quota system in education and government employment has helped them to look beyond the village. However, despite the radical legislation and other changes, caste system has continued to be an important fact of life for individuals and communities in India. In this context, it is important to note that although Dalits are considered lowest in the caste hierarchy, which is said to be propagated by Hinduism primarily in southern Asia, but other religions do not seem to be free from it. Matilda Brason writes in I Am Dalit, Hear Me Roar (
published on 5^{th} May 2012 in Gender Focus, a Canadian Feminist Blog), about how Dalit women in Nepal are discriminated against and are fighting for their rights. The traditional taboos are the same for Dalit men and Dalit women. However, Dalit women have to deal with more often. Dalit women race discriminated against not only by people of higher castes, but also within their own communities. Sneha Verma in her book Dalit Women- Fear and discrimination says ‘Men are dominant in Dalit communities. Dalit women also have less power within the Dalit movement itself. Women are active in large numbers in the movement but most leadership positions in the organizations, local bodies and associations have been held my men’.

Central question
Despite reservation and quota system for Dalit community, they still face the discrimination. My paper is to study the situation of Dalit women - socially, culturally, economically and politically. The most important question arises, how-come the situation of dalits remains the same even over 60yrs, after constitutions guarantees untouchability as an offence.

Social Structure of India
Dalits in India are a very distinct social group. Historically, the caste system classified people by their occupation and status. Each caste had a specific place in the hierarchy of social status and Dalits are called to be in the lowest category. Economically, most of them are poor, irrespective of their economical status, they still face oppression. This social oppression varies from untouchibility in rural areas, to sophisticated kind of discrimination in urban India.

Legally, untouchability in India was prohibited by the constitution of India. The act provides penalty for enforcing untouchibility or any such discriminations. However the fact remains that caste based discrimination and atrocity against Dalit community is increasing all over India that it is leading to blood and brutal killings of Dalit everyday. Such kind of violence is not even seen in animal world. There is hardly any days when Dalits are not killed, harassed, socially boycotted by the upper castes. Dalits houses are burnt, physical violence against Dalit women like rape, parading women naked in the street, beating etc. 90% of the cases goes unreported, and as most of the time they do not get support from police or administration. Even animals are not treated like that, and it is heart breaking to hear such things happening to Dalit community.

We cannot claim that nothing has changed in India, and that untouchability exist in the same way as in pre-colonial days, but discriminations are still imposed on untouchable in rural India. Statistics shows that untouchable Dalits represent only some 16percent of the Indian population, economist says that 40-50% of them live below poverty line. But it is clear that the problem of poverty does not go well beyond untouchability, nor does untouchability boils down to a problem of ritual pollution. Untouchability can be said to be the extreme form of social oppression and economic exploitation and a Human rights violation.

Status of Dalit women
Dr.Vijendra Kumar in his book –Rise of Dalit power in India- “says that Dalits women’s place in family is secondary even if she earns and they are subjected to inhuman behavior and discrimination”.

---

1 Sneha Verma- Dalit women – fear and discrimination page- 13
2 Rise of Dalit power in India by Dr.Vijendra Kumar- page 147
The status of women in present modern India is a sort of a paradox; in one hand she is at the peak of success on the other hand she is still suffering the violence afflicted by her own family members. Present day Indian culture is the product of its old feudalistic and modernization, where there are some women who enjoy the rights and privileges, and some who still live in dark-age, as majority of women are yet to get their dues.

Violence against women is the most pervasive human rights violation in the world today, and especially when the women are from the Dalit community then she is looked down in all levels. Dalit Women constitute 16.3 percent of Indian female population, experience the brutality of casteism in its full vigor. Other than the socio-economic discrimination, they also are subjected to sexual exploitation. Reasons for becoming the victim can be as bizarre as common water supply, or any conflict with upper caste, the ultimate it is the Dalit women who is the target as sexual exploitation. Upper caste violence against the Dalits is increasing in its magnitude and in more cruel and vulgar than the past. In these atrocities, it is the Dalit women who are in vulnerable position, often sexually abused.

Meena Anand in her book ‘Dalit Women- Fear and discrimination’ quotes that Atrocity on Dalit women are an increasing trend. They are victims of Landlords, police and goondaism. In all instances of caste system, Dalit women are victimized. Many of the women who stood against the local landlords are punished by being paraded naked. It was reported that on an average three dalit women get raped every day.3

The annual report of the national crime records bureau reported an 1172 cases of rape of Dalit women during 2005. In 2002 only one among 25 Supreme Court judges was a Dalit. In high court, out of 625 positions Dalits only occupy 25, upper caste occupies 78percent of the judicial post. According to the 2001-2002 Annual Report on the Prevention of Atrocities Act 2002, only 2.31 percent of cases brought under the prevention of Atrocities Act led to convictions. 4

The situation of Dalit women is more precarious and what is worse is that they have to face social, economical, educational, health and political difficulties. Dalit women faces triple burden of caste, class and gender issues. Multiple forms of discrimination confront her, from Dalit and non-dalit community. Being in the bottom of the societal hierarchies, the means of asserting her constitutional and legal rights are minimal. And this is taken advantage by upper-caste men through sexual abuse to reinforce the caste divisions. Any action that comes on the way of undermines the caste division can lead to sexual violence.

The type of violence inflicted on Dalits is in the form of severest violation of human rights. Dalit and tribal women are raped by upper caste leaders, land lords and police to suppress movements to demand payment of wages etc, which shows that they are easy targets for any perpetrator. Upper caste men consider them available for their benefits. It is also found that whenever a Dalit women attempts to assert their constitutional rights, as access to land, property and Panchayats, which is a clash of interest with upper caste member, then Dalit women are always targeted in the form of sexual exploitation.

Dalit women in particular have to fight both socially economically and also politically. Political parties in India speak about equality of women but have totally ignored the dalit women. Traditionally, leadership in villages is confined to the rural elite, who belong to higher castes. The 73rd amendment act granted reservation to Dalits, tribals and women in rural

government. But there are some rural areas, where there has been no or little acceptance of reservation for the lower castes and especially Dalit women by the upper castes. Dalit women who stand for elections are beaten, raped and ill treated. The skewed and unescorted space of Dalit women between different layers of discriminatory social functions often drives them to vulnerability of sexual violence. Dalit women’s body is always threatened when she attains puberty. Dalits are often terrorized by the upper caste to cast their votes in their favour or in the favour of the candidates sponsored by them especially from the reserved constituencies. During the voting period they are lured by the upper caste to vote in their favour. This snatches the democratic right to exercise her will to choose the representatives. And if they want to cast their vote independently, then they are harassed and violence are used against them (Dr. Vivek Kumar from Dalit Leadership in India).  

Vijendra Kumar in his book Rise of Dalit power in India goes to say that the independence did not mean much to the Dalits and Tribals except from the change of the rulers. As majority of them it only meant change of hands from the white sahibs to the brown sahibs”. Dalit who stood for election were beaten, and Dalit women were raped and ill-treated. The member of the higher caste, who were not prepared to accept them in local governance, either grabbed their land or sexually assaulted Dalit women, and out of fear these women withdraw their names from elections. So in order to retain control/power in their hands (higher caste powerful men), they put proxy candidates and keep control in their own hands. There are cases where we heard that elected dalit women were not allowed to attend meetings and non-dalit member’s walkout of the meetings. Sometimes Dalit women who stand for elections are sexually abused by upper caste men, so that they withdraw their names for election.  

Causes for violence and discrimination against Dalits  
The following are some of the causes for atrocities:
- Attempt to enter Hindu temple
- Attempt to take water from the common well or tap
- Intercaste marriage
- Religious conversion to other religion
- Demanding government land for cultivation or for due wages
- Sometimes, even walking on the same street where upper caste people live.
- Asking/ demanding essential commodities from the shops

Conclusion  
Caste plays a powerful role in shaping the patterns of society. Indian constitution abolished untouchibilty but the fact remains that the situation of Dalit is worse as before. Rural Dalit migrate to urban area, not because of lack of work but to get security, which we can call as distress migration. Negative government attitudes and ignorance created by government officials towards all the special schemes approved for them, combined with attitudinal social system, forced them to lead a sorrowful and inhumane like.

The struggle for the liberation of Dalits right, ought to be treated as equal to the struggle for the independence of the nation. National independence cannot be complete unless all the segments of the society are free. The society has to change its attitude towards Dalit community.

5 Acharya et al, 2007  
6 Dalit Leadership in India by Dr. Vivek Kumar – page 223  
7 Rise of Dalit power in India by Vijendra Kumar – page 311
Celebrating ‘International women’s year’ and ‘The year of Girl child’ will not solve any issues. Attitudinal change of the society especially the men and upper caste people is vital in ensuring a respectable status for Dalit women.

Caste appears to be declining in urban India, but in rural India it seems to continue as before and some times in a newer form. There seems to be decline in untouchability in urban India, but that does not imply that caste has disappeared. When compared with other sections of the population, Dalit continue to be the deprived community, especially in rural India.  

The question that arises is – why has untouchability not disappeared? And I think there is only one answer to this question. The class composition in other countries is on the basis on economic system, but in our country it is more on social and religious system that is practiced. And that is why slavery has vanished but untouchability still prevails in our country.

The Indian Constitution abolished untouchability and has made it punishable offence, but the Indian religious ideologies and philosophies are so deep rooted in the minds of Indian society, especially in rural India, that all these legislation and protection of human rights of the SC/ST, are futile when the society is not willing to accept these laws.

The traditional caste system is disappearing but is emerging in a newer and modern form, which is more dangerous like honour killing. The dominant and powerful will keep inventing newer means and mechanisms to justify their wrongs. Dominant caste wants to preserve the system of caste since it gives ruling power and that is possible by oppressing the poor and lower caste people and hence leading to violence.

**Bibliography**


