

## CHAPTER-2

### POSITIONING DALIT WOMEN IN INDIA

#### Social Exclusion

The term social exclusion deals with the various structural dimensions of societal marginalization and poverty. But the concept first appeared in the discourse of France in the mid 1970's. There is a consensus among academicians of various fields that the history of these concepts can be traced back to the publication of Rene Lenoir in 1974. "In France, René Lenoir, as Secrétaire d'Etat a l' Action Sociale of the French Government, spoke of the following as constituting the "excluded"—a tenth—of the French population: "mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits.'"<sup>37</sup>

However, the discourse that followed the work of Rene Lenoir added a long list of exclusions to it. The concept of social exclusion, generally in developmental literature has been defined as an inability to choose or lack of capability to fully participate in the development of a society. In India, social exclusion revolves around some sections of the population particularly Dalit, Adivasi, women, and minorities.<sup>38</sup> It defines the relative position of any group or individual as compared to the whole view of society. One type of social exclusion can lead to the other type of disadvantage of that particular group. For example, Dalit minorities in India are usually economically disadvantaged as well as deprived in cultural and political terms and that, of course, perpetuates their economic disadvantages. The whole process is cyclic in nature. It includes a whole set of forces and not just the poverty dimension. The concept of social exclusion has moved beyond the traditional concept of poverty or lack of resources alone. Rather, it talks about a number of other rights, resources, privileges, etc.

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<sup>37</sup> René Lenoir as cited in Sen, A. (2000). *SOCIAL EXCLUSION: CONCEPT, APPLICATION, AND SCRUTINY*. Philippines: Asian Developmental Bank.

<sup>38</sup> Singh, R.K. (2009). Manual Scavenging as Social Exclusion. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 521-523. Vol 49, No. 26-27.

Sometimes exclusion may take the form of cultural marginalization, a process in which certain forms of values, norms, and living ways are accepted as set ideals and respected in the society. The exclusion based on culture give birth to the concept of others. Irrefutably, diversity and difference are two wheels of culture and it is not necessary that all forms of cultural differences take form of cultural exclusion. The cultural exclusion occurs when certain group of individuals are kept outside the social realm on the basis of their cultural practices, their birth fate, when they are culturally outlawed, impermissible to participate in social decisions. They are not considered as part of dominant cultural construct of any particular society and are placed at the lower ranking in hierarchically arranged social relations. Thus, the exclusion in cultural terms is imbibed in the social structure. Because the behavior of other members of society with them and their interaction is based on this relationship which defines that how the social structure of that society is. “Social structure is sometimes defined simply as patterned social relations-those regular and repetitive aspects of the interactions between the members of a given social entity.”<sup>39</sup>

The result of exclusion among the groups which are excluded intrinsically hangs on the working of economic and social institutions and to what extent they are discriminatory and exclusionary in their results. Social exclusion is when an individual is incapable of participating in the economic, social, and political processing of society. Buvinic says that if the interaction between various groups in society occurs in a hierarchical or power-subordinate manner then evidently it will have a substantial impact on an individual’s access to equal opportunities. The form of social exclusion which takes place in India is mainly ascriptive in nature which cannot be altered because they are beyond individual control.<sup>40</sup>

Social exclusion is a multidimensional concept and it takes into consideration various conditions to decide whether a person or a group is socially excluded or

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<sup>39</sup> Form, W., & Wilterdink. (2020, November 19). *Social Structure*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-structure>

<sup>40</sup> Buvinic, M. (2005). *Social Inclusion and economic Development in Latin America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

not. If a person is excluded from the following areas, then it is evident that he/she is socially excluded.

- 1) Exclusion from labour market
- 2) Exclusion from legal citizenship rights
- 3) Exclusion from participating in civil society
- 4) Exclusion from public areas<sup>41</sup>

Amartya Sen<sup>42</sup> talks about a different concept of social exclusion. He differentiates between “unfavourable exclusion” and “unfavourable Inclusion”. He says that either type can generate adverse effects. “Unfavourable Inclusion” in various areas of life through unequal treatment may bring some serious effects as “unfavourable exclusion” would bring. In the former, people are forcibly kept outside or left out, and later, they are forcibly included. He gives an example of the bonded labourer in a backward rural economy who may suffer particularly from unequal inclusion. There are conditions when people have to take part in some social activities like the market but when they work, there, under unfavourable or unequal conditions then it takes the form of “unfavourable Inclusion”. He aligns the concept of social exclusion with the capability approach. According to him, the capability approach to poverty has various dimensions because there is a wide range of capabilities and functions that have to be valued. He termed it as Aristotelian approach. Social exclusion is a part of capability approach for two reasons. First, we all have good reason skills of not getting excluded from social relations. Second, if one is excluded from social relations then it may lead to deprivation in other fields as well. Therefore, social exclusion is a part of capability deprivation and also a cause of various capability failures. Sen differentiates between “active and passive exclusion”. Active exclusion takes place when people are excluded intentionally through some government actions, policies, or through any other means whereas “passive exclusion” takes place through social interactions and behaviours when there is no deliberative attempt to exclude.

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<sup>41</sup> Aasland, A., & Flotten, T. (2001). Ethnicity and Social Exclusion in Estonia and Latvia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1023-1049.

<sup>42</sup> Sen, A. (2000). *SOCIAL EXCLUSION: CONCEPT, APPLICATION, AND SCRUTINY*. Philippines: Asian Developmental Bank.

Thorat<sup>43</sup> manifested the idea of social exclusion to the caste and ethnicity-based exclusion in India. It is obligatory to understand the interrelation between various societal groups and institutions to understand the various dimensions of social exclusion and how this led to exclusion of particular groups and their deprivation in various spheres that could be civil, cultural, economic, and political. In India, this exclusion hinges on the societal interrelationship and institutions that deliberately discriminate, exclude and deprive certain groups on the basis of their identities like caste, religion, and ethnicity.

Galtung<sup>44</sup> identifies social injustices in terms of structural violence. When no subject is directly involved in an act of hurt then it is called structural violence. When society absorbs the culture then it becomes structural violence. For example, Purity and impurity in terms of caste, domination, and subordination in terms of gender takes the form of cultural violence which gets converted into structural violence over a period of time. Six weapons are mechanisms of structural violence:-

**1. Linear ranking order** – there is a complete ranking order which undoubtedly tells who is at the higher rank.

**2. Acyclical pattern of interaction** –acyclical itself means that all the actors can interact in only one single way and that is hierarchical in nature

**3. Correlation between rank and authority**– the higher the rank is, the more authority it would have.

**4. Consistency between the systems** – all the interaction networks are similar in structure.

**5. Consonance between the ranks** – position in one system tends to be the same in another system. It means if a person is at a higher rank in one system, then he would also be in the same position if he participates in another system and

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<sup>43</sup> Thorat, S. (2010). On Social Exclusion Addressing Inter-social Group, Graded and Multiple-group Inequalities Through Inclusive Policy. *Centre for Social Studies*.

<sup>44</sup> Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 167-191.

**6. High-rank integration between levels** – an actor at one level has the vote of the highest-ranking actor of his level to get representation at the next level.

The lower-ranking actors are deprived of resources and bare minimums because the structure deprives them of possibilities to organize and collectivize their power to fight against the top hierarchies, as “voting power, bargaining power, striking power, violent power”, because they are atomized and not collectively organized, because they are highly intimidated by the topmost hierarchies.<sup>45</sup>

There are three factors of social exclusion that define its character. First, the group which is excluded faces refusal of equal opportunities in various spheres of life. Second, this denial leads to relative deprivation in other areas as well and results in deprivation and human poverty. Third, the process of social exclusion is embedded in the interrelationship of various societal groups and individuals. It is a process through which individuals or groups are kept outside the full participation in society that could be fully or partially.<sup>46</sup>

According to David Bryne<sup>47</sup>, the term social exclusion is inherently dynamic and clearly systemic. It happens in times of history and it affects the lives of those individuals and groups who are being excluded and who are not excluded. It signifies the character of the social system. Some people are made a victim in exclusion by other people of the system. He says that it is important to differentiate between the idea of social exclusion and poverty. Social exclusion is an arising phenomenon that is beyond nominalism.

He supports his own idea with the help of a definition given by Madanipour, which is as follows: “*Social exclusion is defined as a multidimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods.*”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Haan, D. (2003). Extreme Deprivation in Remote Areas in India: Social Exclusion as Explanatory Concept. *Conference on Chronic Poverty*.

<sup>47</sup> Bryne, D. (2005). *Social Exclusion*. Berkshire: Open University Press; McGraw-Hill Education.

<sup>48</sup> Madanipour, as quoted in Bryne, 2005

## Grounds of social exclusion in India

Many studies provide a careful examination of the various grounds of social exclusion all over time. Race, ethnicity, religion, social status, economic status, and gender identity have been grounds of social exclusion all over the world. In India, caste and gender are two such groundings that need to be examined.

### Caste

The word caste seems to derive its origin from the Spanish word '*casta*' which has parlance in the Portuguese language also. However, the context in which this term was used in Europe is not similar to Indian usage. In India, the use of this word became prominent with the advent of Britishers.<sup>49</sup> Omvedt<sup>50</sup> says that caste feudalism in India was integrated with the help of the union between the power of state and *Brahmanism*. Later, when Britishers came to India, they used this structure of caste for their own benefit and to strengthen their rule.

“Varna, Jati, or Zat and many other similar terms have been in use in different parts of the South Asian region for a very long time. They describe a variety of prevailing social divisions and hierarchies of status and class. This indeed includes the idea and practice of pollution or untouchability.”<sup>51</sup>

The early book on the Indian social order i.e. “Manusmriti” divides and arranges the social classes on the basis of Guna into four-folds. This is very much similar to Plato’s classification of three classes based on three instincts. Manusmriti and some other shastras mention four Varna: the *Brahmins* (the scholar and priest) the *Kshatriya* (King and warrior), the *Vaishyas* (agriculturalist and traders), and *Shudras* (artisan and service provider). All those including foreigners, tribals, and nomads, who do not subscribe to the norms of the Hindu society were contagious and untouchables. Another group excluded from the main society was called ‘*Prajanya*’ or ‘*Antyaja*’. This group of former untouchables or Dalits i.e.,

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<sup>49</sup> Origin of the term ‘casta’ as defined in Jodhka, S. S. (2012). *Caste: A Short Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

<sup>50</sup> Omvedt, G. (2014). *Dalit and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. New Delhi: SAGE publications.

<sup>51</sup> Jodhka, S. S. (2012). *Caste: A Short Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

downtrodden were considered either the lower section of the Shudras or outside the Varna system altogether. A passage from Manusmriti indicates that Varna system was originally non-hereditary.

Dalit in India is a class that is historically known as untouchables. The caste system in India separates the Dalits from the rest of the society. The term Dalit has its origin in the Sanskrit word 'dal'. It means crushed, suppressed, downtrodden, underprivileged, destroyed, and broken. The term Dalit is a translation of depressed class from Hindi and Marathi languages. This term was later energized in the 1970's during the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra. Earlier, this word was used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Jyotiba Phule for the victims of the Indian caste system. For him, Dalit was another word for the outcastes and untouchables who were oppressed. They were given various terms by different people. The word 'broken people' for Dalits was used by B.R. Ambedkar. Mahatma Gandhi termed them as 'Harijans' which means children of God. Britishers called them as 'depressed class'. Later they were termed as Scheduled castes in the constitution.<sup>52</sup>

Generally, this class of Dalits are those people who are known as 'untouchables' in India. They are known by various names as *outcastes*, *Bahujan*, *harijans*, *exterior caste*, *depressed class*, *scheduled castes*, *chandalas* etc. in various parts of India according to their regional culture. Untouchables were those who were kept outside the varna system described in the pronounced text called "manusmriti".

"Untouchability is largely an outgrowth of the system of caste, and caste in its turn is the illegitimate child of the concept of Varna. But, in the absence of any historical evidence, it is difficult to say with any precision or finality as to when the three or four Varnas or occupational divisions of society into Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra came to be multiplied into numerous castes. The origin of untouchability also is lost in antiquity."<sup>53</sup>

There are various features of the caste system in India that prove it as inhumane to society. Some of them are social segregation, untouchability, the notion of purity

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<sup>52</sup> Michael, S. (1999). *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*. New Delhi: Sage Publication.

<sup>53</sup> V.S. Nargolkar's article Removal of Untouchability published in 1969 by The Indian Journal of Social Work as defined in Hunashimarad, D. S. (2014). Origin and Development of Dalit Community. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 84-87.

and pollution, hierarchy, restrictions on foods and drinks etc. Dalits as a depressed class are deprived even of the basic necessities of life which made their lives even more pathetic. Due to the traditional notions related to the caste system, Dalits in earlier times faced crisis to live a life of dignity and that makes them penurious till the date. They were forbidden to enter into the temples and were not allowed to take water from the well. They were not allowed to take any sort of education. Dalits were engaged into menial works like cleaning of villages and scavenging. Even the shadow of an untouchable was not permitted to come into the contact of any twice-born and if it happened then there are discussions of harsh punishments for Dalits in the Manusmriti. However, Dalits have not been able to completely shatter the boundaries which were traditionally decided for them by the structure of caste system. Some of the age-old customs related to notion of untouchability are still continuing till date. At some places Dalits are still not allowed to reside within the areas which are traditionally meant for the upper castes only. They are still carrying the baggage of humiliation and impoverishment because of the effects of their historical deprivation.

Though Dalits are provided the identification of scheduled category in the constitution and on the basis of this they get reservations in various educational institutions and government jobs. However, there are apprehensions that identification of Dalit category as scheduled caste further vitalized the division along with the lines of purity and pollution. Thence, more legislations were added to the constitution of India to finally abolish untouchability. These include article 17 of the Indian constitution, Protection of Civil Rights Act in 1976,<sup>54</sup> Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. But despite these legal measures the desired result has not been achieved.

## **Gender**

Gender, according to World Health Organization, are some socially constructed values, that are carried by women, men, girls, and boys. This includes the

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<sup>54</sup> Protection of Civil Rights Act is an amended version of Untouchability (offence) Act of 1955. Untouchability Act makes practice of Untouchability an offensive act and prescribes penalties for the same. Later, this Act was amended in September 1976.



characteristics, roles, and behaviour related to being a woman, man, girl, or boy and their relationship with each other.<sup>55</sup> Kamla Bhasin says “gender in new incarnation is used for the socio-cultural definition of man and woman and how the society gives them different roles on the basis of their sex”.<sup>56</sup>

In India, women are historically considered secondary in socio-cultural terms. The Vedic culture believed that men and women are created as equals. But then a changeable turn came in history to subjugate women. ‘Manusmriti’, a Sanskrit scripture which was written between 1500 B.C. and 200 A.D. proved to be a significant turning point. According to Hindu traditions, it is believed that all societal laws should be governed by Manu. In *Manusmriti* there are Twelve chapters and 2684 verses that are directed to the general public. The separate laws for Husband and Wife are mentioned in chapter 9 which discriminates against women. Here, it is mentioned that the duty of husband is to “carefully guard his wife, in order to keep his offspring pure”. “a husband must constantly be worshipped as a god by a faithful wife”<sup>57</sup> Historically, women are deprived of all property rights, their life and decisions were controlled by others and their freedom was restricted in several ways.

Amartya Sen in one of his seminal articles in 1991, introduced the concept of “missing women” to the world. He brought into attention the problem of the Imbalance sex ratio in India. The sex ratio in India was the lowest at that time (927/1000).<sup>58</sup> However, the last two decades have shown a slight increase in sex ratio. According to 2011 census, the sex ratio in India is 943/1000.<sup>59</sup> Due to ownership of property, the males are seen as the “breadwinners” of the family. Within the family, men play the role of bourgeois and women represent the proletariat class. This transition started with change from primitive society to the feudal stage when people started owning private property. The most important consequence of the ownership of private property was the dominance of the man.

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<sup>55</sup> There is a difference between sex and gender. Gender as defined by Who, is a socially constructed term whereas Sex is just a biological term. Source: *Gender and health*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 19, 2021, from <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/gender>

<sup>56</sup> Bhasin, K. (2000). *Understanding Gender*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

<sup>57</sup> Razvi, M., & Roth, G. L. (2004). Socio-Economic Development and Gender Inequality in India. In *Online Submission*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED492144>

<sup>58</sup> Sen, A. (1992). Missing Women. *British Medical Journal*, 587-588.

<sup>59</sup> Census of India, Source <https://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php>

At this stage, the household lost its public character and became a private sphere. “The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production”<sup>60</sup>

However, girls are seen as a burden because of many reasons. Dowry system is winning to the degree that the birth of a girl child is viewed as a burden to the family in various communities. Further, the female isn't viewed as a replacement as she would continue on to another family. Therefore, the expenditure on her education is also considered as a burden. Laws battling these worries stay on papers alone. Notwithstanding existing severe laws against pre-birth sex determination and sex explicit feticide, the situation is totally unique.<sup>61</sup> One important reason for considering women as a burden is violence against them and the objectification of women's bodies in society. Janet Wolff writes that body's “pre-existing meaning, as a sex object, as an object of the male gaze, can always prevail and re-appropriate the body, despite the intentions of the woman herself.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore the body of a woman is considered as a cause of their devaluation and oppression. Male chauvinism and domination have been established in Indian society due to economic backwardness and lack of self-confidence in women. Females are considered as material objects by society, as a response to it, sexual crimes, rapes, harassment of women at workplaces are increasing in India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report of 2020, the rate of crimes against women during 2018-2020 is 56.5 (as per one lakh of the population). There are 226 registered cases of murder with rape or gang rape in 2020. There are 7045 dowry deaths in all over India. Most of these dowry deaths are planned as fatal accidents like cylinder blasts in the kitchen etc. Women face cruelty in some or other ways in their natal families, sometimes by their husbands or by their relatives. There are 112292 such cases in 2020 according to NCRB.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The first edition of the book 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' by Fredrick Engels was published in 1884 in 'Zurich'.

<sup>61</sup> Rao, G. P., Vidya, K. L., & Sriramy, V. (2015). The Indian “girl” psychology: A perspective. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 57(Suppl 2), S212–S215. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.161480>

<sup>62</sup> Wolff, J. (1990). “Reinstating Corporeality. Feminism and Body Politics.” In *Feminine Sentences. Essays on Women and Culture*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, p, 121.

<sup>63</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, Crimes in India 2020, Source: <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CII%202020%20Volume%201.pdf>

Therefore, due to such patriarchal norms, there is a strong preference for sons over daughters. This goes hand in hand with sex-selective abortion and female feticide. Despite the fact that the Government of India has passed the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PCPNDT) in 1994, “nearly 4.6 crore (45.8 million) females are ‘missing’ in Indian demography in the year 2020, mainly due to pre and post-birth sex selection practices stemming from son preferences and gender inequality, United Nations Population Fund report said.”<sup>64</sup>

Women are generally confined to the private space or within the fourfold of the house. It is believed that the public sphere is not meant for women and it is their natural duty of rear and caring for the children and members of the family. In the 1960s, second-wave feminism made an effort to culminate this public-private distinction. Though the era of globalization has given them opportunities to move out from the private space but this has created a different set of problems for women. Women who are working outside, are loaded with a double burden. It means they work as paid labours at their workplaces and also have to render their responsibility of unpaid work at their homes as a mother, wives, etc. Even the responsibility of home is considered as prior to them. Despite this, when they manage to work outside, they are paid unequally for the same work which men do. Women make up one-half of the workforce still they are less paid. “The massive entry of women into active economic life has only rarely been matched by a corresponding improvement in their living or working conditions. Inequality of treatment marks virtually all aspects of women’s working lives, beginning with wages and employment opportunities and extending to access to decision-making and managerial positions.”<sup>65</sup> Working women also face sexual harassment in various ways at their workplaces. In 1997, in Vishaka Case, it was realized that sexual harassment of women at workplaces needs serious acknowledgment. While considering the seriousness of the matter the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was passed in 2013 to protect women from sexual harassment at their workplaces.

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<sup>64</sup>Sarkar, S. (2020, July 1). *The week*. Retrieved from theweek.in: [www.theweek.in](http://www.theweek.in)

<sup>65</sup>*International Labour Organization*. (1995, august 25). Retrieved from [ilo.org](http://ilo.org): <https://www.ilo.org>

In India, women are not given even basic human rights. “The prevalence of a dominant ideology which confines girls and women to definite roles and obligations leads to their devaluation and discrimination in a range of areas. The basic assumption is that girls are inferior, physically and mentally weak, and above all sexually vulnerable.”<sup>66</sup> They are not privileged to have access to material resources and if they do so then it is only according to formal laws. Indian society is prominently governed by customary laws and traditionally, women are given secondary status. Thence, this lack of access to property led to the economic backwardness of women as a category. That backwardness prevails in other sectors as well. Women are not considered worthy to get education, especially in rural areas. “The main reasons associated with this is that the parents expect girls to look after the siblings while they are at work, working with the parents as seasonal labour during the cultivation period and managing the household work while the parents are at work, the parents take more interest in boys’ education as against the girls as they feel that the girls are to be married off, increasing cost of education, etc. Thus, the universalisation of primary education in India remains a remote daydream for the women.”<sup>67</sup>

But the condition of women cannot improve until and unless there is a change in the perception of society. Exploitation and maltreatment of women, including by and large viciousness, are admissible in nations where women have mediocre economic wellbeing by standard or formal law. Violence against women is an immediate conclusion of their subordinate status in the public arena. “Crude societies have convictions, standards, and social organizations that legitimize and subsequently sustain brutality against women. Abused women in emerging nations will generally acknowledge their mediocre status and embrace the conventional upsides of accommodation and servility”.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> karlekar, M. (1998). Domestic Violence. *Economic And Political Weekly*, 1741-1751.

<sup>67</sup> Saryal, S. (2014). Women’s Rights in India: Problems and Prospects. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 49-53.

<sup>68</sup> Cohen, M. F. (2006). The Condition of Women in Developing and Developed Countries. *The Independent Review*, 261-273.

## Caste, Class, and Gender

In India, being a Dalit is a quite acceptable remark to get humiliated, to suffer from poverty, and to face a degraded life. Being a woman is a reason enough to work as unpaid labour, to get controlled by the males, to get exploited, and to bear unwanted burdens on the name of sex. But the women within the Dalit need special attention because of their threefold deprivation in terms of gender, caste, and class. Women from the scheduled caste communities experience the ill effects of segregation dependent on their sex as well as caste character and resulting in monetary hardship. Dalit women comprised around 16.60 percent of India's female populace in 2011. Dalit women's concerns include sexual orientation and financial hardship as well as separation-related with religion, station, and unapproachability, which thus brings about the forswearing of their social, monetary, social, and political freedom.<sup>69</sup>

The tendency for generalization and of creating a grand construct unintendedly somewhere put diversity aside and makes a homogenized image of a section called women, generally in a binary form of a human, the men, and women. This bifurcation strikes out the disparateness within a particular category. There are differences among women as well. There are “high-caste”, “lower-caste”, rich and poor, and also women from various religious categories.

Aslop, Fitzsimons, & Lennon (2002) say, that even respectable endeavors, like women's activist thoughts, may have the unseen side-effects of further settling the twofold women/men as 'regular'. This happens basically in light of the fact that placing all ladies in a similar classification is very much like doing it for men-overlooks the regular variety of ladies' experience, yet additionally oblivious to the diverse power structures in which ladies all over the world live.<sup>70</sup>

Ruth Manorama, a functioning individual from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women, once stated that “in a male-

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<sup>69</sup> SABHARWAL, N. S., & SONALKAR, W. (2015). Dalit Women in India: At the Crossroads of Gender, Class, and Caste. *GLOBAL JUSTICE : THEORY PRACTICE RHETORIC*.

<sup>70</sup> Aslop, R., Fitzsimons, A., & Lennon, K. (2002). *Theorizing Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

dominated society, Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class, and gender”.<sup>71</sup> “Caste discrimination in the form of social deprivation and norms such as untouchability, class marginalization as they are economically deprived and do not have many job opportunities due to lack of education and are exploited due to the patriarchal structure of society in general”.<sup>72</sup>

Dalit women are oppressed not only by upper-caste males but by the males of their community also. Rape and physical assault have been traditional weapons against Dalit community. The works they do are very pitiful. Violence against them is manifold. They are exploited by landlords in terms of physical violence and economic when comes to paying them wages. They work outside in the fields of others and after coming home, tolerate their alcoholic husbands. They bear the economic burden of the family and even after that, they are deprived of all the economic resources. The crimes which are committed against scheduled castes, women are at the top of that. Most of the crimes among them are committed against Dalit Women. “The National Family Health Survey – NFHS (2006) showed that the prevalence of violence is much higher against women belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes as compared to women outside these categories. The percentage of SC women facing physical violence is 41% while that of ST women is 39.3%, Other Backward Classes (OBC) women is 34.1% and that of other women facing physical violence at the domestic level is 26.8%. In terms of emotional violence, SC women account for 19%, ST women 19.5%, OBC women 16.9%, and other women 20.9%”.<sup>73</sup>

In her study, Sujatha<sup>74</sup> talks about the main reasons for domestic violence against Dalit women and this includes male alcoholism, dowry demands, the man’s suspicious nature, husband’s extramarital relations, and the complex social situations related to inter-caste marriages. Rape and sexual abuse of Dalit women by men of the dominant caste and classes are quite common in India. She criticized

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<sup>71</sup> Valarmathi, T., Jaiswal, S., & Jaiswal, A. (2018). *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Social Science An Anthropological Analysis about the Condition of Dalit Women in India* (pp. 1–8).

<sup>72</sup> Razvi, M., & Roth, G. L. (2004). Socio-Economic Development and Gender Inequality in India. In *Online Submission*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED492144>

<sup>73</sup> Sujatha, D. (2014). Redefining Domestic Violence: Experiences of Dalit Women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19-22.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

the writings which argue that Dalit families are matriarchal in nature and have scope for democratic space in the families of Dalit community.

Dalit Women are those cases that are not spoken out in public by women and the result of this is the creation and maintenance of a culture of violence, silence, and impunity. There is violence in families in form of child sexual abuse, female feticide, and infanticide etc. This happens at workplaces, government places etc. done by landlords, higher caste people, business people, other dalit persons, majority forward castes. Believe in Dalit women's sexual availability and bodily integrity, caste hierarchy and lack of economic resources are some of the factors of violence against Dalit women.<sup>75</sup>

Sabharwal & Sonalkar<sup>76</sup> highlight the specific challenges facing Dalit women in India in the field of economics (wage labor), literacy, health status, and political participation. She argues that mainstream feminist discourse and evaluation in India focuses on gender discrimination and issues of economic, educational, and political empowerment, ignoring the realities of the link between caste and gender. The author argues that it is their exclusion-induced deprivation that differentiates Dalit women's problems from the rest of the women. This requires a dual solution- in general policies against discrimination and poverty of women, second policies for Dalit women.

Here in India, the social structure is hierarchical in nature in which the Brahmins and Kshatriyas are at the very top and untouchables are at the bottom. But in each of these strata, the women of that particular caste are powerless and kept outside the decision-making process. They live at the mercy of the males of that caste. The situation of women in each stratum is most pathetic. Dalits in this hierarchy-based system are at the very bottom and the Dalit women are even below them. They are the most suppressed and crushed in society. They have been more powerless and

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<sup>75</sup> Irudayam, A., Mangubhai, J., & Lee, J. (2006). *Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India*. Chennai: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights; National Federation of Dalit Women; Institute of Development Education.

<sup>76</sup> Sabharwal, N. S., & Sonalkar, W. (2010). *Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India*. New Delhi: IDRC; Indian Institute of Dalit Studies. Retrieved from czech-in.org: [http://www.czech-in.org/EES/Full\\_Papers/19.pdf](http://www.czech-in.org/EES/Full_Papers/19.pdf).

exploited. They are dehumanized in all spheres and live voiceless life. Some of the issues faced by the Dalit women are: -

- Educational deprivation
- Economical deprivation
- Gender-based discrimination
- Caste-based sexual violence
- Lack of accessibility to public resources

### **a. Educational Backwardness**

One of the most prominent concerns is the low literacy rate among Dalit women. According to NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) data, the participation of Dalit Women in Higher Education in 2017 was 16% of Males and 17% of all other females. It was 11,703 in SC women as compared to 68708 in Upper Caste Women. The dropout of Dalit girls in schools is another issue faced by Dalit women. According to the Ministry of Resource Development, the SC female enrolment in Primary level education during 2015-2016 was 124 lakhs and when it came to secondary level of education it came to just 64 lakhs. Further NSSO data indicates that the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of other females in higher education is 23.5 and whereas GER for SC female students at Higher education is just 19.<sup>77</sup>

Dalits are usually aligned in the informal sectors. The male and female both earn for their families. The girls, at a very young age within the Dalit community, are imposed with the responsibilities of the household chores and family's well-being. They get married at a very young age. Therefore, when it comes to their education, Dalit girls become the first ones to get fired by the family. This lack of education leaves them behind in the economic sphere as well.

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<sup>77</sup> Source: [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf)



## **b. Economical Deprivation**

According to a recently conducted survey by official sources such as the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), most Dalit women lack access to regular employment and income-earning assists. According to NSSO data of 68<sup>th</sup> round, the female workforce participation per 1000 in regular wage salaried work was just 118 during 2011-2012 as compared to 213 of other females. In casual labour it was 458/1000 for SC female workforce and it was just 151 for another female category. The self-employment was just 424 among Dalit women as compared to 636 for others, whereas in industrial sector their participation is more in Primary sector. It is 636 per thousand in the primary sector and 158 per thousand in the tertiary sector. This number is much higher for the females of another category. Thence, it is seen that though work participation in labour is more in SC females but they do not work informal sectors. Dalit Women are more dependent on working in the agricultural sector. Their participation in the informal or casual sector is much more as compared to self-employment. Dalits are the ones who do not own much agricultural land and if in certain cases they own some then Dalit women are not allowed to have its ownership. They work as labourers in other fields and earn on daily basis. The percentage of Dalit women aligned in secured jobs, technical jobs, and professional works is much lower than the other females.

Moreover, Dalit women are engaged in scavenging, polluting occupations, and unhygienic works like cleaning and mopping in others' houses. They work as house helps. Due to the stigma of pollution related to such occupations, Dalit women who are aligned with such works are not given work as a cook or other household works. Even doing work as domestic helps they have to face humiliation in one or the other ways. They are not allowed to go into the kitchen. Their dishes are kept separate from the others'. They are usually called by their specific castes. "Unlike women from the dominant castes, dalit women are used to working outside the home and their labour is considered crucial for the survival of the family. More often than not, the home runs on her income since the man tends to spend his on himself, including for alcohol. In rural areas, 70% of the Dalit women are agricultural labourers. Their struggle revolves around procuring food, fuel, and water for their families. In urban India, they work as domestic servants,

construction labourers and casual labourers”<sup>78</sup> The practice of caste-based exclusion and discrimination thus necessarily involves failure of access and entitlement not only to economic rights, but also civil, political, and cultural rights.<sup>79</sup>

### **c. Caste Based Violence**

“Dalit women suffer both gender and caste-based violence. The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women has noted that Dalit women face targeted violence, even rape, and murder, by the state actors and powerful members of the dominant castes used to inflict political lessons and crush dissent within the community.”<sup>80</sup> According to National Crime Record Bureau's recent report, the cases of assault on Dalit women with intent to outrage her modesty during 2020 were 3488 which were much higher than normal crime cases. There were 619 total cases of sexual harassment under Section 354A IPC during 2020. These are the cases that are reported to the police and the number of unreported cases is much greater than this. Only the severe cases get registered, sometimes after the pressure from the community or from societal groups.

Though there are many government provisions to stop atrocities against Dalits. Prevention of atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act, 1989 addresses the atrocities against Dalits. The rape cases against Dalit women are being fought under the POA Act and various sections of IPC. But in the actual operation of the POA Act, the actual purpose for which it was designed to counter and address has been orderly denied. Because of the caste system in the Haryana Justice System, this act continues to be a beacon for the Dalit movement in their quest for justice for Dalit women and girls. The increased cases of crimes against Dalit women raise serious concerns regarding the empowerment of Dalit women as a category. Their bodies become the weapon for upper-caste males which can be

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<sup>78</sup> Sujatha, D. (2014). Redefining Domestic Violence: Experiences of Dalit Women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19-22.

<sup>79</sup> Singh, R.K. (2009). Manual Scavenging as Social Exclusion. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 521-523. Vol 49, No. 26-27.

<sup>80</sup> Source

<https://www.ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/ruralwomen/fedonavsarjantrustids.pdf> (This paper 'The Situation of Dalit Rural Women' was submitted to Discussion on CEDAW General Comment on rural women-Article14 by Navsarjan Trust (India), FEDO (Nepal) and the International Dalit Solidarity Network in September, 2013.

used publicly whenever anyone from their community is overstepping the caste hierarchies. It is considered by upper-caste males that the bodies of Dalit Women are sexually available whenever they want. Therefore, in most of the rape cases of Dalit women, the Culprits are from upper castes.<sup>81</sup>

#### **d. Lack of Accessibility to Public Resources**

Dalits even today are dependent on the goodwill of upper castes to access the public resources. “Dumont observes that upper castes prefer their water sources separate from that of lower castes, and where there is a shared source, water becomes the very locus of untouchability, wherein the purity of water is dependent on who collects it.”<sup>82</sup> Troubled with the onus of fetching water, the circumstance becomes intricate for dalit women as they are forced to bear different biased practices from the upper castes while getting water from the normal assets. Due to a lack of awareness, they don’t have access to basic public health services. Uterine prolapses are still a major concern for Dalit women. Most of the Dalit households don’t have access to sanitation facilities. “According to NFHS-4(National Family Health Survey-4) amongst Dalits, 74.4% of women reported problems in accessing health care. Dalit women die at an average age of 14.6 years (National Family Health Survey-4 2015-16). One in four Dalit women in the 15-49 age category is undernourished.”<sup>83</sup>

“In a study on ‘untouchability’ in 1589 villages in Gujarat, the NGO Navsarjan Trust found that Dalits were not allowed to fetch water from a tap in a non-Dalit area in 71.4 percent of these villages. In 66.2 percent of them, non-Dalit midwives refused service to Dalit women. One of the many unnecessary hardships of a Dalit woman’s life is being denied access to basic services, particularly maternal health services. In another study conducted by Navsarjan Trust, the findings showed that 46.5 percent of Dalit women never received the legally required antenatal and postnatal visits. Worse, 54.8 percent of pregnant women and new mothers from the

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<sup>81</sup> Teltumbde, A. (2015, October 31). Rape as Atrocity in Contemporary Haryana: Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 47-56.

<sup>82</sup> Dumont as cited in Dutta, S., Sinha, I., & Parashar, A. (2018). Dalit Women and Water: Availability, Access and Discrimination in Rural India. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 4(1), 62–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2394481118774487>

<sup>83</sup> Chinnasamy, A. V. (2020). *Financial Distress and Healthcare: A Study of Migrant Dalit Women Domestic Helpers in Bangalore, India*. 21(5), 15.

Valmiki sub-caste, who are traditionally manual scavengers, reported never receiving antenatal or postnatal care visits.”<sup>84</sup>

### **e. Gender-Based Discrimination**

Apart from caste-based sexual violence, Dalit women face severe domestic violence within the family as well. However, not much studies have been done to find out forms of violence against Dalit women within the households. Dalit women work outside to earn along with their counterparts for survival and when they come home, they have to bear their alcoholic husbands who reciprocate their oppression by perpetuating violence against their wives in various forms. It occurs in the forms of beating, verbal abuse, physical assault etc. The other forms of violence are dowry demands, extramarital relations of their husbands, bearing the extra burden of work, and so on. They have to bear Gender-based discrimination in both public and private both spheres.

The other forms of violence are dowry demands, extra marital relations of their husbands, bearing the extra burden of work, and so on. Sometimes Dalit Women are pressurized by their husbands to fulfill their demands of money and they are beaten sometimes in failure to do so. The problem of domestic violence becomes more severe when it is a case of inter-caste marriage. In such cases of marital relationships, a Dalit woman has to face violence from other family members and the community of her husband as well who find it hard to accept her because of hierarchical social norms of society. She is called by her Caste and gets dehumanised all the time. She loses her decision-making power within the family in cases of inter-caste marriages. In such instances, it is apparently the Dalit Community that gets banned by the society and upper castes gets to escape.

This Gender and caste inequality is sanctioned by the religious and cultural norms of the society. The Dalit women are traditionally given such positions in social strata where they are marginalized. This cultural construct and sanction to the

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<sup>84</sup> Source

<https://www.ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/ruralwomen/fedonavsarjantrustids.pdf> (This paper ‘The Situation of Dalit Rural Women’ was submitted to Discussion on CEDAW General Comment on rural women-Article14 by Navsarjan Trust (India), FEDO (Nepal) and the International Dalit Solidarity Network in September, 2013)

hierarchy have created a kind of structural violence towards this particular section of the society. It is this 'avoidance-initiated hardship' that separates Dalit women's concerns from those of other women, and it likewise makes their concerns more serious and confounded from other ladies. For Dalit women, the beginning of this prohibition incited hardship lies in the way that they are viewed as sullied, contaminating, distant, inaccessible, and 'unseeable'; all in all, not good for a social and actual relationship with others. This has tremendous ramifications on the basic liberty and human pride of Dalit women.