

The Position of Dalit Women in Tamilnadu since 1950 – A Study

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Abstract- Depressed class people of India were treated untouchables. Apart from that they faced so many social problems. The condition of Dalit women in Tamilnadu was not so good. They faced the triple burden of caste, class and gender. Caste Hindus illtreated Dalit women due to their poverty, ignorance and illiteracy. Dalit women got social awareness through the Dalit social reformers. The government concentrated attention on Dalits particularly Dalit women. The government of India and Tamilnadu state government enacted Dalit women security legislations. This paper focused the condition of Dalit women and security legislations for Dalit women.

Nowadays , organic farming is gaining importance due to The position of Dalits, in particular Dalit women in Tamil Nadu is pathetic as historically they are subjected to all types of discriminatory practices and they are forbidden by higher caste persons from entering places of worship, drawing water from public wells, or from wearing shoes in the presence of higher caste persons. They dig the graves, dispose of dead animals, and clean human waste with their bare hand. They are deemed polluting and therefore “untouchable,” Any attempt to defy the social order is met with violence or economic retaliation. According to a report, in 120 villeges in Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu, all 120 Villages have segregated Dalit colonies.

The early centre of the Dalit movement in India was Maharashtra, since the pre-Independence period. Ambedkar and the Maharashtra Movements were the source of inspiration for the Dalit movements elsewhere. Taking inspiration from Phule, Ambedkar also highlighted the importance of education for the upliftment of Dalits. In Tamil Nadu, The founder of the Self – Respect Movement and the Dravidar Kazhagam, ‘Periyar’ E.V. Ramasami Naiker was among the early champions of the Dalit cause. He laid emphasis on educating the downtrodden, including Dalits.

In the 1990s, the Dalits started to resist the discrimination by organizing peaceful protests and also by arms struggle. Dalit organizations started organizing marches against human right violations suffered by them, which was not like by the higher caste groups, who saw in it economical and political threat to them. In some states like Bihar, groups such as Naxalites which attracted the support of a section of Dalits started attacking and killing landlords and seized their property. The caste Hindus by organizing private war groups such as Ranvir Sena started attacking the Dalits.

The Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu has long history. Iyothee Thass, Erattaimalai Srinivasan, M.C.Rajesh, N. Sivaraj and I.Ilayaperumal Vai, Balasundaram are some of the leaders

associated with the movement at various stages. The plight of Dalits in the modern days in the state is highlighted by the incident that happened on 25th December, 1968, in which 44 Dalits were burnt to death by upper caste landlords in Kilavenmani village, in the then undivided Thanjavur district for demanding higher wages.

Dalit women face the triple burden of caste, class and gender, Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against Dalit women are inflicted by landlords and the police. Dalits are kept away from their land and employment during social boycotts. Dalit women face physical attacks, and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 is rarely enforced. According to a Tamil Nadu Government official, the raping of Dalit women exposes the hypocrisy of the caste system as ‘no one practices untouchability when it comes to sex’

One of the earliest organized Dalit movements in Madras Presidency started with a memorandum submitted to the Governor of Madras Presidency in the early 1890s on the horrifying living conditions of Parayars,

Since 1960s, Dalits have taken part in struggles against the state and the upper caste to claim their rights. During this period, the Dalit Panthers, and several groups with a Marxist/Leninist or Maoist orientation, emerged outside the framework of recognized political parties.

Tamil Nadu Women’s Forum (TNWF) is a state level initiative, started in 1991 in order to train women on leadership, also collaborates with some of the Dalit parties like Viduthalai Siruthaigal lead by Thirumavalavan (earlier known as Dalit panthers of India-DPI).

Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against Dalit women are used as tools by landlords and the police to inflict political “lessons” and crush dissent and labor movements within Dalit communities.

According to a report, the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have affected the lives of Dalit women. As these SEZs are established on agricultural lands, the women, especially Dalit women get displaced rendering them jobless. Jobless Dalit men are forced to leave villages in search of employment. leaving the Dalit women alone in their villages, who suffer the life of a 'single woman' who are socially discriminated. They are denied sufficient food, health care, education and dignity.

With the objective to facilitate a faster socio-economic development of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe and support them with various welfare measures, particularly on education, to end their social seclusion and economic deprivation and speed up the process of integrating them with the national main stream, the Government of Tamil Nadu implements several welfare programmes. All the departments of the Government earmark specific allocations for the benefit of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe from their plan programmes as special component plan. In addition special central assistance is funded by the Government of India for various welfare schemes.

Among the various social sector programmes implemented by the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, education occupies the prime place as it is considered to be a great equalizer. Besides this, various infrastructure programmes like distribution of house site pattas and construction of houses and provision of basic amenities like drinking water, burial ground and pathway to burial ground etc. are also taken up as part of the social development programmes. Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation (TAHDCO) implements specific economic development programmes for the benefit of the people of Scheduled Castes. The economic development programmes implemented through TAHDCO are Micro Enterprises development for the poor families, vocational job oriented skill training programmes and individual entrepreneur scheme, which are supported by appropriate training and subsidy programmes.

Job oriented vocational trainings are given to educated Adi dravidar youths for generation of employment opportunities. Funds are provided by TAHDCO for training programmes to law graduates, typewriting and shorthand. The tireless work of the women's movement and the Dalit women's movement. and the initiatives taken by both the Central and State Governments are helping to find solutions to the problems peculiar to Dalit women although a lot remain to be done for their upliftment and achieving their equality and dignity of life.

END NOTES

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