

A Grassroot Picture of Untouchability Practices against Dalit Women in Haryana

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ABSTRACT:

Women are now participating in all spheres of life like politics, media, service sector, science and technology etc. and trying to prove themselves but traditional patriarchal norms in the form of violence are trying to push them back. Dalit/Schedules Caste (SC) women, in India's highly patriarchal and caste-based society, bear the triple burden of caste, class and gender. Being positioned at the lowest social order of Indian society, scheduled caste women suffer from many forms of discrimination, including lack of education, economic disadvantages, social disempowerment, domestic violence, political invisibility, and sexual oppression. In contravention of both national laws and international human rights standards that prohibit any physical, sexual or psychological violence against women, varying forms of violent acts specifically targeting Dalit women are occurring on a large scale across India today. Dalit women are the most vulnerable and face untouchability, discrimination and violence much more than their male counterparts. The position of Dalit Women in the society is reflected by the nature and number of atrocities committed on her. Being Dalit women, abusive behaviour is used to remind her to her caste and keep her oppressed. On an average, about 1000 cases of sexual exploitation of Dalit women are reported annually and in the year 2001 alone, 1316 cases of rape were reported (NCRB, 2001)ⁱ. Dalit Women also face violence when they try to access rights and entitlements provided by the Constitution and the government. In addition to facing discrimination and untouchability in accessing welfare schemes, women from Dalit community also face sexual and other kinds of physical violence. In spite of the space (reservation) given to them at panchayat (village) level, their participation is dismal in the local governance. Dalit women are also among the category of oppressed. Dalit in India are a very distinct social group. While belonging to a broad class of have nots, they suffer an additional disability of social oppression. This social oppression varies from the crudest variety of untouchability, still being practiced in rural areas, to the sophisticated forms of discrimination encountered even in modern sectors of urban areas. So, the present study investigates the Grassroot Picture of Untouchability Practices against Dalit Women in Haryana. It is sociologically necessary and meaningful not only to understand the broad pattern and process of social change but also to understand the untouchability practices against Dalit Women which are prevalent today. The present study seeks to describe the salient features of the social change. To understand the Untouchability Practices against Dalit Women in Haryana depending upon the availability of data, a set of indicators have been examined, which includes household facilities, untouchability practices, perception about inter caste marriages, awareness among Dalit women about the laws related to caste discrimination etc.

Key Words: *Dalit Women, Untouchability practices, Patriarchal Society, Violence, Discrimination, Traditional norms.*

INTRODUCTION

Dalit means a person belonging to the lowest caste of the Indian society, which includes the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes; however the term is mainly used for the scheduled castes. Though the constitution has provided equality on basis of caste, class or gender but the dalits are still suffering from economic, political, social and cultural deprivation. They often face the denial of basic human rights and social justice. The women belonging to the dalit community are rather in a more vulnerable state. They face double oppression in the form of being a dalit and also a woman. Being the untouchable community, they also face oppression from the women belonging to upper castes. The caste system of India, which is called the “**Varna Vyavastha**” divides the communities by the way of their occupation. Dalits are mostly leather workers, weavers, sweepers or agricultural labourer, employed on petty jobs or are small entrepreneurs. The women among the dalits have a role in all economic and income generation activities as well as in various social functions but they are victims of the social system of discrimination. In the rural areas dalit women are largely labourers employed in the agriculture sector as landless labourers, as domestic labourers for the landlords of the village, in animal husbandry or as labourers in the small scale industry of the village. In the urban sector dalit women are hired as daily wage earners on the construction sites, as domestic servants and have occupied small jobs in the organized sector. Employment prospects for dalit women in particular are too grim. Entry into the organized sector depends largely upon their awareness in addition to educational qualification and previous job experience. Some other problems include segmentation in the labour market which works against dalit women. Participation of dalit women in organized sector is considerably low or negligibleⁱⁱ.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Dalit women are the most socially, politically and economically deprived among the women of the Indian society. The social status of women in India is a typical example of this gap between position and roles accorded to them by the Constitution and the law, and those imposed on them by social traditions. After the independence, India is subject to important socio-cultural and technological changes besides the political changes. They brought about sweeping changes in the way of life and the traditional social order in India. The literature reveals that the Dalit women are affected by the process of social change and their condition is far from satisfactory. A study of the Grassroot Picture of Untouchability Practices against Dalit Women in Haryana is thus sociologically necessary and meaningful not only to understand the broad pattern and process of social change but also to understand the untouchability practices against Dalit Women which are prevalent today. The present study seeks to describe the salient features of the social change. To understand the Untouchability Practices against Dalit Women in Haryana depending upon the availability of data, a set of indicators have been examined, which includes household facilities, untouchability practices, perception about inter caste marriages, awareness among Dalit women about the laws related to caste discrimination etc. To understand these phenomena, the investigator has formulated the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the basic facilities available to Dalit women belonging to rural and urban areas of Haryana.
2. To study the type of untouchability practices faced by Dalit women.
3. To analyse the perception of Dalit women about inter-caste marriages.
4. To analyse the awareness among Dalit women about the laws related to caste discrimination.

METHODOLOGY:

Primary data which was the base of the present study was collected by interview schedule. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied in the present study.

Sample:

The unit of the study was Dalit women and girls above the age of 16 years. The universe of the study was state Haryana which is geographically divided into four divisions namely Ambala, Hisar, Rohtak and Gurgaon. Four districts viz. Ambala, Fatehabad, Karnal & Rewari were selected from each division respectively on the basis of highest SC population in these districts. Stratified Random Sampling Technique was used for data collection. The data was collected by the investigator personally. SPSS software was used for tabulation and analyse of the data. An interview schedule was framed to collect the primary data.

The sampling method includes three different stages:

First stage – Districts

Second stage – Rural/ Urban

Third stage – Dalit Women/ Girl.

First Stage: Selection of Districts

The population of Haryana as per 2001 Census is 21,144,564, out of the total population 40,91,110 (19.3%) are scheduled castes (SCs). The present study was conducted in four districts of Haryana viz. Ambala, Fatehabad, Karnal and Rewari. These districts were selected on the basis of highest SC population residing there as per 2001 Census.

1. Ambala

As per 2001 Census the total population of Ambala district was 1014,411 of which 357,028 (35.19%) live in urban areas and the major chunk 657,383 (64.80%) of the population live in rural areas out of the total population. The district has 542,977 (53.52%) males and 471,434 (46.47%) females. The scheduled caste population in the district is around 254,477 which constitute 25.09% of the total district population. Ambala stands on 1st position in Ambala division having largest scheduled caste population.

2. Fatehabad

The total population of Fatehabad district was 806,158, of which 142157 (17.6%) live in urban areas and the major chunk 664,001 (82.36%) of the population live in rural areas. The district has 427,862 (53.07%) males, and 378,296 (46.92%) females. The scheduled caste

population in the district is around 221,107 which constitute 27.43% of the total district population. Fatehabad stands on 1st rank in Hisar division having largest in SC population.

3. Karnal

The total population of Karnal district is 1,274,184 as per 2001 Census of which 337,842 (26.51%) live in urban areas and 936,341 (73.48%) of the population live in rural areas. The district has 683,3368 (53.63%) males and 590,815 (46.36%) females. The scheduled caste population in the districts is around 267,424. which constitute 20.99% of the total district population Karnal stands on 1st rank in Rohtak division having largest in SC population.

4. Rewari

The total population of Rewari district is 765,351 as per 2001 Census of which 136,174 (17.79%) live in urban areas and 629,177 (82.20%) of the population live in rural areas. The district has 403,034 (52.66%) males and 362,317 (47.33%) females. The scheduled caste population in the district is around 144,452 which constitute 18.87% of the total district population. Rewari stand on 1st rank in Gurgaon division having largest in SC population.

Second Stage: Selection of Rural and Urban area

To collect the data from urban areas wards and colonies have been taken from the selected districts and to cover the rural areas villages from selected districts have been taken. Thus from Ambala district Ranjit nagar, Vivek Vihar have been taken for urban areas and Mohra & Landa villages have been selected for rural area. In Fatehabad district for urban area Shakti Nagar, Kabir Basti, Dhakka Basti, Balmiki Mohalla, Ramniwas Colony and for rural area Swami Nagar, Jhalinia, Daulatpur, Badopal and Hans Colony villages have been selected. In Karnal district Ramnagar, Bahadur Chand Colony, Sugar Mill, Shivaji Colony, Sector-4, Railway Colony for urban area and Garhi Jatan, Budanpur, Naurta for rural area have been selected. Lastly from Rewari district Kutubpur and Rampura have been taken for urban area and Banipur village for rural area.

Third Stage: Selection of Girls/ Women

The data has been collected from a total number of 400 SC women and girls from the above selected four districts. These women and girls have been categorized into rural and urban areas. 200 samples have been collected from rural area and 200 from the urban area.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

Personal profile of the Respondents:-

Out of the total collected sample from the four districts i.e. Ambala, Karnal, Fatehabad and Rewari, 31.75% of the respondents were from the age group 16-25 years followed by 29%, 16% and 23.25% respondents belonged to age group 26-35 years, 36-45 years and above 46 years respectively. In the rural area, majority of the respondents belonged to Chamar caste. Many sub-caste of Dalit community like chamar, balmiki, oad, bazigar, dhanak, nat, ramdasia and bawaria were also found in rural areas. However in urban area, mostly respondents belonged to balmiki caste. Other sub-caste of the respondents observed were Balmiki, Dhanak, Chamar, Ramdasia and Oad. Out of the total sample, majority of the respondents were married i.e. 73.25% followed by 18.5% of them which were unmarried, 8% were widows and only 0.25% of them were divorcees. As far as educational status was

concerned a large number of respondents were illiterate in both areas i.e. 45% in each, followed by 13.5% were matriculates, 12.25% were educated up to middle level, 11% up to senior secondary level, 10.75% of them were educated up to primary, 9.5% respondents were graduates and only 0.5% of them were post graduate. It was observed that the high illiteracy rate among the Dalit women is partly the product of the socio-economic denial, deprivation and societal attitude for girl child education. But after the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (1995), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) and Right to Education Act, a number of concessions to the Dalit women display a sharp change in the field of education. It was seen in the both areas, a large number of children (both girls and boys) are going to school. But at the higher education level, only a few girls could reached. In rural area, 50.5% of the respondents' family depended on non agriculture based labour for their daily livelihood needs. Various other occupations like agriculture base labour, government job, private job and self employment were also found in rural area. Similarly in urban area, majority of the respondents i.e. 41% were working as non agriculture based labour.

Out of the total sample, 30.5% respondents' family income was Rs. 60,000 per year and above followed by 21.75% respondents whose family income was Rs. 50,001 to 60,000 per year, 13.25% respondents' family income was Rs. 30,001 to 40,000 per year, 12% respondents' family income was Rs. 20,001 to 30,000 per year, 11.75% respondents' family belonged to Rs. 40,001 to 50,000 per year income group and 10.75% of the respondents family income was Rs. 20,000 and below per year.

The study points out that more than half of the respondents were living in nuclear family in both areas and joint families were also found but in lesser number, the percentage of extended family was very low i.e. only 0.5%.

Basic Facilities:-

With regard to basic facilities, out of total rural sample 61.5% respondents have pucca houses, 20% respondents have semi pucca houses and 18.5% of them have kachha houses. In urban area of all the covered districts, 75% of the respondents have pucca houses, 18% have semi pucca houses and 7% of them have kachha houses. In rural sample 96.5% respondents are living in own houses and 3.5% respondents were living in rented houses while in urban sample 78% respondents are living in own houses and 22% of the respondents were living in rented houses. In rural and urban both areas of all the covered districts, maximum number of the respondents have electricity connection i.e. 94.75%. Only 5.25% respondents have no electricity connection. In urban area of Rewari district, 20% respondents have no electricity connection which is the highest percentage among all the covered districts. It is revealed from the results that in rural area of Ambala, Karnal and Fatehabad and urban area of all the covered districts, majority of the respondents fulfill their drinking water requirements from tap while in rural and urban area of Rewari, some of the respondents are getting water from the well. It is also found that in Karnal and Rewari districts, some of respondents are getting water from faraway places. It is also observed in the rural and urban both areas that maximum number of respondents accept that separate well/tap system for Dalits is not prevalent in their area (77.25%) while 22.25% of the respondents replied that this kind of practice is still prevalent in some areas of Rewari and Fatehabad districts as compared to Ambala and Karnal districts. This kind of practice is found more in rural area of Karnal and

Fatehabad districts i.e. 36% and 40% respectively. But gradually with a change in time people's mindset is also going through a change.

Out of the total sample 87.5% respondents in rural area and 95% of them in urban area are having mobile facility. In the rural sample 82% respondents and in the urban sample 93.5% respondents are having television, radio at their homes.

With regard to toilet facility, more than half of the respondents have pucca toilet in their houses. It is observed that availability of pucca toilet in rural area is found better in Karnal and Rewari districts as compared to Ambala and Fatehabad districts. While in rural area of Ambala, Rewari and Karnal districts percentage of respondents going in open area for defecation is higher. In the urban area of Ambala and Fatehabad districts, maximum number of respondents have pucca toilet facility in their houses i.e. 96% and 86% respectively which is the highest among all the covered districts.

Out of total sample, availability of pucca kitchen is found better in urban area as compared to rural area i.e. 67.5% and 46.5% respectively. In rural area, approximately 1/3rd of respondents are using open area as kitchen. In rural area, more than half of respondents use kerosene oil, wood and coal for cooking food while in urban area, maximum number of respondents use LPG as fuel for cooking.

Family Structure:-

Family structure plays an important role in deciding the status of Dalit women. It is observed that the status of women in a joint family is different from the status in nuclear family because women have more decision making power and freedom for work outside in a nuclear family. In a joint family, the rule and restrictions of the elder persons like mother in law, father in law and other person give little opportunity of freedom for women to improve their status. It is found that more than half of the respondents are living in nuclear family in both areas and the percentage of joint family is low as compared to nuclear family. And one important thing which was noticed that out of the total sample only 0.5% of the respondents are living in extended family. Nuclear families include the spouse and their own off-springs. In case of widows and divorcees, they do not have husbands but they have their own children. In joint family, they have their husbands' family and the family of their husband's father. With regard to family size of the respondents, maximum percentage of the families are having 4 to 7 members in family in both rural and urban areas. It is found that in urban area, most of the families have 4 members which is like nuclear family and in rural area, most of the families have 7 members which is like joint family. In joint family father and mother are also living with their son.

But gradually, in the rural and urban both the areas the pattern of the family is changing. With the growth of urbanization, industrialization, education and individualism, large family size is now being replaced with small family size.

Husband's Occupation:-

As far as husband's occupation is concerned it is an important determinant of women's status. The status of a woman whose husband is working on government job, high private job or on high administrative post is definitely high. But a woman whose husband is working as a sweeper, scavenger etc. she gets low status in society as she remains dependent on her male counterpart for her economic support. Although most of the respondents' husbands are

engaged in any kind of work in both rural and urban areas of all the covered districts (41%), but some respondents' husbands are not engaged in gainful activities because they are alcoholics. In rural areas, 16% of the respondent's husbands are working as agricultural workers but 50.5% are engaged in non agriculture work.

It is also inferred that in urban area of Fatehabad district, most of the Balmiki women's husband are engaged in sanitation work but in other areas of all the covered districts respondent's husband are working in other gainful activities like agricultural labourer, running petty vegetable shop, dhobi etc.

Untouchability Practices:-

It is found in the present study that even today customs like untouchability practices are prevalent in our society up to some extent. It is usually seen that it has different forms and it varies in different parts of Haryana. Most of the Dalit women celebrate their cultural festivals with their own caste specifically. Mainly Balmiki women come under the lowest rung of social ladder who mostly do the household chores like mopping, doing the dishes, washing clothes etc. in the houses of people belonging to upper caste and class. In Haryana, mainly Chamar, Dhanak and Balmiki constitute the Dalit castes who are more in number in comparison to other sub-castes of Dalits. The present study reveals that women from Chamar caste have better place in Dalit society as compared to Balmiki women. Though, with the urbanization custom like untouchability practice has changed but it is still there somewhere in their minds. Even today in the villages and the cities, dishes are kept separately for the Dalit women, they are not allowed to enter inside the temples and even there are separate temples for particular castes.

It is also in trend that if people from lower caste go to the houses of people from upper caste, they are allowed to sit on the floor only. It is commonly found in rural areas as compare to urban areas. During our field survey, it is observed mainly in rural and urban parts of Rewari district but in rural it is more common. When the data was being collected from Banipur village of the rural area of Rewari which comes under Bawal block of Rewari and is situated at the Haryana and Rajasthan border, some such facts came in front which seem quite surprising in present scenario. The people from Dalit caste are prohibited from worshiping or doing any rituals inside the temple but the cleaning chores of the temple is being done by Balmiki women. Hence, it can be concluded that even today there is narrow mindedness about caste system.

It is found in the families with higher income or where a family member is working in a government or private sector, women are not involved in the labour for daily wages. It is also observed that well educated women and women belonging to families with higher annual income have a different place in society. Somewhere, untouchability being related to caste also belongs to class and culture. In Rewari district impact of culture of Rajasthan can be seen clearly while in Fatehabad district, Dalit women are facing the untouchability due to their poverty. In all the districts under study, it is found that Dalit women are mostly involved in menial work because of their financial crisis so that they can secure the future of their children. In Rewari and Fatehabad districts maximum number of respondents said that they are not being provided with the equal opportunities to progress because of their poverty as well as social and cultural prohibitions which bound them like illiteracy, child marriage etc.

Perception about Inter Caste Marriage:

Cultural code is a key to understand the type of culture. It can be defined as a set of images that produce particular stereotype in mind regarding that culture. It also helps to understand the behaviour response of people belonging to a particular culture. Each and every culture sets some norms or customs which have their importance for society as their function of exercising control over the conduct of individuals. These social and cultural codes determine the perceptions, judgments and conduct of individuals of that particular society. These codes of conducts mould the individual's life in a manner that they have no objection to conforming to customs, besides they want to avoid castigation from society for not aiding to them. The cultural codes also provide the society a clear guidance in all actions like rules for marriage, relationship with other communities etc. Caste Panchayat also set some code of conduct for the people under its jurisdiction.

The Haryanvi social fabric is organized around the village unit which is comprised of a group of certain castes and sub castes. Khap is a term for a social political grouping and used in a geographical sense. A number of villages grouped themselves into a Gohand (corresponding to the present Thana area), a number of Gohand form a Khap (covering an area equal to from a Tehsil to a district) and a number of Khaps form a Sarva Khap embracing a full province or state. Due to this, in the present study it is also found that maximum number of respondents said that inter caste marriages are being rejected in the Dalits because of the pressure exerted by the society. It can be said that even with the advancement of the society and the legislation against untouchability in place these customs are continued being practiced in Haryana.

Knowledge of Untouchability Prohibition Act:-

The present study concludes that most of the respondents (66.25%) do not know about the Untouchability Prohibition Act from rural and urban both the areas of all the covered districts (see table 3.9). Rural (42%) and urban (36%) Ambala has the highest percentage and rural Fatehabad (32%) and urban Rewari (20%) has the lowest percentage related to knowledge about untouchability practices. It is also observed that in rural and urban areas of all the covered districts, maximum number of the respondents have no awareness that the discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, gender, class and birth place is a crime. Rather they feel discrimination on the basis of caste system in their daily life, and they don't speak up because of fear of societal rejection.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude it can be said that even today customs like untouchability practices are prevalent in our society up to some extent. It is usually seen that it has different forms and it varies in different parts of Haryana. As far as untouchability practice is concerned, it is much more in practice in the districts of Fatehabad and Rewari as compared to Ambala and Karnal. The reason might be the better educational and economic development of these districts. Inter caste marriages are being rejected in the Dalits because of the pressure exerted by the society. It can be said that even with the advancement of the society and the legislation against untouchability in place these customs are continued being practiced in Haryana. The results reveal that since Dalit women lack education and skill training, they are involved in work like domestic labourers or daily wage labourer. Despite many positive developments in securing women's human rights, patriarchy continues to be embedded in the social system denying the

majority of women the choice to decide how they live. The overriding importance of community in a patriarchal sense ensures that women rarely have an independent identity. Factors like caste, class, community, locality and occupation all combine together to affect women making them accept gender inequality. Thus, it can be said that the status of Dalit women will improve gradually with the development of the area where they live and the initiatives of the state as well.

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