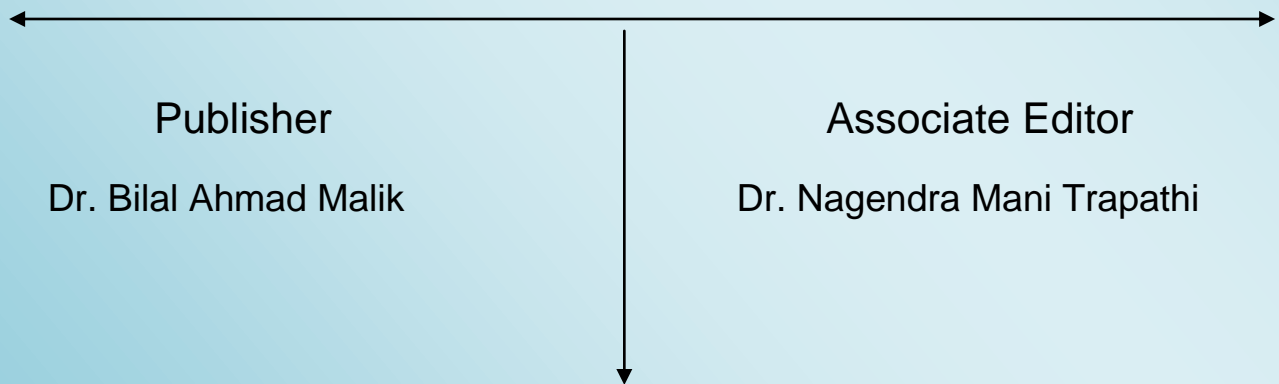


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## ATROCITIES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST DALIT WOMEN: A STUDY ON HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Even though Indian Constitution emphasized on socio-economic equality of all the castes and genders, still there is socio-economic and cultural discrimination based on caste and gender. It affected the atrocities and violence on Dalits and especially on Dalit women. Dalit women are the worst sufferers of atrocities in the rural areas and even though strict laws are formulated to control these atrocities, due to lack of evidences the convicts are acquitted. The paper provided elaborate statistics on the atrocities and violence against the Dalits and Dalit women in India. Human rights are powerful solutions to solve the problems of Dalit women against atrocities and violence. Further, education, reservation and political participation of Dalit women are emphasized as a powerful control against the atrocities and violence against the Dalit Women.*

**Keywords:** *Atrocities And Violence, Dalit, Women, Human Rights.*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

According to the Hindu religious belief, "All human beings are not born equal." This creates caste-based discrimination against Dalits, which is then open to various forms of violence against them, which include public humiliation, torture, rape, beating, and killing, etc. The untouchability is the basis for atrocities and violence, denial of basic needs, land rights, legal discrimination, infringement of civil liberties, inferior or no people status, de-humanizing living and working conditions, impoverishment, mal-nourishment, bad health conditions, high levels of illiteracy and continuing social ostracism is continue to the reason for human rights violations against dalits (Anant, 2003).

Dalits, literally meaning "broken people" or "oppressed" in Hindi, are the lowest members of the Hindu caste system in India. The caste system is a Hindu hierarchical class structure with roots in India dating back thousands of years. In descending order, the caste system is comprised of Brahmins (priests), Ksyatriyas

(warriors), Vaisyas (farmers), Shudras (laborer-artisans), and the Dalits, who are considered so polluted they are beyond caste. Traditionally, caste, determined by birth, defined whom one could marry and the occupation one could pursue.

Caste based discrimination and atrocity against dalits community is alarmingly increased all over India that lead to bloody and brutal killing of dalits everyday. These anti-social committed by so called caste hindus terrorize the dalits in almost many parts of India. The extent and occurrence of dalit atrocity is rampant like an epidemic in many parts of India. In many states such as Bihar, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, U.P., M.P., Karnataka and several parts of Tamil Nadu and AP the violence against the Dalits reached to newer heights. The severity of violence's against dalits is beyond any human comprehension as dalits are lynched, murdered and mutilated. This kind of violence is not seen even in animal world.

There is hardly any day goes by when dalits are not killed, harassed, socially boycotted by the upper castes. Dalits houses are burnt, physical violence against dalit woman like rape, terrorizing the dalit woman by parading naked on streets, cutting genitals of dalit children's, beating elderly dalits are rampant and it is like an epidemic in rural areas and villages across India. The so called caste hindu's cannot tolerate dalits for no reason. The dictatorial attitudes of upper caste hindu's go beyond any legal authorities, the law and order is in serious danger due to this anti-social elements, so to say that any social activities of dalits such as marriages, temple festivals, funeral proceedings of dalits cannot go smoothly without violence and dalit killings because the Hindu's cannot stand a dalit wearing a decent cloth, a dalit should not ask for minimum wages in rural areas, they are not allowed freely to participate in political meetings and activities, dalit bridegroom cannot ride a mare in front of upper caste Hindu's, the dalits have to step down voluntarily from the above said activities otherwise he or she and the marriage party has to face the wrath of the upper caste Hindus, this is particularly common in the ignoble Rajputana state called Rajasthan.

The violence and attack on dalits are so horrendous that dalit people live in constant fear, insecurity and torturous life. It is a gross human rights violation, state governments like Maharashtra where the recent Khairlanji murder of entire dalit family members, states like Haryana where 5 dalits were lynched like animals in a day light under the blessings of law and enforcement (the local police), raping of minors as young as 5 year old dalit girl, mutilating and cutting hands, legs and genitals of children's, adults and olds, parading dalit woman's naked in broad day light in the presence of entire village people are few of the thousands of examples of organized and

well planned caste brutality against dalits. Dalits are treated all over India as cheap dirt or less than animals and this sad status of Indian society is displayed with detailed information with graphics to the world by digital media. In this 21st century where the information spread at the speed of light to entire world, sadly our local authorities, political leaders and law enforcement is sitting quite and encourage such heinous crimes go unaccountable in India. No human being should ever tolerate such heinous crimes committed by anti-social caste hindu's.

### **STATISTICS OF ATROCITIES ON DALITS:**

According to the National Commission of Human rights of India, more than 62,000 human rights violations are recorded annually. On average, two Dalits are assaulted every hour, three Dalit women and children are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and at least two Dalits are tortured or burned every day (Narula, 1998).

Sexual harassment also takes the more violent form of physical molestation and rape. The incidence of recorded instances of *atrocities* on Dalit women is far higher than non-Dalit women. The position of Dalit women in the society is reflected by the nature and number of atrocities committed on her. Being a Dalit woman, abuse is used to remind her of her caste and keep her oppressed. On an average about 1000 cases of sexual exploitation of SC women are reported annually and another 400 cases are reported for the ST women (IIDS, 2010).

The economic and political vulnerability exposes them to multiple levels of violence. During the period of 1999-2001, an average of 28,016 cases of discrimination and untouchability were registered annually by the 'untouchables' under the Anti-untouchability Act of 1955 and Prevention of SC and ST Atrocities Act. This comes to about 3 cases per lakh population. The ratio of such cases was highest in Rajasthan (9.3); followed by Madhya Pradesh (7.7), and Uttar Pradesh (4.9). The ratio was about 3 cases per lakh population in Orissa, Karnataka, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. The break-up of crime against SCs for the year 2001 includes 763 cases of murder, 4547 of grievous hurt, 354 cases of arson and 1316 cases of sexual assault (rapes), and 12,200 cases of other offences. In the case of STs, an average of 4952 cases of crime was registered annually. Most of these cases were confined to Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. The break-up was 167 cases of murder, 756 of hurt, 108 of arson and 573 of sexual assault (rape) and 2732 cases of other offences. Total atrocities (2001) against SCs was five times more than that for non-SC/STs and this is more or less true for different types of crimes also (IIDS, 2010). Following table presented year-wise statistics of atrocities and violence against Dalits in India. But, these numbers are only reported cases and due to the threat of social alienation in the society, many of the cases will not be reported by the Dalits.

**Table No. 1. Total Number of Reported Atrocities and Violence  
Committed against Dalits**

Year	Murders	Violence	Rape	Arson	Others	Total
1981	493	1492	604	1295	10434	14318
1986	564	1408	727	1002	11715	15416
1991	610	1706	784	602	13944	17646
1996	543	4585	949	464	24899	31440
1997	513	3860	1037	389	22145	27944
1998	516	3809	923	NA	NA	28172
1999	506	3241	1000	337	21727	26811
2000	526	3457	1083	290	25815	31171

**Source:** National Conference on Dalits Organization.

Further, as reported in National Human Rights Commission Report on the Prevention and Atrocities against Scheduled Castes, 2011:

**Every 18 minutes:**

- ❖ A crime is committed against a Dalit

**Every day:**

- ⇒ 3 Dalit women are raped
- ⇒ 2 Dalits are murdered & 2 Dalits Houses are burnt in India
- ⇒ 11 Dalits are beaten

**Every week:**

- 13 Dalits are murdered
- 5 Dalits home or possessions are burnt
- 6 Dalits are kidnapped or abducted

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF DALITS:**

- ❖ 37 percent of Dalits living below poverty in India
- ❖ More than half (54%) of their children are undernourished in India
- ❖ 83 per 1000 live birth children born in Dalit community are probability of dying before the first birthday
- ❖ 45 percent of Dalits do not know read and write in India

- ❖ Dalits women burden double discrimination (gender and caste) in India
- ❖ Only 27 percent of Dalits women give institutional deliveries in India
- ❖ About one third of Dalit households do not have basic facilities
- ❖ Public health workers refused to visit Dalit homes in 33% of villages
- ❖ Dalits were prevented from entering police station in 27.6% of villages
- ❖ Dalit children had to sit separately while eating in 37.8% of Govt. schools
- ❖ Dalits didn't get mail delivered to their homes in 23.5% of villages
- ❖ Dalits were denied access to water sources in 48.4% of villages because of segregation & untouchability practices
- ❖ Half of India's Dalit children are undernourished, 21% are severely underweight & 12% DIE before their 5th birthday
- ❖ Literacy rates for Dalit women are as low as 37.8% In Rural India

#### **STATUS OF PREVENTION OF ATROCITIES ACT:**

The conviction rate under SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act is 15.71% and pendency is as high as 85.37%. This is when the Act has strict provisions aimed as a deterrent. By contrast, conviction rate under IPC is over 40%.

#### **ATROCITIES AGAINST DALIT WOMEN:**

The situation of Dalit women needs special attention. Dalit women are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world: they make up more than two percent of the world's total population. They are discriminated against three times over: they are poor, they are women, and they are Dalits. Although both Dalit men and women suffer under the same traditional taboos, Dalit women are confronted with these more often. They are discriminated against not only by people of higher castes, but also within their own communities, where men are dominant. Consequently, Dalit women have less power within the Dalit movement itself. Although they are active in large numbers, most leadership positions in the organizations, local bodies and associations have until now been held by men.

According to Arpita Anant, Dalit women in India face the triple burden: caste, class and gender. As stated by another woman activist in India, "No one practices untouchability when it comes to sex." Rape is a common phenomenon in rural areas. Women are raped as part of caste custom or village tradition. According to Dalit

activists, Dalit girls have been forced to have sex with the village landlord (Narula, 1998). In rural areas, “women are induced into prostitution (*Devadasi system*), which [is] forced on them in the name of religion.” The prevalence of rape in villages contributes to the greater incidence of child marriage in those areas. Early marriage between the ages of ten years and sixteen years persists in large part because of Dalit girls’ vulnerability to sexual assault by upper-caste men; once a girl is raped, she becomes unmarriageable. An early marriage also gives parents greater control over the caste into which their children are married. Moreover, Dalit women are also raped as a form of retaliation (Talukdar 1-16; O’Neill 8-31). Landlords and the police use sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women to inflict political “lessons” and crush dissent within the community.

Certain kinds of violence are traditionally reserved for Dalit women. These include: extreme verbal abuse and sexual epithets, being paraded naked, dismemberment, being forced to drink urine and eat faeces, branding, pulling out of teeth, tongue and nails, and violence including murder after proclaiming witchcraft. Dalit women are also threatened by rape as part of collective violence by the higher castes, but sexual assault and rape of Dalit women and girls occur within their own communities too. The *devadasi* (or *jogini*) system of forced temple prostitution is the most extreme form of exploitation of Dalit women. In spite of its severity and frequency, most cases of violence against Dalit women are not registered. The lack of law enforcement leaves many Dalit women unable to approach the legal system to seek redress. As the women are often unaware of the laws, their ignorance is easily exploited by their opponents, the police and the judiciary. Even when cases are registered, the lack of appropriate investigation, or the judge’s own caste and gender biases can lead to acquittal.

One of the reasons that Dalit woman continue to be target of atrocities is that in rural areas, due to extreme poverty, lack of education, and as high caste Hindus own 80% land, Dalit women are forced to work on minimal wage. A slight denial to their orders or daring to ask for a raise in wages can result in humiliations, beating, torture, rape, killing and jail. More often, Dalit womens and children are held by as ransom to catch their spouses on minor charges.

## **EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:**

All human beings have the right to live as human beings. Human rights are not conferred or given. They already exist in society. The concept of human rights aims at protection of rights like right to life, liberty and property. These rights are attributed to human beings irrespective of class, caste, gender, colour and religion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly on December



10th, 1948. The preamble of Indian constitution adequately empowers the central and state government to eliminate human rights violation in the country.

India is a democracy and is a Party to most of the major human rights treaties. These treaties provide the same rights for men and for women. Because India is also a Party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Government has an extra obligation to make sure that women can realise their rights. It is generally accepted in international law that governments have to do more than just pass legislation to protect human rights. The Government of India has an obligation to take all measures, including policy and budgetary measures, to make sure that women can fulfil their rights. It also has an obligation to punish those who engage in caste-based violence and discrimination. The government of India, as a modern country with a growing economy, has the means to fulfil its obligations.

In spite of these international and national declarations and resolutions, human rights are violated in different countries all over the world. In Indian society, due to the social barriers such as castetism, untouchability, patriarchy, disparity, superstition, religious exploitation and class variations, specific groups are becoming weaker and marginalised. These groups are facing the problems of identity crisis, deprivation, discrimination and atrocities.

## CONCLUSION:

The caste system which measures an individual's dignity and worth based on social class is clearly incompatible with human rights. This goes against the article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights wherein all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Since the age old cultural habits have been working against the Indian government's efforts to improve the state of this community, it is vital that a system is in place to end the actual structure of the caste system from within, be it by educating the offending parties or simply by holding the digressers accountable. Lastly, it is quintessential that along with protecting the Civil and Political rights of human beings, equal attention is paid to the Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Economic, Social and Cultural rights not only allow one to demand that the government of the victims be accountable to their obligations to respect protect and fulfill the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings are entitled to but also allow for an improvement of a disfavored group as a whole.

Gender discrimination, suffered by women across caste lines, has its genesis in the caste system. Dalit women suffer most because of their gender, poverty, and caste status. Intense suffering melts into a force to become the basic ingredient for social transformation. Women leadership is therefore critical to transform the caste system. Participation of Dalits and Women is essentially needed in education and politics, so as to assure their equal rights in the society.

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