



Conference Report: Aug. 2006

**REPORT OF THE
STATE-LEVEL DALIT WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
ON
LAND AND POLITICAL POWER
FOR DALIT WOMEN**



Introduction

The Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement is a state level forum for the Dalit women of Tamil Nadu has organized a two day State Level Conference from August 27th to 28, 2006 at Palavoy, Arakkonam. The highlight of this year conference was on the

"Land and Political Rights for Dalit Women". The movement exists to assert the rights of Dalit women at State Level. Every year the movement organizes conference focusing on different themes as per the contextual relevance.

The Dalit Women's Conference provides a space for Dalit women to come

together and to evolve common strategies to promote the rights of Dalit women. It brings in them the unique feeling of solidarity and strength. It draws them out of their own villages and gives an opportunity to address on the stage as a people of importance.

The conference creates wider level awareness among Dalits and other caste people. The Dalit women themselves after each conference have taken up many local issues. All these years the conferences have been found to be effective tool for collective learning, strengthening solidarity among Dalit women and for evolving common and collective strategies. So far the TNDWM has organized seven conferences at different venues of Tamil Nadu. The number of Dalit women participating in the conference increases each year, ranging from three thousand Dalit women in the first conference to five thousand last year.

At the conference we consider the context of the coming local self-governance election and the need for promotion of women's political participation. Besides the conference has focused its attention on the government importance of achieving land rights for Dalit women especially in the context of the present state government's promise of two acres of land for agricultural workers, this year the highlight of the conference was also emphasized the above subject.

Context

The struggle for democratic upsurge overthrew the classical forms of imperialism and colonialism in India. Right to independence and self-determination of people acquired the status of basic human rights. However, real assertion of power has been a mirage and a distant reality for Dalits especially for the Dalit women who are exposed to the multidimensionality of domination and oppression in society. The persisting efforts to defend the structures of domination or to create new forces of subjugation are the recurrent efforts from the bureaucrats and dominant communities. The

most affected in such a situation, are the Dalit women.



More than fifty nine years after the Indian Independence it has dawned on our legislators and political leaders that women should participate in the democratic political process. The report, of the Commission on the status of women in India, highlighted the fact that women are not being represented adequately in the decision making position. Dalit women must enter the echelons of the political field to ensure that their concerns are represented in the political agenda.

Political participation

Dalit women are denied political participation. The denial of political participation includes the denial of right to participate in the electoral process, the denial of exercise of the freedom of franchise and the denial of exercising the offices.

In Tamil Nadu reserved Dalit constituencies like Pappapatti, Keeripatti, Nattarmangalam and Kottakachiyendal have never experienced the process of completion of election for the local self-governance for the mere reason that the other caste people are not ready to accept the Dalit leadership. Justice is denied to Dalits and Dalit women. The brutal murder of elected Dalit panchayat presidents of Melavalavu and Urappakkam are ample evidences of this fact. The attack on Dalit community is an unending menace. The continued oppressions and inability to overcome caste-perpetrated violence are the results of economic dependency of Dalits.

Political consciousness and political awareness is very much lacking among women specifically among the Dalit women. Political parties and other caste people exploit Dalit women to their advantage in spite of their major voting share.

In Tamil Nadu the third local self-governance election is due in the month of October 2006. This is a platform for assertion of grass root democracy especially asserting of Dalits political rights. The struggle for democratic rights and political power has been the priority of Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement.



Land rights

Land is a means for empowerment. Land is wealth and source of livelihood. Assets holdings in rural India have always been concentrated in a few hands. Inequality in the distribution of wealth and specially asserts land holding be get disparities in income generation. Land reforms were considered as a panacea for reducing the inequalities in land holdings.

Land is identified as one of the main causes for atrocities on Dalits in rural India. Possession of land as a permanent asset would provide the much needed social status and economic security to the Dalits. The political **remdana** of the dominant class keeps the land reforms as mirage and a distant dream for the Dalits.

Rural India highly depends on natural resources and land plays a crucial factor in influencing the rural economy.

Since time immemorial the Dalit have direct nexus with land and agriculture. The Dalits of Tamil Nadu were given lands during the British regime, called the Panchami lands or the Depressed Class Land, with the condition that the lands at no cost should be alienated to non-Dalits. Violation of the same will divest the title and dispossess the ownership. In total 72,142.16 hectares of lands were given to the Dalits in Tamil Nadu. Substantial portion of these lands are under the possession of rich non-Dalit landlords. The lands that were exclusively given to the Dalits are taken away from them and the Dalits are left as landless and resource less. These lands need to be tapped and redeemed in the name of the Dalit women.

The present ruling party in Tamil Nadu prior to the election had promised vide the election manifesto 2 acres of land for the landless agricultural workers. The government has already taken initiatives for the allocation of the lands as promised. An effective lobbying is required for achieving lands for Dalit women under this provision. District wise awareness and lobbying are required. The conference is an appropriate intervention for creating awareness among large number of audience.

The preamble to the Indian constitution enshrines that India is a democratic, socialist and secular republic. But even after 59 years of Independence, democracy has not taken strong roots. The 73rd Amendment to the Indian constitution envisages real power to people. Dalit women need to utilize this space for the real empowerment of Dalits. Land and political power are the two tools that will liberate the Dalit women. The eighth conference aims to motivate the Dalit women of Tamil Nadu in these lines.

Objectives:

- ❖ To elucidate the Dalit women on the provisions and procedures of availing lands for Dalit women.
- ❖ To create wider level consciousness among the women and the Dalit

women about the promise of land in the manifesto of the present government.

- ❖ To motivate Dalit women to lobby for achieving the land rights.
- ❖ To enable Dalit women to have knowledge on the local self-governance and thereby to motivate them for identifying appropriate candidate who will take up the cause of Dalit women.
- ❖ To impart knowledge on good governance, democracy and alternate leadership.
- ❖ To facilitate Dalit women to secure political awareness to achieve political power envisaged in the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian constitution.



- ❖ Make Dalits assertive against corruptive electoral process and to enable them to adhere to fair election.
- ❖ To evolve a collective common strategy for achieving land rights for Dalit women.
- ❖ To widen the perspectives of Dalit women leaders on the need of land and political power for the Dalit women.

The process of the conference

Women numbering 1500 from the state of Tamil Nadu participated in the 8th state level conference organized at Palavoy, near Arakkonam in Vellore district, in Tamil Nadu on 27 and 28th August 2006. The conference had the following components:

Press meet,

Symbolic expressions of breaking the barriers,

Keynote addressees – National and International perspectives

Sharing of life experiences by the survivors and Dalit women rights defenders,.

Exhibitions – Vermin compost, Natural pest controllers, Natural seeds

Nutritious food stalls

Short film shows

Dalit Cultural Festival

Press meet

As a curtain raiser a press meet was organized on 26th August at the conference venue in, Palavoy. 15 members from the Tamil Nadu Dalit women's movement interacted with the media and shared the focus and relevance of the conference.

Ms. Burnad Fatima, the Dalit Women Human Rights Defender, explained the Dalit women perspective. The media members were present all along the conference. They had an exclusive interview with the representatives from **the International Movement Against Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)** and with the Regional Director of **Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific (PAN AP)** who shared about the hazards of pesticides and its impact on Dalit women referring to the increasing process of GE technology. The

proceedings or the conference were widely covered by the media.

August 27, 2006 – Day I:

The inauguration of the conference was the highlight of all. The district level leaders marched to the podium lead by the Sakthi cultural team amidst the bang of the 'Parai' (Drums used by Dalits). The leaders were seated on the stage as center stage of attention.

Symbolic expressions of breaking the barriers

The conference kicked off in a symbolic expression of lighting of traditional lamp accompanied by slogans and cultural actions. The Dalit women leader Ms. Jeyarani welcomed the participants and guests.



Dalit women Advocate Ms. Epsibai who presided over the conference gave the presidential address with the question of why the status of Dalit women remains impoverished and static. The speaker addressed that the lands are with the rich landlords, politicians and religious mutts. Neither the land ceiling act nor the land reform schemes and procedures could bring redemption to the Dalit women who are kept as landless agricultural labourers. There is a dependency on the other caste people for the

survival of Dalits. Land should be made the exclusive property of Dalits. Ownership of land would infuse self-confidence to fight against the caste-perpetrated violence. This would gradually encourage their political participation. The Dalit women should have no fear in reclaiming the Panchami lands. Dalit women need to join hands to reclaim the lands and to achieve political power.

Keynote addressees – National and International perspectives

Ms. Burnad Fatima the Dalit Women Human Rights Defender in her keynote address elucidated the purpose of the conference. She has raised questions as such, "why the Dalit women do not have land rights? Why are they unemployed?" and explained that land right brings economic prosperity. If the Dalit women were given land they would be on par with others. The caste dominant community cannot bear such a thought. It was more of an interactive session rather than a designed address. The speaker indicated the importance of land rights, especially the title of the lands in the name of Dalit women, with focus on the context of state government promises on two acres of land for the landless agricultural labourers.

'Land Rights' for Dalit women the key focus of the conference she said, why, because the government has not included the Dalits who are below the poverty line instead has a bogus survey details depriving the Dalit women of their due share, and the government scheme is going to infringe them further. In the name of model villages the tradition of the villages are ruined and the lands are taken away from the people under compulsion. The people are displaced from lands. The speaker indicated the incidents of West Bengal where the TATA Company has taken several thousands of acres of land for car manufacturing factory by displacing agricultural workers. Who are the beneficiaries? How can a Dalit who is unable to buy a kilo of rice per two rupees, afford to buy a car? While talking on their National Employment Assurance Scheme and the contradiction of increasing mechanization the

speaker requested the participants to join hands to challenge the government to assert the rights of Dalit women. Untouchability, a heinous crime perpetrated on Dalits in every sphere of their lives continued to exist even after 60 years of Independence. The practice of 'double tumbler' system that discriminate Dalits still exists in hundreds of villages in Tamil Nadu, untouchability continues to exist in schools and in public places she said. No government comes forward genuinely to abolish these practices. The Dalits are left to fight it out by themselves. The struggle and protest against landlessness should take different forms and intensive methods. Ms. Fatima concluded by insisting that the coming Panchayat election should be utilized as a space to assert the political participation of Dalit women.



Prof. Aranga Malliga in her keynote address started with the quote 'Where ever justice is hidden injustice prevails there'. The speaker cited that land is being linked to men but the truth is that the Dalit women have better nexus and link with the land than any man. Her link starts with the dawn when she starts to sweep the land to sprinkle cow dung. The government is going to give a land to them that are unfertile and unfit for cultivation what will people do with such a land. There are thousands of acres of fertile lands on Kaveri delta that are under the illegal occupation of rich landlords. Other fertile lands in the hands of temple mutts. The landlessness and unemployment drive the Dalit women in search of employment. They are being subjugated to violence. They must rejuvenate and utilize the political platform to voice their concern to get the government promised lands for them. The speaker

concluded by requesting the audience to join hands in the struggle to realize land and political rights for Dalit women.

Mr. Viduthalai Rajendran popular leader in the Tamil Nadu political circle and serving office bearer of the Periyar Diravida Kazhagam has highlighted that the organizing conference of this nature itself is public's achievement. The various laws have not brought any change in the status of land distribution. Irrespective of the existence of the land ceiling act thousands of acres of lands are still in the name of trust and the landlessness and land-based slavery continue to exist. Land right is important to fight against untouchability, casteism, globalization and Brahmanism. The speaker shared about the evolution of Panchami land and its present status. In spite of the verdicts from the appellate courts and G.O's from the government the possession of the Panchami lands have remained with the non Dalits, the unlawful holders and encroachers. So the people should come forward to challenge the various perpetrators of Dalit human rights. He recommended for inter caste marriage and asked the youth to stay away from the religious influence and superstitions.

Ms. Sarojeni Rengam from PAN AP, Malaysia shared her the solidarity with Dalit women. The speaker expressed that she was able to internalize the challenges and sufferings undergone by Dalit women. Land is the life; it has deeper meaning than mere money. There is no life without land. The women all over the world are deprived of land rights. The globalization process is a new colonization by the multi national companies. They have ruined the countries like Brazil and are now in India. The Dalit women need to fight against the multinationals. Deprivation of land leads to poverty, starvation and migration. The companies TATA and Pepsi have taken away thousands of acres of lands for their commercial ventures in West Bengal and in Punjab. Through attractive schemes they are able to convince the landowners and the governments. The speaker also expressed her concern over poisoning of agriculture, food, land, water and environment. The Dalit women that are

exposed to pesticides are the direct victims of pesticide poisoning. The seeds are being patented and are no more with the people. The giant companies like Monsanto, Kargil and Dupont have taken control over the basic of food production. The seeds technology and the pesticides are in their hands. Now, they have patented the GMO technology and are selling them. The GE modified BT cotton was proved to be hazardous by the peasant of Andhra Pradesh who suffered fatal death. The speaker also indicated that how women are deprived of land rights at the instances of patriarchal values of the society. The speaker shared about the corporate farming in Malaysia and its related hazardous on the environment and in the lives of the farmers. She also shared about the aqua culture industries in Thailand and indicated that corporate farming and land alienation are the common concerns in the Asian countries. Hence, every one should join hands against the globalization and casteism.

Mr. Naina Masilamani representing the SC/ ST federation stated that women are the key factors for the National prosperity. He has expressed that the government schemes are not conducive to the Dalit women. The Dalit women are toilers of land who shed their perspiration for the progress of the family at the cost of their aspiration. Women are the reconcilable force in the deciding electoral powers. He advised the women to contest in the Panchayat elections irrespective of the results.

Prof. Saraswathy, indicated that a family can have a decent living with one acre of fertile and prosperous land. But the landowners amaze thousands of acres. Where does the profit go? What are the governments doing? The entire Kaveri delta lands are in the hands of five landowners. There is no meaning for the demand that the land belongs to the tillers. This is the right time to place this demand before the concerned authorities. Making use of this opportunity of the conference the Dalit women should come forward to demand land rights for Dalit women.

The Director of IWID, Ms. Neelavalli, shared the historical position of the lands belonging to the tiller of soil. The change regarding land transfer and title over the land was very recent one. The land belongs to the people. During the Monarchal period the people were paying tax to the king those who failed to pay had to surrender their lands as a mark of fine. The Minister and others confiscated the land. It was the government that took away the land from the people. The speaker requested the Dalit women to get hold of the land and to demand the government for the title in the name of the Dalit women.

Sharing of life experiences by the survivors and Dalit women rights defenders



The next session was presided over by **Ms. Magimai, coordinator, Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement**. She has expressed her concern over the continued increase of land alienation, unemployment, forceful migration, sexual harassment and atrocities on Dalit women due to their economic dependency on others. The subjugation makes them to be submissive to the landowners. It is the duty of the Dalit women to strengthen the force to demand land rights for the Dalit women.

Ms. Logeswari from Human Right Forum, shared about the plight of the women in the plantation work. They are enslaved in the plantation; any protest will brand them as revolutionist and even terrorist. She indicated the continued state of perpetuated violence on the Tamil women in Srilanka and shared that the women are

suffers everywhere. Their works are not recognized instead are being treated as ignoble. They need to overcome this situation by joining hands in the struggles of women to assert their rights.

Ms. Chandrika, from PAN AP pointed out the health hazards caused by the pesticides used in agriculture. The Dalit women are directly exposed to the pesticides that could cause cancer, abnormality and other chronic diseases. She asked the Dalit women to be very cautious about the pesticide usage.

Mr. John Jeyagaran, extended his support and solidarity to the Dalit women's movement and said Dalits were land owners of the past. The evidences show that they have been holders of land for many years. Because of their ignorance and dominance of other caste people that the Dalit have become landless. The Dalit movements should look into the root of the landlessness of the Dalit women and redeem the land.

Ms. Emeli from Phillipines representing the Gabriella Movement expressed that the struggle of Dalit women are similar to that of the women of our country. Gabriella is a movement comprised of women, peasants, workers and students. She was very happy to learn the joint protest against globalization since it is the major issue in Phillipines. Land alienation and migration are major challenges in our country, she said. Two million people are displaced in Phillipines because of globalization. The people are fighting against globalization since 2001, 720 people were killed by the government for their protest against globalization. This year alone, 80 women were killed. In spite of that the women continue to protest the government and multi national companies. She extended her solidarity to join the struggle of Dalit women in fighting out caste, untouchability, Brahmanism and globalization.

Ms. Michalle from Malaysia expressed her solidarity to the conference and highlighted that every women has role to play in fighting against the discrimination.

Ms. Kalaimagal from Pudukottai pointed out that the Dalit women are being denied of their rightful place in political area and their right over lands. Dalit women continued to remain as poor, oppressed, discriminated and weak in spite of their hard work. Only the land could bring prosperity and confidence to her. She asked the participant to join hands to claim the promised two acres of lands for the Dalit women.

Ms. Vijaya, Dalit Land right federation shared about the difficulties she faced in redeeming the Panchami lands in Thirukovilur area. Though it was a success story the challenge faced by them was immense. This is in spite of the legal rights enshrined in the government orders regarding the redemption of Panchami land.

Ms. Ursula from Karur shared that land is the source of livelihood of the Dalit women. It is a symbol of their governance and power. She shared about the struggle they had in getting land for the women. They succeeded in getting land from the government for women. The women are collectively cultivating that land by using natural manure and without pesticide usage. She asked the people to demand the government to ensure land in the name of Dalit women.

Ms. Beulah, from IWID shared that Dalit women are ignorant of their the political rights. They do not think that they have the power in deciding who should be the rulers. She asked the people to vote for the Dalit candidates. If we do not educate the people on political participation the Dalits are not going to be part of the political emancipation process. Hence, Panchayat elections may be aptly utilized to show the world that Dalits are able administrators and a greater force.

The cultural actions and liberation songs accompanied the address. The cultural actions brought out the challenges faced by Dalit women in their daily life and also suggested the legal remedies that can elevate their status by the cultural troupe of Sakthi

and Viduthalai Cultural team. Dalit liberation songs have decorated the program by the renowned Dalit Artists Dalit Subbaiya.



Exhibitions

In order to encourage the Dalit women farmers to revamp the practice of the organic farming, exhibition was organized on vermin compost and natural pest controllers as an alternate for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This also aimed to revive the traditional farming practices. Naturally preserved seeds were exhibited as an alternate for Hybrid and GE seeds. It was shown that women are the preservers of seeds and they need to revive the practice as a symbol of promoting food security in their own villages.

The participants showed interest by visiting the pits and were interacting with the persons in charge of the exhibition stalls.

Nutritious food stalls

Food stalls were installed as a symbolic expression to motivate the Dalit women to choose their food selection and not to fall prey to the increasing dominance of MNCs and their new consumerism. Sprouts, cereals and naturally processed food were exhibited. The participants were encouraged and motivated to consume such foods, which once was their own. The hybrid technology, green revolution and now the GE technology have taken away the safe and traditional food habits and in turn have left people with food with poison.

Short film shows

In the afternoon short films were exhibited on Globalization and its impact on women, Imperialistic war, Tsunami Disasters, Violence against women and the rights of Dalits were screened. This was a relaxing as well as an exercise of self realization since the short films were crisp and informative, and enabled the audience to reflect on the information.

Dalit Cultural Festival

The night of the first day was better remembered as a Dalit cultural festival night. The cultural festival was inaugurated by **the Dalit leader Prof. Periyar Dasan from Chennai**. In his inaugural address has called for the revival of Dalit arts and culture. The Dalit women are being subjugated to violence. The modern society still tolerates the uninterested Brahminical culture that only the Brahmin can take credit. Where as the popular Dalit art that has been soul and heart of the Dalit are now declining. The powerful Dalit art is inborn in every Dalit and it is a powerful means to express the identity of Dalits. It is heartening to witness a Dalit cultural festival being organized at State level. The speaker wished the group's success and encouraged them to continue their effort. The conference has been a platform for the Dalit artist to come together and to express their talents.



Different cultural groups from all over Tamil Nadu performed cultural actions bringing to lime light, their hidden talents and Dalit art. It was an occasion for the revival of Dalit culture and Dalit artists. The Dalit artists were duly respected and recognized. The

people had an opportunity to recollect that the Dalits are enriched with such talents and the Dalits have very rich cultural tradition.

The cultural night started around 8.00 p.m. and continued till the dawn of the next day.

Day II - August 28, 2006

The second day's highlight was the keynote address delivered by **Ms. Nimalka Fernando from Sri Lanka**. She has pointed out the challenges at the International level with special reference to the cold war in Srilanka, the struggle of Dalit women in India and the Lebanon issue. The speaker requested the participants to join hands against the caste and racial discrimination and expressed that the liberation songs by the cultural team brought out the inner sufferings of Dalits. The status of women all over the world remains the same irrespective of their numerical strength. In Srilanka, the women constitute 55 percent however they are economically poor and do not have the self-respect. In every country the women are the voting population but they do not use this weapon to challenge men who capture the political power. They are excluded from the decision making process. Declining food security and women without decision making power are the present Scenario. It is the World bank and the G8 countries that determine what we must produce and eat. Our governments stand alley to them. They do not know about hunger. But we know what is poverty and hunger. So the change must start from home. She indicated the in equal representation of women in political sphere. In Sri Lanka there are 235 MLAs among whom only 13 are women. This is inadequate. There need to be equal representation. The Dalit women leaders elected to Panchayat were attacked and killed why? It is important for Dalit women to participate in the political spaces it provides them confidence and the power to challenge the existing paradigms. The wars displace women. The war in Sri Lanka displaced 80,000 people among whom nearly 10,000 people have migrated to India and took asylum in the refugee camps. Each day more

than 20 people are being killed. Why this situation? The women are the most sufferers. The government should take the initiative to bring peace and harmony. It is the political power that determines and the Dalit women should come forward to make use of the space in the political participation.

This was followed by a thought-provoking question from **the Dalit women activists Ms. Jeyarani**. She indicated that struggling for peace is a big challenge. The Dalit women have been struggling for a peaceful life against the challenges from the dominance caste in the name of caste riots and untouchability practices. Every Dalit women activist faces a challenge from the rulers and caste fanatics.



The Dalit women activist as well as a survivor of caste atrocity Ms. Sangili priya shared her experience with a liberation song. She shared the atrocity by the other caste people on the Dalits of her village. The other caste people used the Dalit area as toilets and to throw the human excreta and debris. Repeated requests and petitions to the concerned authorities did not yield results and remedy to the Dalits. The Dalit women joined together and protested against these practices. They met the district collector and pleaded him to have a look at the spot. It was informed to him that a failure would force the Dalit women to approach the court against the authorities. The collector intervened to the advantage of the Dalit people

Dalit women survivor Ms.Seethalakshmi from Trichy shared that

she was participating in the conference for the first time and she was overwhelmed by the events and programs of the conference. She shared about the previous day's learning and expressed that she was able to relate the sufferings of the Dalits to the root cause of varnashiam.

The Dalit women activists
Shantha expressed that land is the basis of the livelihood of the Dalit women. The laws are ineffective when it comes to the Dalit women. They are unprotected and are subjugated to sexual violence and caste atrocities. Political participation will emancipate them from the existing struggles. The role of Dalit women in the coming Panchayat election is very important. The earlier reserved constituencies of Pappapatti, Kirepatti, Kottaokochiyenthal and Nattarmangalam are again reserved for Dalits. The dalit women should join hands to promote political participation and to achieve land rights for Dalits.

Dalit women Human rights defender as well as a victim of violation
Ms, Indrani shared her experience of being attacked by the Dalit men and the other caste men for supporting a Dalit women candidate who contested in a general constituency against a dominant caste candidate. She also shared about the continued attack on the Dalit women in the District of Thiruvannamalai. She concluded by expressing that the Dalit women should not deter away from the challenges instead should shed their perspiration till they achieve land and political rights.

Dalit women survivor Ms. Devi Kamatchi from Kutherampakkam narrated her experience about the attack on the Dalit women by the other caste people of the village. The Dalits of the villages are not allowed to make use of the drinking water from the village public pond, not allowed to make use of the common property resources and denied the right of worship in spite of the Dalit being forced to pay the subscription for the temple festival. The Dalit people's assertion resulted in the brutal attack on the Dalits and when the Dalits approached the

police their plea was turned down and after a sustained protest they succeeded in getting the complaint registered. However the police also filed case against innocent Dalits. The order of Criminal Procedure Code 144 was enforced in the village infringing the freedom of Dalits. It was more protection for the other caste than for the Dalits. The villagers continue to live under such situation for the past 28 years.

Ms. Devi from Veerapandipattinam, shared that she got acquainted with the Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement since tsunami. It was the TNDWM that responded to the cry of the Dalit women suffered in the tsunami. She shared how the Dalit women were depended on the sea and the backwater for collection of oysters and prawns. The sea is considered as the property of the fisher folk. The tsunami took away their livelihood resource, a factor not accepted by the government and hence the Dalit women did not receive any relief and rehabilitation. The women group own fifteen fiber boats and the same are being used by men. Where as the loan credit Rs.50,000 remains in the name of women. Though they are boat owners they earn their living by collecting oysters and prawns. After tsunami these have become rare species. She expressed the untouchability practices and the violence against Dalit women referring them to the non responsive law enforcing agencies.

Dalit women leader Ms. Sowriammal from Vellore district indicated the hazards of pesticide in agriculture with reference to the various diseases suffered by the agricultural Dalit women workers. Why this situation? It is because of the landlessness, and lack of political power. She indicated that the Panchami lands are in the hands of the non Dalits making the Dalits more and more poor and insisted that the Dalit should join hands to get lands for Dalit women and for achieving political participation.

The Dalit leader Mr. Sakthidasan from Chennai raised the question; Who are the landless agricultural workers? The ultimate reply was that the Dalit are the

landless agricultural coolies. In 1891 an Act was passed in the London Parliament to vest the Dalits with the Panchami lands and the same was passed through a legislation in Tamil Nadu in 1892, by which the landless Dalits were provided lands with the stipulation that the lands should not be alienated to non Dalits. In spite of this strict provision 1.25 million acres of Panchami lands are in the hands of non Dalits. The government has passed orders to reclaim the lands and to divest them to Dalits. However any initiative to retrieve the land from the hands of non Dalits will end up in the violence against Dalits. This was evidence with the incident of 1994, in Chengalpattu when two Dalits were brutally shot to death by the police for protesting to claim the identified Panchami land. The speaker indicated the government's scheme of two acres of land for landless agricultural workers and insisted that the Dalit women should join hands to demand the government to give the two acres of land in the name of Dalit women.



The Dalit activist Ms. Bhagiyam from Karur shared the increasing sexual atrocities on Dalit women in Karur district. She narrated the sexual violence meted out to a Dalit girl and the struggle undertaken by the Dalit women group in her area to seek justice for the victimized girl. After much protest and perseverance the Dalit group succeeded in registering a case against the perpetrators.

Ms. Rani from Muttukadu shared her agony and ill-treatment by the government authorities for representing the cause of Dalits that suffered loss of livelihood sources and property in the tsunami waves.

She was refused passport for being a poor Dalit woman even though she produced the documents to prove that her trip was sponsored by external supporters. She referred her plight for being a Dalit woman.

The Dalit activist Ms. Kamalavalli from Pernampet indicated the upcoming challenges in the lives of the Dalit women. This is in addition to the manifold discrimination they are facing encountering now. On the one hand the government is promising two acres of lands for Dalit women and on the other side it is not taking any initiative to reclaim the panchami lands from the illegal possessors. The government promises the lands for the people below poverty line. It is a big question how far fair and reasonable is the BPL list. She insisted that Dalit women should participate in the political spaces. They must defeat the people who challenge the Dalit women that the women are not capable of asserting political participation. The proper candidate need to be identified and supported through out her tenure.

The Dalit activist Mr. Murthy indicated the atrocities on the Dalits referring them to the root cause of Brahmanism and the caste dominant society. The Dalit women have no space in the decision making and they are being subjugated to violence by Dalit men also. The Dalit women blindly follow the superstitious practices in the name of religion that Brahmin women do not follow. But they ensure that the Dalit women are kept in darkness and do not internalize their status. The conference is a space for the Dalit women to enlarge their perspectives, to gain knowledge and to assert their rights.

Ms. Valligopal a women activist shared that it is a rare occasion for her to participate in the conference. Land is very important in the life of Dalit women. The title of the land should be in name of Dalit women. Several Dalit women lost their belongings and livelihood resource in tsunami. But they were not compensated by the government it is violence against Dalit women. The Dalit women are treated as ignoble and any Dalit women that manages to get elected in the

Panchayat space is being harassed and deposed under false allegation. The women should challenge and assert their right to 50% of reservation and not mere 33%. It is the right of women to participate in the political spaces. The Dalit women should come forward to challenge the existing paradigms and take over the power in their hands. Land and political power are the two weapons that can emancipate the Dalit women from the ruin.

The district level Dalit women leaders came forward to the podium and raised slogans asserting the rights of Dalit women and extending their solidarity support to each other. This was followed by the passing of resolutions. Ms. Burnad Fatima read out the resolutions and the same was consented by the participants by applauding each resolution.

The conference came to a solemn end with the vote of thanks by **the Dalit women activist Ms. Valliammal**. She expressed her heart felt thanks and appreciation for each every one that took the pain to organize the conference and spend their time by way of participation and resource as a mark of solidarity for the Dalit women.

Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement has been surviving as a platform for the Dalit women to assert their right and to challenge the atrocities and multiple discrimination against Dalit women. The movement make use the conference as an opportunity to mobilize larger number of Dalit women of Tamil Nadu. It provided a platform for evolving collective strategies to counter the challenges faced by Dalits under different pretext. Since its inception the Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement has organized seven annual state level conferences with focus on seven themes that have been key factors in the lives of Dalit women. The conference have been found to be useful to buildup grass root leadership and for the Dalit women victims to ventilate their moments of agony. The conferences are presided by the district level Dalit women leaders.

In the context of coming 3rd Panchayat Raj election in October 2006 and the relevance of land for Dalit women the

conference for this year was held on the theme '**Land and political power**'.

Resolutions

To the government of Tamil Nadu

1. The conference insists the State government to continue with the existing reserved constituencies for women and not to reschedule them in the context of the coming Panchayats elections.
2. The conference demands the government to provide necessary protection for the elected Dalit women and to ensure the atmosphere to exercise their office without the interference of the district collector and the other officials.



3. While welcoming and appreciating the land allocation scheme of the state government, the conference urges the government to allocate the land in the name of the landless agricultural Dalit women and to provide them with the required instruments, seeds and manure to make the land more productive.
4. The conference urges the government to take wartime measures to redeem

- the Panchami lands from the encroachment and to vest those retrieved lands to Dalit women.
5. The process of mechanization displace the agricultural workers and intensifies the unemployment, the conference demands the government to prevent mechanization in agriculture through legislative provisions.
 6. The increasing cash crops intensify the food insecurity and increase the dependency, and hence the government should take adequate measures to encourage the farmers for promoting food crops.
 7. The continuing untouchability and caste discrimination are heinous crimes against humanity. The conference indicates that it is the bounden duty of the governments to ensure equal status and as an initial step the government should construct houses in the name of Dalit women amidst the main villages.
 8. The conference condemns the continued deprivation of Dalits' share in the common property resources and demands the government to ensure the Dalit women's decision with regard to the final decision of the allocation of common property resources.
 9. The conference urges the government to provide adequate shelter and protection to the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka and to ensure them self respect and dignity. The government should assure sufficient food and financial resource for their dignified life.

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

1. The innocent common women and children are the victims of the wars and the government perpetrated

terrorisms. The conference declares that the war is inhuman and insists that the world community and the UNO should initiate actions to promote peace and transquility.

2. The conference vehemently condemns the brutality of the Singhalese bombing on the innocent school children and killing 55 girls and wounding 195 children. The conference urges the Indian government to initiate steps to stop the war in Sri Lanka.



3. The conference condemns the political parties that oppose the women's reservation bill and declares that the Dalit women will reject these political parties in the coming elections, and urges the government to pass the bill that ensures 33 percentage women's representation in the Parliament and in the state assembly, without further delay.
4. While appreciating the 'National employment Assurance Scheme' the conference insists the government to increase the number of workdays into two hundred and while calculating a member per house the total number of persons be taken into account and the consideration be paid in cash instead of kind.
5. The conference vehemently opposes the MNC policies of the government and demands that the nations majority citizen's benefits be prioritized instead of being slave to

the neo-colonization. The conference urges the government to withdraw immediately the New economic

policies that infringes the rights of every Indian particularly the more than 17 corer Dalit population.



For Further Information, please contact to the Secretariat of Tamil Nadu Women's Forum.

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Join Hands With Us To Achieve Gender Justice!
பாலியல் வேறுபாடற்ற சமூக நீதியை அடைய ஏம்மோடு இணைந்து செயல்பட வாரீர்!