



Tamil Nadu Women's Forum Fact Sheet No.1

Dalit Women's Issues

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- The caste system, an age old cruel form of discrimination continues to discriminate 160 million Dalits of India of whom 49.96% are Dalit women.
 - Dalit women are discriminated, treated untouchables and as outcaste for being Dalits. **The Hindu hierarchical caste system which preaches the concept of purity and impurity considers Dalit women as 'impure'**. The rituals and the Brahminical values maintain the caste system where Dalit women face multiple discrimination, as a Dalit, as women, and as a worker.
 - **The basic amenities such as roads, potable water, streetlights, drainage, and other basic amenities are refused to Dalit women.** Dalits have no proper housing. They have no (pattas) ownership right to the land on which they have constructed huts. Dalit women and girls have to walk longer distances to fetch water and have to spend more time in search of it, often they are denied due to untouchability.
 - 78% of Dalit households have no electricity 90% have no sanitation facilities.
 - **Dalit women are bonded, they are abused, sexually exploited by other castes, humiliated and are easy targets of insults.** While comparing with other women, Dalit women suffer with the discrimination due to class, patriarchy, caste and sexual exploitation.
 - **The initiation of globalization process** has almost driven these multiply discriminated women into a state of abject poverty, exploitation and starvation deaths.

- As per the census of India 1991, more than 190 million workers out of the total 314 million workers were engaged in agriculture related works and among them, Seventy five percentages (75%) were Dalit women. **Mechanization in agriculture has displaced millions of Dalit women agricultural labourers from their means of livelihood.** It is estimated that a single harvesting machine displaces as many as 2000 workers from work.
- After the introduction of the globalisation process there is **a sharp rise in prices, decrease in job opportunities, and a dramatic decline in income opportunities**, which has hit rural Dalit women severely. As the government has considerably cut down the Public Distribution System, the Dalit women are forced to survive with poverty and starvation. This increase in price has also reduced nutritional levels and chronic hunger became rampant among the landless, rural poor, especially Dalit women. Tight family budgets cut down the expenditures on health and education, so the Dalit girls are often forced to dropout from schools.
- Rural Dalit women are the least competitive in the existing labour market, primarily due to multiple discriminations against them based on gender, caste, class and other biases. Accordingly, they accept the most marginal work, notably as daily wage labourers in the agricultural sector in rural areas. This results in **a feminized agricultural sector**. This trend is further intensifying under the macro-economic policy changes. In 1997-98, Dalit women received an average of Rs.23 compared to Rs.50 for male labourers - about 46 percent of men's wages. Wage gaps sharply widened in 2002. In the same villages, women received an average of Rs.30 and men Rs.80 - only 37.5 percent of men's wages.

For further inquiry, please contact to the secretariat of Tamil Nadu Women's Forum

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