

Discrimination Faced by Dalit Women in India

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Abstract : Dalit women make up a significant portion of the Indian population. However, they are victims of age old discrimination. This paper presents a brief background of the Indian caste system which is a hierarchical division placing Dalits at the lowest rank. Dalits are forced to perform menial and harsh tasks. They often face social ostracism. The situation of Dalit women is of unique significance as they face triple discrimination due to their caste, gender, and class. Dalit women are strictly withheld by the rigid boundaries of the caste system. They are discriminated at every stage of their life and are denied access to public places, education and healthcare facilities among others. They face the worst forms of sexual violence. In spite of legislations and international conventions in place, their plight is not adequately addressed. This paper discusses, in brief, the legal mechanism in place to prohibit untouchability. Furthermore, this paper details on the specific human rights violations faced by Dalit women in the social, economic and political spheres. The violations range from discrimination in public places, denial of education and health services, sexual exploitation and barriers to political representation. Finally, this paper identifies certain lacunae in the existing Indian statutes and broadens on the measures to be taken to improve the situation of Dalit women. This paper offers some recommendations to address the plight of Dalit women such as amendments to the existing statutes, effective implementation of legal mechanisms and a more meaningful interpretation of the international conventions.

Keywords : Dalit, caste, class, discrimination, equality

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