

# **Issues and Challenges in Dalit Women's Political Empowerment**

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## **Abstract**

*Dalits are the socially, economically, culturally, and politically marginalised groups in India. They also face a lot of discrimination. They aren't given the opportunity to live among humans. Because they are regarded as being at the bottom of society, they are forced to live miserable lives. They make up the fifth category known as Panchamas and are exempt from the caste system. They have become an unhealthy and despised part of society and are socially isolated. The high caste folks constantly took advantage of them. They were the targets of untouchability and other forms of prejudice. They weren't accorded the same standing as other caste groups. Due to their illiteracy, ignorance, and backwardness, they were unable to fight against exploitation and improve their situation.*

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## **I. Introduction**

The status of Dalit women was high in Dravidian society. The love poems of the ancient Tamil Sangam literature demonstrate that women had some degree of freedom, including the ability to pick their husbands, collaborate with their male relatives, and travel at will (Subrahmanian, 1966). Since child marriage, forced widowhood, and the Sati system were traditionally encouraged in Hinduism, it was more difficult for these women to achieve a high social standing when compared to women generally. But a Dalit woman who, happily, had eluded Hinduism's ingenious trap was more independent and free. They did not engage in any anti-women behaviour in their social interactions. They were ignorant of things like child marriage, rigid monogamy, widowhood, dowry customs, and Sati customs. But Hinduism slowly undermined the status of Dalit women. The Dalit were forced into widowhood as a result of trying to adopt the practises of the caste Hindus in a futile effort to gain their approval and identification.

Their second marriage was outlawed. Women from Dalits were cruelly deprived of their freedom (Sivaprakasam M.N, 2002). Dalit women gradually started to be seen as inferior to their husbands. They are forced to work in the unhealthiest, degrading, and exploitative environments. They are forced to work hard labour for unfair rates, and the wealthy landlords from upper castes also abuse them sexually. They are compelled to rely on this source of income. Due to their illiteracy, ignorance, and poor socioeconomic status, they did not have complete freedom in the political sphere, but they showed a considerable amount of interest in it. As a result, Dalit women in India are in the worst position possible, despite the fact that the rigour of untouchability has been greatly loosened. Due to their illiteracy, ignorance, and general backwardness, they were unable to better their situation or fight against exploitation.

## **Women's Movement and Dalit Movement**

In India, the Dalit movement was founded to advance the status of Dalits. Although this movement began to express their identity, Dalit women were unable to create their own identity from it. Particular issues were also ignored, and the formation of their leadership was not supported. Their issue is that "despite being a part of the larger Dalit movement, they have not been given a space" (Ranjith Biswas, 2007). Their issues are caused by Dalit identity politics, which forcefully express caste identity while opposing the gender aspects of caste itself.

It fully silences Dalit men's patriarchal behaviour against their wives. 2001's Thorat Vimal The women's movement placed a lot of emphasis on women's rights in the first phase, but in the second phase, it placed more of an emphasis on women's liberty and autonomy. However, female activists never made an effort to include Dalit women in their campaign. They support women generally in their constitutions and manifestos. The difficulties facing women in general have been taken up by women activists in this movement, but no issues pertaining to Dalit women have been raised.

Thus, silent Dalit women were denied their proper role in the governing process because Dalit activists raised Dalit women's issues while mostly ignoring Dalitwomen's cases. On the other hand, women activists focus on issues affecting all women while ignoring those affecting Dalit women.

### **State and Dalit Women**

The State was crucial in addressing the issue of Dalit women. The state has put into effect a number of constitutional provisions to better their socioeconomic and political situation. Dalit women were able to enter politics thanks to the reservation legislation. They become electors, voters, and candidates, yet research shows that they do not benefit significantly from the political system. Gains provided to them are unplanned and incidental. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that Dalit women have political equality under the Constitution, as well as to follow the process of empowerment by first realising the predicament in which they find themselves, as well as to encourage them to move toward self-assertion, self-decision making, and effective participation.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment is the best provision the Indian Constitution has introduced for the benefit of Dalit women. The fundamental goal of this reserve is to enable the downtrodden to send delegates who will then serve as their spokespeople in various organisations. The Indian government approved a number of constitutional amendments in 1993 with the goal of strengthening and democratising the Panchayats, the country's rural legislative bodies. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which was introduced in April 1993, created the Panchayat Raj Act. The Panchayati Raj system has become a strong institutional structure and efficient conduit for participatory development as a result of the Constitutional Amendment. The PRI is a democratic system of local self-government that promotes independence and involves the populace in decision-making, with a focus on Dalit women. It has made special allowances. A significant number of Dalit women entered the political field with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment; 1/3 of the seats are designated for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe.

### **II. Objectives**

1. Finding out the socioeconomic status of the elected Dalit women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions is one of the study's primary goals.
2. To comprehend the challenges Dalit women confront in carrying out their responsibilities.
3. To determine whether women's reservations in Panchayati Raj institutions have given these Dalit women more influence.

Data from both primary and secondary sources were used to compile the study. With the aid of an interview schedule, personal interviews, and the observational approach, primary data have been gathered. The secondary data was gathered from government documents such as census reports, yearly reports, books, journals, published articles, periodicals, and official records of the Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat, and Zilla Panchayat.

### **The Dalit women's community's socioeconomic background**

Education, occupation, family occupation, and income are all taken into consideration when examining the interviewees' socioeconomic backgrounds. As a result, it is crucial to examine the socioeconomic profile of Dalit women representatives in order to understand how their participation in Panchayati raj affects both their performance in their roles and the issue of role conflict.

The majority of Dalit women elected as legislators have completed their primary schooling. According to the data, 22.54 percent of them are illiterate, 53.94 percent of them have a high school diploma or less, and not a single representative has a post-graduate degree. Adi Dravida (29.82%) and Mogera Castes (25.82%) make up the majority of them. According to the survey, their primary line of work is beedi rolling (49.30%). The heads of the Respondents' families make up the majority of coolie employees (76.06%). 86.38% of respondents had an annual income of less than Rs. 10,000, while only a small percentage (2.82%) have an income between Rs. 15,001 and 20,000. This demonstrates the extremely precarious economic situation of the Dalit women legislators.

### **The Dalit women confront the following challenges**

Participation in politics is the exercise of political power. Reservation has allowed women to participate in politics. However, it gets harder for them to participate in Panchayati Raj Institutions and represent themselves politically. Because they must deal with simultaneous oppression from two directions, their condition in Panchayati Raj Institutions is more fragile and worse. First, from the male members of their family and the upper caste, and second, because of their inferior standing within the caste system. While performing their jobs, they must deal with various challenges and issues.

The most significant impediment to Dalit women's actual political empowerment through Panchayati Raj occurs during the nomination process for candidates. Most women don't run for office in PRI elections of their own free will, but rather under duress from their husbands, other male family members, or political parties. The goal of the current study is to comprehend that the political parties, which account for 31.92% of

respondents, and families, which account for 17.13% of respondents, are what most of them are driven by. The majority of Dalit women representatives are nominating themselves in order to meet the reserved quota.

According to the survey, they participate satisfactorily in Panchayati Raj Institution activities in terms of attendance. The vast majority of them (99.6%) frequently attended Panchayat meetings. However, the majority of them attend meetings as silent observers because they lack the necessary qualifications and knowledge of panchayat activities. 89.67% of respondents claim that they have not made any independent decisions; instead, they have mostly conferred with coworkers and, to a lesser extent, with family members (8.92%).

The majority of people claim that working for the Panchayat is not tough for them, while 34% believe that taking care of the family and household chores is the largest challenge. As a housewife, mother, and wife, they are responsible for a variety of home duties. They also have the extra responsibility of panchayathi raj. Nevertheless, despite all of these challenges, some of them are doing their best to adapt to the current circumstances and attempt to effectively carry out their representational duties.

### **III. Conclusion**

In order to promote Dalit women's participation in decision-making at the local level, the government has reintroduced the Panchayat Institution through a specific constitutional package, which it did by introducing the 73rd constitutional amendment. Since they endure incredible caste- and gender-based persecution, The Indian constitution has been amended to bring about reforms, but the social structure of India has not changed because Dalit women continue to face tremendous oppression and exploitation. Therefore, it is necessary to shift people's attitudes toward patriarchal norms and untouchability. Reservation services are insufficient since they only partially and for a small number of people open doors. They must have a variety of resources, including as education, training programmes, increased legal rights, etc., in addition to reservations.

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