



“We, the Citizens of India ...”

Fact Sheet on Dalit Women faced discrimination during Covid-19

Brief introduction to the theme:

The year 2020 may have breezed past amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, but it did not really manage to ruin all of India's festivities. It has been more than 73 years since we are free from the clutches of British. Today even after 73 years, our women are not able to or allowed to feel the freedom; rape, molestation, sexual harassment, cases of gender based violence occur on a daily basis against them and it is increasing in the period of lockdown at an alarming rate. Our society is neither free from caste-based discrimination and the Brahmanical structure of society, nor we have succeeded to resolve the communal conflicts. We have corrupt systems, criminal politicians ruling over us. India is lagging way behind even in solving the basic issues like poverty and unemployment. Considering these persisting issues from the past 73 years, we as a society definitely need to revisit our belief on being free and independent.

As per census 2011, Dalit women constitute 8% of total India's population who are victimized by the Caste, Class and Brahmanical Patriarchy; at this juncture the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak created another layer of hardship for them. In India, Dalit women's gender compounded with their caste makes them the lowest of the low and they take place at the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy and they face systemic and structural discrimination as Dalits, as poor, and as women.

Dalit women have proved to be especially vulnerable to this Pandemic for a range of social-political-economic reasons, poverty tops the list. The vast majority of Dalit women are poor despite a vast affirmative action program that India put in place shortly after independence. The unplanned lockdown forced migrant Dalit women to go back to their home towns and villages where they were clueless about how they will run their household. Apart from that, Dalit women who earn their livelihood doing menial works, such as Manual Scavenging, Safai Karamcharis, Sweeper, ASHA worker faced immense discrimination on the basis of maintaining the “Social distancing”, as in India, it is not at all a new concept. Based on the religious scriptures of Hinduism, ‘otherness’, which is considered as a preventive measure of COVID-19, has always been a measure to discriminate lower caste and Dalits in India.

Consequently even in the best of circumstances they are entitled to limited access to health care, education system, any other form of social protection, services & facilities and during the pandemic the plight of these people has only worsened.

1. Kumar, A. 2020. The Wire. *The Pandemic is changing the face of labour*. Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/economy/covid-19-pandemic-indian-labour>
2. Ekta, A. 2020. NEWSclick. *Covid-19: Dalit Women says She was Beaten up, Denied Rations in Saharanpur*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsclick.in/COVID-19-Dalit-Woman-Beaten-Denied-Rations-Saharanpur>

Facts and figures:

- According to the data collected by AIDMAM-NCDHR through various media sources and individual interventions, 44 cases majorly from 4 states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa) of atrocities of different kinds have been reported in different parts of India during the lockdown period. This includes, rape, gang rape, and murder, sexual abuse of women & minors, physical assaults, destruction of property, land encroachment, domestic violence & denial of access to entitlements. Out of these, the team has intervened into 44 cases directly by doing continuous follow up and providing support to take legal actions.
- Among these 44 cases of atrocities intervened in, in 37 cases the FIR has been registered and 32 cases are registered under SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) Act, 1980.
- The population of Dalit women in India as per the 2011, National Census is 9.79 crore which is 48.59% of the total Dalit population in India. As per the 2011 national Census, the total female population in India is 58.7 crore of which 16.68% is Dalit woman's population (NACDAOR, n.d.). A large majority of the illiterate population comprise of Dalit women with 76.24% of Dalit women being illiterate (Unheard Voices- Dalit Women, 2007). Due to high levels of illiteracy prevailing among Dalit women, when it comes to Dalit women labour, in rural areas they are mostly involved in the agricultural sector, and in urban areas Dalit women are mostly engaged in unorganized sectors working on extremely low wages, tedious and time consuming work. These women, whether in urban or rural areas, have the highest poverty levels, are landless and are dependent for employment, wages and loans on the dominant caste.
- The risk of exposure to the virus has also set off a chain of violence and harassment against Dalit ASHA workers, who have also complained of facing hostility from families while collecting health data during the Covid-19 Pandemic. On 9th August, 2020, thousands of ASHA workers' joined in a protest for better pay and PPE kits at Jantar Mantar, Delhi after 150 ASHA workers who tested positive in the city for Covid due working in pathetic conditions without safety kits. These protests were part of a nationwide series of protests and strikes by workers, farmers, Dalit and Adivasi groups which raised issues including but not limited to the privatisation policies of the government, anti-farmer ordinances, dilution of worker's rights during the pandemic, auctioning off of natural resources, displacement of Adivasi communities, and so on. (Tiwari, 2020).

- The All India Survey on Higher Education for 2018-2019 reports that Dalits account for only 14.9% of the 37.4 million students enrolled in higher education. (All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19, 2019). Dalit girls belonging to the economically weaker sections are deprived of access to education. They do not get proper uniforms, books and sometimes also have to walk or travel long distances to reach their school. This is a restrictive factor acting upon educational journeys of Dalit girls. In this era of booming online learning platforms and extensive use of these platforms in this period of lockdown has added another milestone in the struggle story of Dalit students. A recent incident that took during the lockdown period place in Kerala, where a bright Dalit girl of Malappuram District committed suicide due to the inability of attending online classes. (Emanuel, 2020)
- Suspended mid-day meals in schools and meals for children under-6 in *Anganwadi* Centres across the country due to novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The Supreme Court of India had issued notices to all the state governments and union territories to explain how these meals would reach the beneficiaries amid the pandemic and in response some of the states has provided mid-day in the form of dry ration but in case of Bihar, different news and reports state that the children were not receiving the dry ration. The 2011 Census of India indicated that Scheduled Castes constituted 15% of Bihar's 10.4 crores population. The census identified 21 of 23 Dalit sub-castes as Mahadalits. Some of the parts in Bihar still follow rigid caste system practices such as untouchability, which influences the education system there as well. So in this scenario as well, the Dalit children are the worst impacted and the school-going Mahadalit children begging at the streets and selling junks at Bhagalpur, Bihar validates the news. (Singh, 2020)
- Data from the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) indicates that Dalit women die younger compared to the dominant caste women due to the existing disparities in health system (Masoodi & Sreevatsan, 2018). NFHS data also sheds light on the health indicators such as infant mortality, maternal mortality, nutritional status and institutionalized delivery unfavourable to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and this period of has only deepened the already existing scars of discrimination. Dalit women are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 due to inaccessible information regarding health, society's negative attitudes, inaccessible health facilities, social distancing challenges and inadequate social protection measures.
- In the manual scavenging work, it has been observed that 95 to 98% workers are women and mainly belong to some specific castes like Valmiki, Dome, Bhangis, etc. These castes are considered as untouchables among untouchables who are forced to clean dry latrines, carry loads of excrement in leaking cane baskets, clear sewage, discard placenta post-deliveries, work on railway tracks, exhume dead bodies while enduring sexual harassment, social exclusion, dismal wages, and a lifetime's worth of trauma. In addition to this, Covid -19 has increased the life threat for them as they were working as frontline workers in this pandemic with zero protection and facilities to save themselves from the disease. (Kumar & Preet , 2020)

- 1) Emanuel, G. 2020. Mumbai Mirror. *Kerala: Malapuram District reports second suicide of class 10 over online classes*. Retrieved from https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/news/india/kerala-malappuram-district-reports-second-suicide-of-class-10-student-over-online-classes/articleshow/76440526.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst
- 2) Pradeep, Manjula. (2014). *Current scenario of dalit women in India*. Retrieved from http://idsn.org/wpcontent/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Key_Issues/Dalit_Women/Manjula_Pradeep_-_Current_scenario_of_Dalit_women_in_India_2014.pdf
- 3) Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, 2020. *Unheard Voices- Dalit Women*. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/Ind/INT_CERD_NGO_Ind_70_9030_E.pdf [Accessed 14 August 2020].
- 4) Census Report, 2011. Retrieved from <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-common/censusdata2011.html>
- 5) UNICEF India Tribal Nutrition. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/tribal-nutrition#:~:text=About%2040%20per%20cent%20of,tribal%20and%20non%20tribal%20children>.
- 6) Thorat, S. and Lee, J., 2005. *Caste Discrimination and Food Security Programmes*. Economic and Political Weekly, pp.24-30.
- 7) NACDAOR- National Confederation of Dalit & Adivasi Organisations. Retrieved from <https://nacdaor.org/>
- 8) Tiwari, A. (2020). The Indian Express. *Asha workers protest at Jantar Mantar demanding better pay, face FIR*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/asha-workers-protest-at-jantar-mantar-demanding-better-pay-face-fir-6550956/>
- 9) Ministry of Human Resource and Development. 2019. *All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19*. Retrieved from <http://aishe.nic.in/aishe/viewDocument.action?documentId=262>
- 10) Singh, R.K. 2020. India Today. *Schools closed, no mid-day meal forces children to beg, sell junk in Bihar's Bhagalpur*. Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/schools-closed-no-mid-day-meal-forces-children-to-beg-sell-junk-in-bihar-bhagalpur-1697835-2020-07-07>
- 11) Kumar, S. Preet, P. 2020. Economic & Political Weekly. *Manual Scavenging: Women Face Double Discrimination as Caste and Gender Inequalities Converge*. Vol. 55. Issue no. 26-27.
- 12) Masoodi, A. Sreevatsan, A. 2018. LiveMint. *Dalit Women in India die younger than uppercaste counterparts: Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/Dy9bHke2B5vQcWJJWNo6QK/Dalit-women-in-India-die-younger-than-upper-caste-counterpar.html>

Demands for accountability:

- Ensure a smooth process to file the cases of Atrocities against SC & ST. The cases should be registered timely under the POA Act, 1980.
- Ensure immediate medical facility in case of any kind of sexual or physical violence faced by women. In caring for the victims of sexual violence we always give priority to the health and well-being of the patient, the necessary medical procedures are being done effectively and in that process the victims are treated with utmost respect and dignity.
- Create a system to provide immediate monetary support to the survivor to continue the medical treatment, additional testing, if required for operation, buying medicines etc.
- Strengthening the existing system of Institutionalized psychological support provided to the victims of rape and gender based violence.
- Introduce livelihood support compensation packages and undertake a systematic process of enumerating informal/migrant sector workers specifically Dalit women, together with immediate relief compensation in the form of direct cash assistance as a well-established practice during the times of natural disasters in India and internationally, to enable them to sustain in the absence of (regular) wage work, to prevent them from distress induced indebtedness and exploitation.
- To immediately take action to prevent violence against Dalit women perpetuating out of casteist and patriarchy and provide both pecuniary and penal measures to address violence against Dalit women.
- To better enforce the SC/ST (PoA) Act and POCSO Act to render justice.
- To utilize the funds from the Scheduled Caste Sub Plans for the implementation of the PoA Act and also providing interim and long-term measures to ensure the security and livelihood of the Dalit women is protected.

Call for action:

- Reach out to survivor to support and provide legal support, monetary relief and other government schemes benefits at earliest as possible.
- Strict implementation of the SCs and STs, POA Act in cases of violence and discrimination against Dalit women and minor girls.
- Manual Scavenging Act 2013 should strictly be implemented to eradicate the practice of manual scavenging with adequate rehabilitation measures including better salaries or healthcare facilities to women sanitation workers who are on the front line on Covid and more prone to get the disease.
- A strong accountability framework which consists of empowerment of Dalit women rights holders to claim entitlements, and capacity strengthening of duty bearers to effectively deliver better services to right holders i.e. the Dalit women.

Ray of hope:

➤ In Bihar, District-Aurangabad, Block- Nabinagar, Village- Saya Parsa, A ration dealer was not providing ration to 60-70 Dalit families amidst the lockdown in April. When the Dalits went to him and asked about the ration he said that he would only provide ration if the Dalits paid him the double amount. The women leaders working in the field came across this news and informed the state team member. The women leaders decided to take strict actions against this dealer and submitted a complaint to the DDC, Aurangabad by taking signatures from all the sufferers on 27/04/2020. The DDC inquired about the matter and after the inquiry, the DDC, Aurangabad took immediate action against the dealer by cancelling his dealership license and transferring the dealership to another dealer.

➤ In Bihar, Palki Sakhi Village of Gaya district from the past two months the ration dealer was not providing ration to the people of the village. Later the women leaders intervened into the matter, reached out to the dealer on call and warned him that if he did not distribute the ration among the people we would officially file a complaint against him to the DM of Gaya and also sent the field level volunteer at his residence several times so that the dealer takes expeditious actions into the matter. With the continuous efforts and insistence of women leaders and volunteers that built pressure on the dealer and he distributed 300Kg Rice among 45 Dalit households.

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**If We Do Not Rise Campaign
India**