Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India

By: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Delhi

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

Date: May 6th, 2010

Published by: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Delhi
Location: New Delhi
IDRC Project Number: 104939-001
IDRC Project Title: Dalit Women- Rights and Citizenship in India (Phase I)
Country/Region: India, New Delhi
Full Name of Research Institution: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies
Address of Research Institution: D II-1, Road No.4, Andrews Ganj, New Delhi
Name(s) of Researcher/Members of Research Team: Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal, Saswatee Rath
Contact Information of Researcher/Research Team members: nidhi@dalitstudies.org.in

This report is presented as received from project recipient(s). It has not been subjected to peer review or other review processes.

Keywords: Human development indicators, discrimination, Dalit women, feminisim, rights and citizenship, social exclusion.
Abstract

This report develops an understanding on the problem of “Dalit women' in India. Dalit women include a section of women in Indian society, who come from the lower castes, particularly the untouchable and other lower caste, and who beside gender discrimination, also suffered from the prescribed customary provisions in the institution of caste and untouchability. Excluded women are not 'just like' the rest of the women. They are also disadvantaged by who they are. They suffer from social exclusion which deprives them of choices and opportunities to escape from poverty and denies them a voice to claim their rights. There is a close inter-face between patriarchy and social exclusion which enforce each other. The women from discriminated groups suffer from triple deprivation – gender, poverty and social exclusion. The discussion presented selected evidence on the nature and forms of caste – based discrimination suffered by Dalit women in access to sources of livelihood and social needs. This evidence however, is very limited and there is a need to study the nature and forms of discrimination faced by Dalit women as a woman, as a Dalit woman and as poor women. The Dalit woman’s exclusion from the rights normally considered as accruing to every Indian citizen thus needs to be examined more closely, looking both at her conditions of livelihood and employment and the various ways in which she is subjugated in the public and private spheres. The challenge is to capture the interface of these three dimensions of caste, class and gender and to analyse the consequences of social exclusion and discrimination on their rights and citizenship. This would help to conceptualize inclusive policies to address the problems of Dalit women more effectively.

The Research Problem

Mainstream Indian Feminist Movement address some and not all aspect of Dalit women’s rights and citizenship. This discourse is universalistic in nature and does not cover the aspect of caste and its interface with gender and as a result Dalit Feminist activism emerged. There is very limited information on the varied experiences of Dalit women as woman, as Dalit and as poor woman and that they constitute a sizeable proportion of women’s population. It is because of this neglect of Dalit women problem that IIDS and IDRC developed a programme on Dalit women discourse.

Objectives

Main Objective

1. To develop an understanding on the problem of ‘Dalit women’ and,
2. To evolve a perspective on their rights and citizenship in India.

Specific Objectives

- Review of Feminist Discourse
- Indian Feminist Discourse and treatment of Dalit Women question,
- Understand the evolving Dalit Feminist Discourse and New Dalit Women Movement,
- To get an insight into their problem through empirical evidence,
- Through theory and empirical evidence, evolve the perspective on Rights and Citizenship of Dalit women,
- Identify emerging issues

Methodology

The methodology followed was of desk review of literature and analysis of the official data base on human development indicators for Dalit women. A comprehensive review of the current theoretical and empirical literature related to gender discourse in general and of Dalit women in particular was undertaken. With the help of current data from the official sources and some studies (which are limited in number) this project also tries to capture the economic and social situation of Dalit women and examine them in the background of theoretical discussion. Further on, analyses of the current economic, education, health and political status of Dalit women. Based on insight from the theoretical and empirical literature, the project indicates the need for studies based on the primary survey to develop a suitable perspective on the group specific problem of Dalit women.

Project Activities: The activities undertaken were the following:

- Undertook review to locating Dalit Women in the social science literature on gender and caste.
- Reviewed the available debates on Dalit Women in feminist literature.
- Analyzed Dalit Women’s Socio-Economic status from the development literature and from the literature generated by civil society organizations.
- Identified Dalit Women’s role and participation in local and national government including cabinet, parliament and sector ministries.
• Located resources and parallels in the global literature on race, black women, other discrimination communities and issues.

• Reviewed literature produced by Dalit Women to understand Dalit Women’s articulation about the self, society at large, patriarchy, caste, human rights and development issues. Dalit women's writings in English as well as Marathi were reviewed.

• Analysis of indicators of human development for Dalit women from the unit level data set of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 62nd round at the all India level and across social groups for comparative analysis was undertaken.

• Since unit level data set was analyzed where data is at the individual level, this study is an analysis of current status based on primary level data set collated by the NSSO.

• The data was collected by the NSSO during the 62nd round survey on employment and unemployment conducted from July, 2005 to June, 2006. The survey was spread over 4,798 villages and 5,125 urban blocks covering 78,879 households (37,975 in rural areas and 40,904 in urban areas) and enumerating 3,77,377 persons (1,86,571 in rural areas and 1,90,806 in urban areas).

• Analysis of indicators of human development for Dalit women from NFHS 3 at the all India level and across social groups for comparative analysis.

• The National Advisory Board was formed and met twice to advice on the project. The members were: Dr Navsharan Singh (Senior Programme Specialist, IDRC), Prof. Vimal Thorat (Convenor, AIDMAM and Professor, IGNOU), Ramya Subramanian (Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF), Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat (UGC chairman and IIDS Managing Trustee), Prof. Surinder.S.Jodhka (Former Director, IIDS and Professor, JNU), Dr. R.P. Mamgain (Director, IIDS). The first National Advisory Board meeting was on 24th November 2009 and the second on 21st April 2010. National Level Workshop was held on the 19th of March in Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre to get feedbacks of the draft report on ‘Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India’.
**Project Outputs:**

1. A report was prepared titled ‘Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India’
2. Conference Report titled ‘Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India’

**Project Outcomes:** This report developed an understanding on the problem of ‘Dalit women’ in India. This was done through a comprehensive review of the current theoretical and empirical literature related to gender discourse in general and of Dalit women in particular. With the help of current data and some studies, the report captured the economic and social situation of Dalit women and examined them in the background of theoretical discussion.

Further, based on insight from the theoretical and empirical literature, the report indicated the need for studies based on the primary survey to develop a suitable perspective on non-discriminatory access to rights of Dalit women. The themes i.e. economic rights; formal and informal employment and; political participation were agreed by Dr. Navsharan Singh for the conducting study during Phase-II. However, the proposal for the Phase-II would be submitted by IIDS only after the finalization of the prospectus of IDRC for the next financial year. This was discussed in the 2nd advisory meeting held on 21st April 2010.

**Overall Assessment and Recommendations:** This is in one of the most neglected areas of gender studies and we are grateful to International Development Research Centre for sponsoring this particular study and for supporting the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.