

## Socio-Economic Realities of Dalit Muslim Women in India During Covid-19

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### Abstract

Dalit women, especially Muslims in India, are seen to be present at a crucial moment when they must overcome three barriers at once: class, race, and masculinity. Muslim Dalit women have been victims of sexual assault in rural India. The disadvantages of Muslim Dalit women are among the most notable exceptions; their disadvantages are never part of the battle for women in India. However, bourgeois feminism did not advance all the real issues of Dalit women by setting the feminist agenda. The additional bias against Muslim Dalit women due to their gender and caste is evident in the numerous successes achieved by the human development metrics of this group. In all aspects of human growth, literacy, and survival, Muslim Dalit women are far worse off than Dalit men and non-Dalit women. This study aims to comprehend the larger connotations that connect Muslim Dalit women's social spaces to COVID-19. In conjunction with these social and political trends, the mistreatment of Muslim Dalit women is on the rise, as is subtle or extreme discrimination within Dalit households. Therefore this study uses a qualitative approach to address issues concerning Dalit women

Keywords: Muslim Dalit women, COVID-19, Education, Health, Crime, Discrimination

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### INTRODUCTION

Dalits, also known as scheduled castes in India, comprise about one-sixth of the population. Despite a constitutional ban on "untouchability" and passing specific legislation such as the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1955, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, they continue to face discrimination (Waughray, 2010). The word "Dalit" is widely used in North India, and its etymological origin is derived from the Sanskrit word "dal," which means broken or beaten down. According to the Punjabi dictionary "The Mahan Kosh," a Dalit is someone who is trampled on or vandalised at the feet of the lower caste (Hinjati) and the upper caste (Anandhi & Kapadia, 2017). According to the government of India, Article 4 of the Constitution of India states:

"The State shall take special care to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sectors and, especially, the recognised castes and tribes, and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." (Ghosh & Ghosh, 1997).

Dalits speak a variety of languages and follow a variety of religions (Bauman, 2008). They speak Telugu, Bengali, and other Indian languages in addition to Hindi. It does not matter whether they are Hindu, Christian, or Muslim. These disparities in language, profession, and religion can be problematic at times, making it difficult for Dalits to organise and speak with one voice. Muslim Dalit women in India face social poverty in addition to gender identity. The Dalit movement started in the early 1930s and began to resurface in an old Indian classification based on the democratic values of democracy, prosperity, and social justice (Patel, 2001). In India, women are not culturally homogeneous. There is inequality in health, educational milestones, and economic prosperity as calculated by the Index of Human Development,

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specific to catalogued castes (Dalits), STs, and Muslim women. Not only upper-class women but also their groups incite violence against Muslim Dalit women. Men are strong in Dalit groups. Muslim Dalit women themselves have less power in the Dalit movement. Women are very influential in the struggle, but up until now, the bulk of leadership positions have been occupied by men in corporations, municipal bodies, and communities.

Many SC women, including rummagers, are active in so-called dirty and contaminated work. Besides, we have found from official data that in agricultural and non-agricultural operations, both rural and urban, real compensation rates between SC women and men and non-SC/ST women occur. At the heart of this myth is the prevailing "Brahmanic" principle of "Manusmriti" morality in the first millennium, which constitutes the invisible convention of Indian society. Enjoy social, economic, and political activities as religious obligations that actively oppress women and "Non-Dwijas." The dynamic totalitarian regimes of those marginalised castes in the late 1960s and 1970s took on the name "Dalit," which comes from the Sanskrit root verb Dal, which was intended to crack or divide. Dalit applies to those who were scattered and were purposefully grounded by those above. The term refutes the ideas that have been used to explain caste pollution and karma (Jogdand, 1995). Hierarchy and isolation refute the connotations of paternalism, charity, and the overarching caste structure of the word "Harijan." It is important to remember that all marginalised communities, particularly women, were initially conceptualised as having the "Dalit" identity. So, due to various injustices, the Dalit Movement deemed women of the highest castes to be Dalits. The evidence has shaped the government's agenda to promote women economically and educationally, as well as to include them in local government, along with many other civil society campaigns.

In terms of growth, Muslim Dalit women have very little advantage over the majority of women. As Muslim Dalit women have steadily improved social progress metrics over women in the upper class, the gap between Muslim Dalit women and the rest continues. It has contributed to a greater demand for gender policies relevant to the community. The caste system relies on the classification of individuals into social classes (or castes), whereby the political, cultural, and financial privileges of each human caste are predetermined or allocated and made heritable by birth, and where rights are assigned to castes in an unparalleled and hierarchical manner. Under the conventional caste system, the intangibles just at the end of the caste hierarchy were stripped of all rights, and at the very edge of the social and economic pyramid, the unsociable mindset and abuse of the high-caste Hindus were by far the most prevalent among these untouchable citizens. The untouchables have benefited from the idea of "untouchability," which is exclusively for them. Because of their unusual untouchability, the untouchables are considered unclean and contaminated, as well as physically and socially separated and isolated. This alienation and discrimination led to the abolition of their rights and limitations on physical and social autonomy, as well as a lack of equity in access to society, the community, and the economy at different stages. As a result of their caste and gender, Muslim Dalit women experience prejudice, exclusion, and violence. The majority of Dalit girls drop out of school, missing out on one of the most important possibilities for them to escape poverty. Given the large number of Dalit women and men who live in poverty, justice will not be served if Dalits endure being marginalised and deprived of their human rights.

Previous research, such as Oza, P. (2012)'s "Dalit Women in Modern India: Beyond Point of View Theory and Above Women's Study Narratives," discussed violence on many levels, including physical, emotional, psychological, self-esteem, pride, and, most importantly, humanity. The researchers concluded that Dalit women are gradually trying to take over their invisibility in speech and are beginning not only to speak but also to theorise and build broader solidarity to earn their hitherto denied place under the sun. In examining the feminist perspective of Dalits, the women's liberation movement of Dalits has played an

essential role, as a historic division from the history of concepts has been almost impossible. In other words, the conceptual debates themselves embody the history of doing, and vice versa.

Rege (1998): "Dalit women talk differently: A critique of "difference" and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position." Dalit women in Kerala have experienced gender inequality and local violence as a result of a severely unbalanced balance of social, economic, and political power, according to researchers. Their socio-economic weakness and lack of political power, when combined with the overall risk of becoming Dalit women, create potentially violent situations and, at the same time, reduce their ability to escape. The researchers concluded that the social structure and traditional conservative position of the Dalits also contributed to important factors in their backwardness. Dalit women are in a better position than other women, with access to education, public employment, and political representation. They still lack social status. Dalit women are more suitable and meaningful than those who suffer from double polarisation due to caste and gender. While they are socially aware of inequality and willing to actively participate in social struggles both within and outside their family circle, they have not adequately recognised their contribution to social change.

Still (2017): "Dalit Women: Honour and Patriarchy in South India." It aims to give Dalits a broad and critical identity. Their abilities, the history they created in the most unfavourable circumstances, their educational aspirations, the courage of moral dignity, and their development show the way to liberation. It brings a new identity and confidence to the oppressed sections of society. The experiences and struggles of Dalit women show the way to modernity and bring about social changes in society.

Paik (2018) studied the topic "The Rise of New Dalit Women in Indian Historiography." They found that Dalit women in India have been living in silence for centuries. They have participated in its exploitation, oppression, and barbarism as silent bystanders. They have no control over their bodies, earnings, or lives. Instead of controlling them, someone else controls them. The extreme manifestations of violence, exploitation, and oppression against them are visible in the form of hunger, malnutrition, disease, physical and mental abuse, rape, illiteracy, disease, unemployment, insecurity, and inhumane treatment. The combined power and influence of feudalism, racism, and patriarchy have turned their lives into a living hell. The vast majority of them live in the most precarious situations. They still live in the dark age of barbarism in the current era of modernism and postmodernism. Among women, caste has played a role in presenting problems related to Dalit women. In an upper-class society, lower-caste women have very little access to the masses, which is further complicated by their gender. Dalits and the marginalised continue to be colonised by feudalists and aristocrats, who are not free from caste discrimination.

From some of these studies, it is still not clear how the latest updates on the development of the Dalits, especially in the COVID-19 season, are seen. This needs to be studied and can assist the government in issuing future policies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The researchers focused on secondary sources such as books, academic articles, papers, studies on caste oppression and sexual discrimination, and objective evidence on caste and gender anxiety.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to systematically explain Muslim Dalit women's status in India by reviewing the theoretical and empirical literature in depth, analysing secondary data and the material from numerous related articles, and demonstrating the myriad impoverishments of Muslim Dalit women in the wider sense of intersectoral caste. The main objectives of this study are:

1. To study the educational status of Muslim Dalit girls in India.
2. To discuss the present economic and social status of Muslim Dalit women.
3. To find out the main challenges or barriers to development for Muslim Dalit women in India.
4. To study the health status of Muslim Dalit women in India.
5. To study the violence against Muslim Dalit women.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions are outlined to explore the status of Muslim Dalit women in India:

1. What is the educational status of Dalit girls in India?
2. What is the economic and social status of Muslim Dalit women in India?
3. What are the issues and standpoints related to Muslim Dalit women in India?
4. What is the health condition of Muslim Dalit women in India?
5. What types of violence do Muslim Dalit women face in India?

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **New Challenges and Social Mobility as a Consequence of the Pandemic**

The theory of separation provides a snapshot of the existence of gender differences within social classes. According to the 2001 census, approximately three-quarters of the population of India are SC, ST, other backward classes, and Muslims. Women are half of them. Most registered caste women do not have access to income and are mainly concentrated on wage labour. India is a democratic country and hosts the most relevant conference on human rights. These treaties provide equal rights for men and women. Since India is also a party to the CADAW Convention, the government has another responsibility to ensure that women in the region exercise their rights. It is true that, under international law, states should do more to protect human rights than simply enforce the law (Paik, 2018). The government of India is obliged to take all necessary measures to enable women to exercise their rights, including in the legislature and the budget. It also has the responsibility to punish those who practise racism and intolerance.

In a modern world with a growing economy, the government of India has the resources to fulfil its responsibilities. India is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human and Democratic Rights. The Government of India must ensure, through this Convention, that the human rights of Muslim Dalit women, such as the right to a full life, the absence of torture or barbarism, and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, can be protected against slavery. To marry exclusively, the government of India must ensure that the lives and dignity of Muslim Dalit women depend on the exercise of these human rights. As part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, India not only recognises certain economic, social, and cultural rights but also discriminates against all citizens. The treaty also sets out how states can fulfil their rights. The ICESCR includes the rights to fair and favourable employment and work and the right to a dignified life, including trade union rights, social security, family protection, food, housing, clothing, and medical care. The right is included in the rights of the ICESCR. This civil right is rarely given in the case of Muslim Dalit women. The government has launched a quota scheme to inaugurate the work of the Dalits (Mangubhai & Capraro, 2015). However, Muslim Dalit women only promoted the quota system to a limited extent. This is partly because only the public sector is interested in this project.

Furthermore, the project is claimed to be flawed because many positions have not been filled and there is a lack of dedication to a government led by upper-caste leaders. However, the national government has not drawn attention to issues of standards and the importance of schooling for Dalit girls. The lack of

facilities, education, and curricula that do not apply to or educate the socio-cultural life of the Dalits, all added to the disillusionment of the school population. In government schools, a significant percentage of Dalit girls have no basic facilities, such as classrooms, teachers, and teaching assistants. Slow houses, leaking towers, and mud floors appear to be normal in these classrooms, creating a deficient environment for children. The justification for this is that most government primary schools are perceived as low-quality (Harinath, 2014). The digitalisation of education in the setting of a pandemic demonstrates how policy regimes and political institutions have embraced online education without resolving the challenges of the digital divide between the affluent portions of the country and the most disadvantaged Dalits. The suicides of Dalit girl students in Kerala and Punjab in retaliation for online education highlight the plight of the Dalits and their quest for education.

Dalits have also acknowledged that they are systematically disenfranchised from the field of education as the digital divide widens. Exclusion from education and social isolation may serve as a reminder of their destructive past, which is rooted in caste beliefs and practices. In this context, the subjugation of Muslim Dalit women is determined by caste and gender. They experience physical assaults on a daily basis from the ruling castes. Dalits are despised for their unclean presence. Purity and contamination with regard to caste have grown stronger as caste has changed. The service sector influences the lifestyles of the world's marginalised populations. Working conditions for Muslim Dalit women in the informal economy are deplorable. In caste-based professional environments, they are inexperienced and lack networks. Women's emancipation and adaptable jobs are essentially capitalism-driven liberation theatrics. COVID-19 has also impacted the working population of Muslim Dalit women. A Dalit domestic servant, a widowed woman with two children, one of whom is physically disabled, was harassed by caste Hindu officials for raising questions about rations and the lack of a job during the lockdown (Singh & Kaur, 2021).

Domestic workers' livelihoods were in jeopardy in urban and semi-urban areas. Middle-class ladies do not engage them and do not pay domestic helpers. Domestic workers are subjected to it as a result of their low caste status. Eighty-one recorded violent incidents in Tamil Nadu during lockdown demonstrate the continuing harsh, caste-based atrocities. Their rights and dignity are being eroded. Muslim Dalit women's lives are inextricably linked to income disparity. There are discussions about the precariat in connection to the old and emerging working classes. Creating artificial divisions among different sections of the working class is not the way to solve this. Regardless of criticism from Marxist studies, the concept of the precariat has the capacity to unravel neoliberal concerns (Dholakia, Ozgun, & Atik, 2020). The lives of Muslim Dalit women, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to the standard understandings of the proletariat and precariat. In the backdrop of emerging economic ideologies and practises, caste, class, and patriarchy ideologies are complicating their lives. Their issues are not limited to the proletariat and precariat.

### **Economic and Social Humiliation of Muslim Dalit Women During the Pandemic**

In India, the Dalit community is a diverse population with various occupations, languages, and cultures. Muslim Dalit women work in a variety of occupations, such as cleaning, eliminating human waste, and sweeping, which are the most common jobs they do in cities and in a variety of non-urban contexts, including tea plantations, fishing, leather processing and shoe manufacturing. The severity of deprivation varies based on their occupations. Dalits in rural India are caught between the competing factions of a rising market economy that fosters formal employment relationships and the village's hierarchical and caste-based social relationships. India's economic growth has been good in the last decade. However, there

is growing caste inequality. From the perspective of Muslim Dalit women, the issues of the epidemic and caste reposition the issue of humiliation in an unusual way. Those who are otherwise ostracised because of their caste location will be more stigmatised in the COVID-19 era, leading to a shortage of social and cultural capital. The issue of embarrassment is important to the Dalit way of life. It is determined that the pollution-purity worldview excludes a large number of people from social connections, both in time and place.

The caste system and the purity-pollution concept establish a type of absolute rejection that aims to drive a person or a whole social group far beyond the framework of civilization, rendering the latter absolutely unseeable, unapproachable, and untouchable. Muslim Dalit women are independent, progressive, and focused on equal treatment and justice. The role of Muslim Dalit women was surprisingly strong after independence and strengthened their status compared to the pre-independence period. Increased labour market availability may be significant for the community. However, differences in concentration and a significant wage gap between SC and non-SC/ST women in the main occupations of Muslim Dalit women in the agricultural industry reveal that the majority of Muslim Dalit women are deprived of salaries and influential positions.

The unemployment rate is higher among graduates and Muslim Dalit women, and this situation prevails in rural areas. Although there is a gender gap in literacy rates among both social classes, Dalits report a larger gap than non-Dalits. The government of India is obliged to take all necessary measures to enable women to exercise their rights, including legislative and budgetary measures. It also has the responsibility to punish those who practise racism and orthodoxy. In a modern world with a growing economy, the government of India has the resources to fulfil its responsibilities. India is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human and Democratic Rights. Inconspicuous in all respects, Muslim Dalit women and men who are obliged to do menial labour keep their existence inconspicuous in all respects.

It is noticed that manual scavengers are the keepers of what the body condemns and what is excreted to keep the physical environment healthy. The hard reality of Muslim Dalit women workers who are pressed to work due to internal family-based patriarchy and poverty, as well as non-Dalit repudiation of such stigmatised jobs and labour, destroys the ideal associated with the pandemic that strikes regardless of socioeconomic cleavages. The metaphysics of untouchability is particularly devious in how it ensures its perpetuation. The untouchables, who have the most to lose by confronting it, are susceptible to its ruthless logic and repeat the brutal logic of graded inequality among themselves (Geeta, 2013). Caste-based societal stratification obstructs all avenues for Dalit freedom in an organised manner. The bodily knowledge elicited by the COVID-19 principles and reflections positions the issues of social distance, touch, and labour, all of which are integral to the horrific institution of caste. Dalits have highlighted the tenacity of the public and political institutions that constitute any civilisation. During the epidemic, states worldwide were unable to anticipate the dangers of social and political restrictions through lockdowns and social isolation.

### **Muslim Dalit Women - Issues and Standpoints**

The Constitution of India provides moral protection against the genocide of SC/ST citizens, as many SC/ST men and women are victims of torture and casualties. The Constitution does not specifically define atrocities, but the Parliamentary Commission on SC and Tribal Protection defined in Article (1.4) of 2004-05 in its fourth report that "SCs bear a double burden on women belonging to castes and tribes." They were exploited by caste and gender, and were weak and powerless against sexual exploitation (Surbhi Sinha & Roy, 2012). In contemporary Indian society, the problem of Muslim Dalit women is remarkably relevant,

especially in light of the new social movements that are confined to their political space and are silent today. We create a part of the imagination with the term "Dalit woman" that lies somewhere between the Indian feminist movement and the Dalit movement. Later, it became his identity and profession. Women of all castes have faced discrimination because of their perception of being the lesser gender. However, in the case of Muslim Dalit women, it has become a horrible cycle because Dalit communities are being treated as inferior communities by the upper castes. As a result, they have become economically disadvantaged, with women facing multiple levels of discrimination due to their gender nature, whether by caste, gender, or economic and political factors.

Muslim Dalit women differ considerably from their higher-caste peers. In the most tragic circumstances, it gives a new identity and faith to the oppressed part of society. The experiences and challenges of Muslim Dalit women reflect the journey and social change in contemporary culture. Unemployment in rural India is local. The lack of investment in resources and technology in rural industries has contributed to a considerable surplus of labour. Further, historically, agriculture and allied cottage industries were the only major occupations in rural areas, but they were insufficient to sustain the growing demand of the population. Therefore, the message to the rural population is to travel to the city in search of jobs and a better life. For women and children, immigration is also hazardous. Those in the village are often the victims of local zamindars, or businessmen, and their repressive activities. Rural areas are generally characterised by profound intergenerational poverty, inadequate health care, a crisis of potable water, poor sanitation, and other public expenditures. Rural areas are largely culturally conservative, with well-defined caste and gender classifications. India, one of the largest democracies in the world, wants more participation from all races, ideologies, genders, and ethnicities. However, the discussion on the women's quota bill in Parliament is at the centre of the bitter reality of Indian politics being finalised. (Surinder Khanna, 2011).

The government has taken several measures to increase the number of women, especially at the highest levels. The most lethal forms of Dalit crime include all insults to Dalit and indigenous women, causing Dalits to defecate on people, blacken their skin, split their heads, and wander the streets of the villages. The Dine-Hunt is another barbaric method of atrocity against Muslim Dalit women and tribal women, where conventional forces have killed, massacred, or expelled vulnerable women as witches. Muslim Dalit women face significant persecution that can be combined into two categories: six based on their caste and three based on their gender identity. Muslim Dalit women are subjected to verbal abuse, physical violence, sexual violence and assault, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, and kidnapping for racial reasons. There are three types of violence in their families, such as female feticide, rape in child marriage, and domestic and marital brutality. Dalit rural women face concerns similar to those in India. The lives of Muslim Dalit women living in rural areas are hampered by the intervention of soil, wood, and water in these areas, as well as by privatization.

### **Health Status of Muslim Dalit Women in India**

Health is a fundamental human right and a global social goal. Health is essential to meeting basic human needs and achieving a better quality of life (Costanza et al, 2007). Health is the main path of human development, which is the basis of a healthy, rich, and prosperous life. Health is also reflected and spontaneous in the proverb, "health is wealth." In 1911, UN member states achieved eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be met by 2015. As a matter of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, India has been largely hampered by the inequality of social groups. A top administration priority since 2000, when India signed the Millennium Development Goals to combat hunger, famine, gender

inequality, demonization, malnutrition, and maternal and infant mortality, has been to provide basic health care to all people (Haraway, 1990). The health situation of a social group is directly related to their socioeconomic situation. The health of a social group is inextricably connected to its socioeconomic status.

As a result, health conditions vary based on a region's economic and social development. Health varies greatly between social groupings in a caste-divided culture such as India. In India, the female caste can accelerate the number of deaths through factors like unsanitary conditions, insufficient water supply, and medical attention. The quality of health varies according to the economic and social growth of a site in different areas. The young age of marriage and high fertility affect health outcomes. Muslim Dalit women have a low body mass index (BMI), anaemia has spread, and there is little access to information on maternal mortality. One in four Dalits between the ages of 15 and 49 is severely malnourished by BMI, and one in six of the top six women has the same nutrients. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) estimates that around 55.9% of women aged 25–29 with anaemia are Dalits, compared to 53% of Indians. The national average is 53% (Paswan & Jaideva, 2002). Dalits have the poorest health due to a combination of issues, such as low calorie intake, the use of stale food, unsanitary labour conditions, poor living conditions, heavy workloads, and ignorance. Anaemia is a common problem faced by women in India, which is exacerbated for Muslim Dalit women. Several Muslim Dalit women's platforms offer business from birth, and many have indigenous ways of staying at home. It helps most husbands and in-laws make healthy choices.

SC women face higher levels of inequality and insecurity because of higher levels of income, lower academic performance, and higher unemployment. The lack of knowledge about gynaecological problems or diseases and the fear of revealing them are two of the leading causes of their high prevalence. Together with some awareness programmes through audiovisual media, additional education can be a catalyst to improve reproductive health problems among Muslim Dalit women. Most women do not seek treatment if they have problems due to a lack of knowledge or awareness of the disease. Muslim Dalit women play a vital role in the spread of self-reported gynaecological problems. Muslim Dalit women in India are killed at a younger age than the highest caste, face discrimination in accessing health care, and lag in all of these well-being indicators. If Muslim Dalit women are involved in sex trading, their situation worsens. According to data, a significant percentage of Muslim Dalit women work in this field. These are acts that the Badi ladies are well known for. In addition, teenage girls from these neighbourhoods are trafficked. As a result of all of these factors, women have been affected by HIV/AIDS.

A Dalit woman is much more likely to be malnourished than a higher-caste woman (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015). The reasons are low income levels, poor health awareness, poor delivery, and postpartum care for both the baby and the mother. Muslim Dalit women in India face threefold responsibility for a list of people, class, and gender. They have no power or position in society. According to the fourth round of the National Family Health Survey (2015–16), even in their own homes, Muslim Dalit women have less power: After 15 years, 60% of Muslim Dalit women have no right to control how their money is spent; 46% do not have bank accounts; 46% are unable to go to the market alone; 49% are unable to visit a health facility alone; and 35.7% have experienced some form of physical abuse in their homes. COVID-19 has had more of an impact on the lives of Muslim Dalit women and girls than anyone else in India. Those Muslim Dalit women who work in sanitation, in particular, are risking their lives as key workers who do not have social security during the epidemic. Many Muslim Dalit women at the grassroots level strive to improve the lives of their communities. They gained strength, training, and leadership skills with the support of Muslim Dalit women's rights activists. According to the latest data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Dalit women in India die more often than upper-caste women. Not surprisingly, the average age



of Muslim Dalit women at death is much lower than that of upper-caste people. This can lead to poor nutrition, poor sanitation, and an unhealthy life.

### **Untouchability Revived Among Muslim Dalit Women During COVID-19**

The patriarchal structure allows for women's oppression (Sultana, 2010). The caste system also contributes to the systematic discrimination of India's 96 million Dalit women. COVID-19 necessitates high hygiene precautions. Far from the concept of sanity, the necessity of their professions, combined with poverty, compel Muslim Dalit women to continue performing traditional menial jobs without protection, such as euthanizing dead bodies, scavenging, and cleaning open sewage. This puts women at a greater risk of contracting the disease. The disgust, dread, and need for sanitation to protect against coronavirus have fueled the rest of the population's intentional distance from susceptible Muslim Dalit women (Bansal, 2021). Their predicament is exacerbated by their lack of access to healthcare. These constraints stem from poverty, gender disparities, obtaining authorisation to visit a hospital, and the perception of Dalits as contaminated. Gender dynamics influence healthcare spending in Dalit households. According to the UN report, the average mortality age of Dalit women is significantly lower than that of Dalit men or non-Dalit women. Even if they are hospitalised, the benevolent paternalism of local health personnel creates substantial impediments to Muslim Dalit women receiving good, effective care. The differential treatment of Muslim Dalit women is regulated by the caste-based attitude prevalent in institutions supported by predominantly upper-class bodies.

With the present predicament, where hospitals are overburdened by more patients, insufficient healthcare staff, and a caste-based attitude, it is apparent that healthcare delivery, diagnosis, and treatment, as well as accessibility to healthcare facilities, will be dominated by caste and gender stereotypes. While Dalits lack the capacity to articulate themselves, neither the media nor the government pays heed to these inequities. Women have been physically and verbally beaten on multiple occasions, as well as sexually assaulted, raped, and coerced into prostitution. During COVID-19, these inherent discriminations and violations against Muslim Dalit women took several forms. While COVID-19 reduces opportunities for interaction in public, Dalit rapes have become more common in the workplace, at home, and in medical institutions. Between February 2020 and August 2020, the media recorded many caste-based atrocities, with rapes accounting for around 10% of the overall number of instances. Furthermore, the vast majority of them occurred in hospitals (Chakraborty, 2021). According to the media, a Muslim Dalit girl, who was also a COVID-19 patient, was raped many times by the doctor and hospital staff members throughout her treatment. The pandemic has added another layer of oppression to the lives of Muslim Dalit women, who were already suffering from the triple oppressions of poverty, being female, and being female Dalit. Human rights violations occur in public, official venues, the perpetrator's house, or even their own residences. The pandemic has re-established its invincibility. While social isolation is vital to preventing disease transmission, it creates a gap between Dalits and non-Dalit members.

That is, it pushes those who are already far away. This schism has widened to the point where the Dalits are unable to obtain fundamental basics like masks, sanitisers, and groceries (Johnson, 2018). The Dalits, formerly known as untouchables, are now subject to double untouchability. The pandemic has been affecting people regardless of their nationality, class, or gender, but it provides a way to strengthen racism and discrimination and to continue to exclude Dalits, especially Muslim Dalit women. Previous research has suggested that differences between people of a certain class exist even in unequal societies. Following this, it can be said that COVID-19 has significantly impacted the systemic oppression of Muslim Dalit women in all sections of society. While governments use the epidemic as an excuse to advance various

agendas within the limited excuse of protecting their citizens, in COVID-19, the segregation of people of a certain class and the oppression of Muslim Dalit women continue to affect a large portion of the population. The government has implemented several affirmative efforts to protect the rights of Muslim Dalit women, but this has reasserted the stigma of ineptitude, leading to the reaffirmation and reinforcement of sex stereotypes. In a country where the state is led by a Dalit president, the concept of "suitable" stalks Muslim Dalit women, and without remedy, they continue to experience exclusion and abuse, which was exacerbated by COVID-19.

### **Suggestions from the Study**

The following suggestions may be made from the present study:

1. Muslim Dalit women, in particular, require equal treatment from the state, and Muslim Dalit women should be considered fair in all aspects of social operations.
2. Working Muslim Dalit women raise awareness of legal protections against caste and gender disparities and discrimination.
3. The government should implement successful policies to eradicate caste disputes and segregation. Policies to eliminate caste conflicts are important. However, because some are enshrined in established laws, strict guidelines must be followed.
4. Create effective strategies for increasing Muslim Dalit women's literacy rates. While free child education guidelines are being drawn up in India, strange provisions for diffusing educational achievement among Muslim Dalit women must be laid down.
5. Implementation of the framework for the disposition of cases of caste-based violence: often, caste-based affirmative defences are postponed for many years, and Muslim Dalit women do not have justice due to the court's deferred decision, which is why it is important to dispose of these cases immediately.
6. Situations in Dalit settlements necessitate the use of psychosocial counsellors. A psychosocial counsellor is needed to solve these problems because of the high sensitivity of caste-based harassment and crime toward Muslim Dalit women.
7. Small clinics and hospitals, as well as particular accommodations for migrating Muslim Dalit women, are part of a cooperative system.
8. Mass campaigns to increase awareness of Muslim Dalit women's rights and freedoms; In addition to the government's efforts to reduce caste-based harassment, mass initiatives projected by the media and non-government entities will contribute to the government's attempts.
9. To ensure that Muslim Dalit women do not rely on mediators, the SHG is bolstered by leveraging power.
10. The majority of Dalit women are motivated to work. To improve their talents, they must be appropriately trained.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper is specifically written to understand Dalit Muslim women's concerns and examine their struggles' multidimensionality. The study revealed that the changing variation in voice involved in community-specific gender policies is closely related to the discriminatory economic benefits enjoyed by different communities, such as the Dalit Muslim women's group. Therefore, Dalit Muslim women have studied more intensively, both economically and socially, in the public and private worlds, about various methods of granting citizenship rights, which are traditionally considered to include all indigenous

peoples. During the colonial era, the scheduled caste was subjected to social, economic, and political repression. Although steps have been taken to raise society's standards in the post-colonial era through our constitution and legal apparatus, much remains to be done for human development in general. Reservations have been established as a special safeguard by the Government of India to ensure greater access and equity in addressing deep inequalities. The principle of defensive discrimination provides for three types of reservations for castes and ethnicities, including: 1) reservation of seats for these groups in the state or legislative parliament; 2) reservation of government and semi-government jobs; and 3) educational reservations, especially in colleges and universities. Even in the face of deplorable working conditions, women have the highest and most economic activity in daily wage work. Inequality in access to occupational and reproductive health facilities suggests that it is the result of conventional assumptions about "lower caste" social status and perhaps notions of hygiene and misappropriation of funds. Religious restrictions on prostitution are critical to the equal rights of Dalit Muslim women and their lack of control over their status and sexuality. As a result, Dalit Muslim women face many problems due to the need for various treatments.

Second, legal intervention and legal protection against social exclusion and prejudice against women in disadvantaged communities, in addition to a broader equality policy for women, will also include a group-specific gender policy to address women's voices in marginalised populations. This will help the country strategize to combat the problem of Dalit Muslim women more efficiently. Dalit Muslim women need policies and services that address various class and ethnic deprivations. India's statistics on participation rates at the state administration level show that women in general, and Dalit Muslim women in particular, are very poor in India. All efforts undertaken to combat caste-based prejudice should take into account the conditions of women and girls, and special safeguards should be adopted to protect the human rights of women and girls who suffer from caste-based discrimination. In the areas of education, employment, health care, access to land, and personal security, particular attention should be paid to eliminating intersecting forms of prejudice. Despite many positive policies in India regarding social class and disadvantaged women and ensuring that everyone has the right to education, SC women and girls continue to face the curse of inferiority and child marriage. Dropout rates are higher among high school girls, and underage marriage is more common. Due to high infant mortality rates, Dalit Muslim women need comprehensive health policies, especially in maternal and child health.

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