

Facing despair
Struggles and Challenges of Dalit Women

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India has celebrated its 60th year of Independence. The country is now recording 2-digit economic growth every year and successfully takes quite an important and dominant position in international politics and in the economic arena. The success of India is built up with the international reputation of well-educated human resources, “democratic and stabled” political circumstances, and promises of land, benefits and other resources to the foreign and national investors- which are all based on exploitation of Dalit women. In reality India remains the world leader in maternal mortality, female infanticide and foeticide, deaths due to preventative disease, and other indicators of human development. Even in 2007, in Raitara village of Vanarasi in Uttar Pradesh, a five-year-old Dalit girl is facing imminent death from starvation as the family being slaved in a farm for free labour. Likewise, vulnerable villagers, namely, rural women, meanwhile, get a lot of impacts in the gap between two faces of the country. Those bad indicators are always appeared in Dalit women.

The Dalits and the marginalised are still colonised by the feudal lords the Elites without freedom from caste discrimination. Indians have driven out the colonizers but not the one who are discriminating Dalits. For Dalit women, they are also coerced to be victimised in the patriarchy. Dalit women are bearing the burden of double day caste and sexual division of labour. Dalit women are demeaned and degraded and their body is a free terrain of colonization by men from other community. Dalit women are a deprived section and at the lowest level of economic and educational structures. They are poor, illiterate, sexually harassed, faces state, caste violence and exploited. Doubly, triply or multiply discriminated, Dalit women face a lot of struggles in daily bases otherwise just being overwhelmed with those surges of discrimination up to them. Without being struggling, Dalit women would be just left in despair.

This paper, therefore, focuses on struggles of Dalit women. The paper, firstly, sees Dalit women’s struggles. The struggles, however, spread out to wide area of Dalit women’s life- too broad to cover just with a paper. The paper, therefore, tries to show a piece of dimensions of the struggle- which helps the readers to understand the overall background of the exclusion of Dalit women- anti- Dalit women’s tendency in historical context as well as in cultural context. Secondly, it would be taken up the violation against Dalit women in the culture of globalisation with detailed analysis on their socio economic including rights to livelihood. The violation is now intensifying and internationalised.

And lastly, the paper would suggest people's movement based methodology to tackle with multiple discrimination against Dalit women, which can alternate with the course which was set by the top or the others. Also, in throughout the paper, many cases would be presented including nation-wide known incidents as well as local problems of Dalit women.

1. Dalit women- their pathway of struggles

1-1. Discrimination against Dalit women in Hinduism

Although it is now in modern world, caste discrimination, an age-old practice that dehumanizes and perpetuates a cruel form of discrimination continues to be practiced. India where the practice is rampant despite the existence of a legislation to stop this, 160 million Dalits of which 49.96% are women continue to suffer discrimination. The discrimination that Dalit women are subjected to is similar to racial discrimination, where the former is discriminated and treated as untouchable due to descent, for being born into a particular community, while, the latter face discrimination due to colour. The caste system declares Dalit women as 'impure' and therefore untouchable and hence socially excluded. This is a complete negation and violation of women's human rights.

Dalit women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcastes, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour. According to the Hindu caste hierarchy, there are four castes namely the Brahmins (priestly caste), the Kshatriya (warriors), the Vaishyas (traders) and the Shudras (menial task workers). Below this four-tier caste ladder there is another rung of peoples, who are called the untouchables (Panchamas). Among the untouchables, the status of women is further eroded and closely linked to the concept of purity. This is what the rigid, fundamentalist Hindu promotes through continuation of caste system, imposing the Brahminical values to maintain the caste system.

The creation of a number of Hindu religious books including the *Manusmriti*, *Atharva Vedas*, *Vishnu smriti*, and many others like these and their strict compliance by the Brahmins (upper priestly Hindu caste), led to a society in which equality between men and women was far from existent (Agarwal: 1999). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution, also makes it very clear in his article titled "The rise and fall of Hindu woman" that the root cause of suffering for women in India are these so called Hindu religious books (Ibid.). Books like the *Manusmriti* divide people into a stratified caste system and promote inequality between men and women (Thind: 2000 and Agarwal). According to the *Manusmriti*, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth (Thind:

n.pag). It not only justifies the treatment of Dalit women as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a number of violent atrocities on women as can be seen in the following verses (Agarwal and *Manusmitri*):

A man, aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him. Or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight years of age. If (the performance of) his duties would otherwise be impeded, he must marry sooner. (*Manusmitri* IX.94)

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.” (*Manusmitri* V.147)

Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. (*Manusmitri* IX.3)

Even the killing of a Dalit woman is explicitly justified as a minor offence for the Brahmins: equal to the killing of an animal (*Manusmitri*). If the killing of an untouchable was justified as a minor offence, you can imagine the treatment they received throughout their lives.

In a male dominated society, Dalit women suffered unimaginable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape. The laws in the *Manusmitri* and other Vedic scriptures close all economic, political, social, educational, and personal channels through which Dalit women could be uplifted (Thind n.pag). The horrendous Laws in the *Manusmitri* were incorporated into Hinduism because they were favourable only to the Upper castes, which form the majority of India. Even today, in modern times, we see the severe oppression and exploitation of Dalit women. The Laws of the *Manusmitri* have a devastating effect on the level of education reached by Dalit women.

The caste discrimination inherited by birth leaves Dalit women facing multiple oppressions that violate their economic, political, social and cultural rights. The most deprived section of the society comprises of Dalit women who are the poorest, illiterate and easy targets for sexual harassment. The women face not just caste violence inflicted on them by the dominant castes, but also state violence.

1-2. Hindu Culture and Dalit women’s Struggle

Culture, meanwhile, regardless of its history- traditional culture or modern culture- reflects positionality of peoples collectively with rules, values and norms. Culture is dynamic changes never static with identities and shared experiences. Family, religion, and education system used to be the main elements of culture. Culture is influenced by media. Rituals are always carried out by people, which are reinforcing the meanings of life. The traditional culture which is locally interacting, reconstitutes against this the cultural imperialism which is institutionalized which is the identity of cultural power. Culture of the Oppressed is to resist the culture of the dominant to bring freedom. Traditional culture has continuity of people's lives and respects moral codes adopted by people. The stories of the oppressed revealed through symbols and practices. People's culture is a culture of multiplicity which is dominant over other culture. This involves a political structure which is decentralized sensitive to local culture. The alternative cultural politics leads to cultural and social change. India is, essentially, home for many cultures mutually enriching contact with each other. Indian culture has come from Dravidian culture. Indian culture is a living force. It has a significant role in moulding the culture of Asia.

The Hinduism History which has continued degrading Dalit women through dogmas and concept of purity, then, affects culture which can work as a catalyst for progress of Dalit women's living environment. With Sanskritization which is hinduization a dominant model, the ideals and beliefs of the Brahminic practices are imposed on Dalits to adopt a life style with untouchability practices. Sanskritization is an alien faith to Dalits, the spirituality of Dalits is replaced by Sanskritic spirituality. The Dalit life is incontinuation, that is, of dead and living are the integral spirituality of Dalit culture.

Brahminical culture endangers Dalits' identity and integrity. It enhances and annihilates Dalit culture instead of enriching the culture. The culture is reflection of resistance from the past to the present and moves to shape a blueprint for the future life which becomes a flowing stream. There is continuity of collective life in Dalit culture. In addition, modernization introduced consumerism and market economy which has destroyed ethos, value system, celebration, and affirmation of the culture of the people, particularly the culture of Rural Dalits. Traditional culture is a way of living and producing for life, to sustain life. But through imperialistic modern culture, the mode of production is set only for consumption. It is called as neo-colonization of traditional culture which is not the people's culture.

Meanwhile, what would be the question of duties of a wife? Who is the head of the family? Wives are devoted to their husbands and afraid of even mentioning the name of their husband. Barren

woman considered to be “*amangalam*”, bad omen and inferior to others, to be a curse to the society. Puberty is viewed as ‘flowering’ stage in a girl’s life, as pleasurable. Fertility, women are referred to mud waiting to receive seed. Woman in marriage are framed to be obedient and submissive wives. Motherhood is expected to be nurturing, fearful, good wives and bearers of worthy sons. Sexuality of fertility is socially permissible and sexual acts such as homosexual, lesbian behaviours are considered to be deviant, perverse and abnormal. Society allows multiple forms of sexual behaviour to co-exist practically but not socially. Erotic literature such as *Kamasutra* hints at the existence of homosexual desire and love.

Diverse sexualities are present and celebrated in Hindu temple sculpture. Pro-life existence of non-normative sexual culture is significant. They reveal the norms that a society lives by, to be constructed rather than given, clearly authorized by systems of patriarchal power. Madurai Meenakshi, Queen of the city, becomes bride given away every year in marriage. Marriage ceremony is the history of female domestication and husbandry authority.

Although it has been praised diverse of sexuality of the “human beings” at the one side of Hindu concept, Fundamentalist, Hinduism excludes plurality of the people even in sexuality. Particularly, lower caste, labouring women, who are Dalit women- are treated as the sexual “property” of the men of the all caste. The other caste women are treated as good and lower caste Dalit women as bad women because of Dalit women social status is low, subordinated that is why they are made to be sexually available to other caste. Dalit women are marked as natural and fit victims of violation, contrast to upper caste women who are considered to be pure and custodians of chastity. Chastity of upper caste women could be taken up as big issue in their “culture” because of being submissive wives who is called *pativiratas*. The lower caste women are considered not to be chaste. Sexual purity is anticipated caste purity which is honoured by the society.

Dalit women follow the Rituals more than the Dalit men. Dalit women associate with earth. They put the earth on the forehead, the mixture of water and mud strained that water is given to babies. They are related directly with the earth which is the life source. Worshiping the trees, decorating trees with *Kungumam*, turmeric that is worshiping old trees and rocks with the decoration. Cultural programme of festivals is only moment for the Dalit women who get into trance (or being “possessed” so to say). It is the only time they express their inner feelings and speak against other caste men, husbands, and demanding arak the local alcohol, chicken, good food, and behave like goddess. Before transplanting, the seeds are germinated in pots and Dalit women carry them by singing songs. Dalit women worship the nature for better and more food to be produced. Dalit women’s dances are *Kummi*, and following to them they have *Kulavai* - wherever they work they sing. To show the closeness with the

nature, they sing songs about their forefathers, mothers, the children and they abuse the landlords through their songs. After the hard work in the day during the night they sit together and chat with each other. They use lot of proverbs while talking and fighting. They tease each other and their blood related men from their kin who are about to be married with them. They relate with each other, and while calling the person they will not use the name but the relationship. They sing when a baby is born, when a girl attains puberty and also *Oppari* death. These practices we never find with women of other caste.

Dalit women are very strong and they give birth to more children. Dalit women work equally with the men, that is, why they oppose male domination and prove that they are stronger than the men. Dalit women work hard to survive. They are very open-minded, innocent, and not exploiting others but exploited by others. They have good characters. Dalit women, everyday, relate themselves with people in four ways. 1) With their family members, children, husband, 2) With the traders who buy their products, 3) The other caste landlords who give them work, and 4) Relate with distant relatives during marriages, deaths. Now beyond this the new effort is that Dalit women attend conferences, meetings, workshops and training programs which allowed them to meet with many Dalit women.

Dalit women are illiterates. They know only work related to land. They have not achieved even as one percent politically. They remain only as voters. They have no chance of learning about the country, the other ethnic groups and languages. Not all the Dalit women are member of the movement as well as in the political party. They are not involved in politics. Dalit women leadership is also controlled by the men. Dalit women have their own language. They preserve their language of their land. They have their own justice that is they do not have permanent enemies amongst themselves. For many years they follow the Rituals of the land. They are different from other caste women because they do not depend on their men like others. They work equally with men. When the men were taking the spade, Dalit women are ready with their basket to take mud. Every work it is both Dalit men and women work equally. Dalit women are workers, and they are not slaves to their husbands. Dalit women have very strong resistance power which has to be sustained.

Dalit culture was destroyed after the invasion of Aryans. Dalits lived through the dominant Brahminical culture. Sanskritization of Dalit culture, based on pure and impure concept was thrust on the oppressed, downtrodden communities especially on Dalit women. Dalit culture was silenced and destroyed. Dalits through a war, resistance gave life to the culture that faced the death by the dominant culture. Dalit culture is liberation, freedom, solidarity, equality, a culture of resistance towards freedom. Dalit culture is preserved through various forms of theatre which is revolutionary, disturbs and leads to action which is political action.

Dalit women perform dance which is devoted to Mathamma the Kulathaivam. The dancer is, however, almost exploited as being expected to dance in an erotic way. This is religious sanctioned prostitution. The month of June (*Anni Matham* in Tamil Calendar) is the temple festival for five days. The temple is built, festival conducted, the 'Car' is held in front all by the other caste. Out of five days the Mathammas, Dalit girl children are given to the goddess believing those children will be cured by the healing power of goddess. Once the child is cured, she is married to the goddess and named after her. She becomes a powerful replica of Mathamma. Later on she is mocked and treated as a public property. In public places she is teased and her children born are face lot of humiliation in the school by other children.

Mathammas socially and economically exploited by the community. She lives on her own without the support of families. A Dalit woman, becomes a dancer, then sexually exploited ends her life with nothing but left out with diseases.

The dominant brahminical culture from which the Devadasi system is extended to Dalit community is prevailing Dalit women. Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement (TNDWM), meanwhile, faced harassment even from Dalit men in the community for exposing the issue of Mathamma. The Dalit movement with patriarchal norms started publicly attacking leaders from TNDWM "individually". They are accused, through wall posters, public meetings and black mailings. TNDWM faced harassment confronting the caste and patriarchal nature of the communities which is also influenced by Hindutva ideology. Hindutva Ideology perpetuates hatred towards other religion and maintains the culture, the exploitative dominant culture through caste.

2. Contemporary Oppression against Dalit Women- in a wave of globalisation

2-1. At Special Economic Zones (SEZs), where producing "exclusion"

At present, 134,000 hectares of lands are set 67 multi-product SEZs in India (Financial Express, 30 Aug 2006). Although the land owner might receive the compensation for the land acquisition as the SEZs, the peasant Dalit women are facing the peril of the livelihoods by losing their job as well as being evicted from the land.

For Dalit women, "trickle-down effect" theory, in which people can expect "trickled" benefits dropped down from the country or big companies' economic growth, is just a mirage, not a reality at all. The alienation is creating widespread discontent amongst farmers and common people all over

India. The state, meanwhile, behaves as an agent of the corporation. The state government, which is essentially responsible to the citizen not only becomes advocates of the corporations but also acts as corporations.

The state government itself takes away the land, especially agricultural lands, coastal lands with the coastal regulation zones, salt pans, and forest lands for SEZs. The land taken for SEZs, meanwhile, only 35% is used for industry and the rest for non-industrial purposes: recreation centre- and housing. Although people are raising their voice, the oppression from the state government is intensified.

In Nandigram, West Bengal, 17 villagers were shot to death with the protest against government taking away lands for corporation; chemical hubs of Salim group. Out of 17 killed 12 are Dalits. The people of Nandigram have lived in daily fear of retaliation when the Citizen's Committee entered to the district. The mission found that women were extremely apprehensive, begging the mission to spend the night with them.

The state, however, is not restoring land rights and titles to landless Dalit women. Land given to SEZs promoters is more than 1000 hectares which obviously violates Land Reform Act. SEZs will not create employment for local Dalit women but it will push away Dalit women because SEZs employs skilled and educated workers. Communities, especially Dalit women in unorganised sectors, will not be employed in SEZs.

In Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, for example, another Nandigram is about to be occurred. Even though there are vociferous protests against the Tata's titanium dioxide plant to be situated at Sathankulam of the district, there are a lot of oppressions from the ruling party to the panchayat leaders to urge them to accept the project. Also, even before the panchayat leaders accept the project, the state government made an agreement with the company for establishing the Rs 2,500-crore titanium dioxide project. Negligence of local people voices in the politics and economy in SEZs definitely erodes the livelihood of the most vulnerable groups in the region, the Dalit Women.

Besides of land conflict occurred by SEZs, the insecurity of women is intensified. Those who work as manual labourer in big factories are mostly poor women, such as Dalit women. When returning from the factory to their home late at night, women need to worry about their safety. In Ulundurpettai taluk of Villupuram district, there were 3 rapes – one was Dalit woman, and other women were from other community. All are workers in big factories, and attacked on the way to go home from their workplace.

SEZs are not only taking away the land, political rights, and dignity, but also depriving of Dalit women's opportunities for self-improvements, such as educations. In northern Tamil Nadu, where Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED) develops various community-based activities, it has been introduced between Chennai and Kancheepuram. From all over India and foreign countries - e.g. Reliance Group which runs many business all over India, Nokia, Hyundai, and Samsung- have invested to the zones and established huge factories along with the super highway which connects Chennai, Kancheepuram, and Bangalore. The establishment of SEZs firstly affects peasant landless Dalit women by displacing them from the lands without any compensation. They employ not only skilled workers, but also manual labourers from Dalit villages, mostly young women for manual works.

Buses with the company logo are waiting for Dalit young girls early in the morning in front of the Dalit villages. Dalit girls are encouraged to go for work with SEZs than continuing for higher education. Dalit girls cannot have opportunities to learn any skills, even as "on the job trainings", and would face the unemployment as "uneducated woman" when the economy goes bad.

Very recently, the Swiss based international lingerie company- Triumph has decided to invest to the area in order to establish key factory for underwear business throughout of the Subcontinent. The key of the final decision of investment was the quality of traditional technology in Garment industry, which Rural Dalit Women have conserved for many years in order to sustain their rural life (The Indian Express). Meanwhile, they are planning to sell those women's underwear for 400-1000 Rupees which is almost impossible price for local Dalit women, whereas the provider of the skills would face of insecurity.

2-2. At Dalit Women's workplace- influence of globalisation sprayed out in the villages

The political economy of globalisation erodes livelihoods of Rural Dalit women, who even luckily live far away from the Special Economic Zones. The agriculture sector has been transformed into the easier money making industry, such as floriculture and horticulture. Agriculture is turned into floriculture where small farmers would be eager to see cash everyday. Dalit women and school-going Dalit girl children are employed to pluck flowers for extremely low wages. Dalit Women and Dalit children are working in the fields where hazardous agro chemicals and pesticides are sprayed which affected the health of the Dalit women and Dalit children.

The studies conducted on the impact of floriculture on the health of Dalit women in Santana Gopalapuram were on half an acre of land there are 10 workers: both men and women. According to

the villagers, floriculture has been around for last 20 years, but in the last 5 years, it has intensified and more farmers are moving to floriculture. Earlier they used to grow groundnut and rice. Women specifically mentioned that they have to get up early and finish household work before going to pluck flowers. They work from 6am in the farm and they can eat only after 10 am at the earliest. Also, due to constantly bending and plucking of flowers for almost 6 hours for low wages, at a stretch, there is chest, back and leg pain. Pesticides are sprayed almost when they are on the field, and smell persists for 3 days or more. Women are suffering from excessive white discharge, rolling feeling in the stomach, hysterectomy, and even tumour in uterus.

Floriculture affects also the rights to education of Dalit girl children. Dalit girl children are employed in order to pluck the flower before going to school and after the school. Dalit girl children are not able to recheck what they have learnt in the school and this turns into potential factor of drop-out. Of course with the health problem with pesticide, Dalit girls are failed to access to the school as well. Even some of the family members fell down with diseases caused by the pesticide this affects children's rights to go to school.

In Kollathur where the agricultural lands were taken away for aqua farm for exportation which is located by the Buckingham Canal, at the backwater area of east-coast of Kancheepuram District, Tamil Nadu, is a Dalit village. Dalits have worked for cultivation of cashew nuts, prawn and fish catching in the backwater. In 2004, a Chennai based entrepreneur, F. Bartholome has obtained the license from the Aquaculture Authority and opened an industrial prawn farm called Chinna Aqua Farm. The farm came up on agricultural land, right alongside backwaters. The farm discharges untreated effluences from the farm which salinated agricultural lands and the backwaters.

The Aqua farming in India was promoted by the government in 90's for one of the international business strategies of the country without thinking about the environmental impacts. Soon after, in 1996, the Indian Supreme Court has regulated the use of coastal area for environmental reason, including creeks and backwaters which polluted water bodies. Running the farm without registration and permission shall be a criminal offence, but in practice, Bartholome's farm, for example, successfully got the license although it violates the regulation which stated in the law due to the lack of seriousness in the implementation of the law and due to corruption.

Kollathur aqua farm is located on agricultural land whereas agricultural land should not be used for Aqua farming. Bartholome himself is also connected strongly with politicians. Ironically even after the inclusion of regulations, the production of prawns in the area for the exportation is increasing.

The land has been transformed from traditional agricultural lands for people's food to money making products for exportation. And now, with the toxic waste the Aqua farm cause loss of agricultural production which affects directly the daily food production of the Dalit villagers. Also, prawn catching and mussels collection by the Dalit women was totally affected with the pollution. This causes food insecurity as well as livelihood insecurity to Dalit women.

The toxic waste polluted not only plants and animals but also human beings, mostly Dalit women who work in the field and with the toxic polluted back waters directly. Women got itching, skin disease and dimming of eyesight. Ground water has been salinated, and Dalit women lost adequate water for agriculture as well as for drinking. Not only endangered the livelihood by losing their work, but also women had to suffer from the physical pain by the disease, and from no money for the medical cost for treatment.

The Dalits of Kollathur village are suffering from impacts of the pollution directly and indirectly due to the false cases many villagers who struggled against the farm were beaten up and charged. Just in the last two years, more than 40 young men from this village of 4000 attend court cases four times in a month; need to pay a lot of cost for legal procedure; cost for advocates as well as transportation cost to the court.

The increasing vulnerability in rural traditional life encourages not only industrial transformation but also migration. At Thirumalpur of Vellore district of Tamil Nadu where women earn only Rs.12.50 as wage for half-a-day's labour for agriculture work forced them to migrate to neighbouring State to earn more than Rs.50 per day. The Dalit women leave their children with their elders. Both men and women migrate they are made to stay in big halls or in schools. The women migrant workers sleep in one corner and their husbands as well as other men in other side vice-a-versa. They have no privacy they rely on near by pump sheds, lakes and ponds to bathing and washing their clothes, which are very insecure places. Every time they migrate from their village for a maximum of 20 days. The contractor employs them with an assignment to carry out harvest in 20 acres of land. After taking his commission of 30%, the contractors pay the rest to the workers. Women lose freedom and dignity in bad working conditions when they migrate.

3. In order to sustain Dalit women's struggles

3-1. Civil Society's Challenge?

Having faced the deprivation of human rights of Dalit Women, what kinds of actions have been

taken by the civil society? In order to achieving “uplifting” or “development” of peoples in disadvantage class, Development NGOs as well as international institutions emphasize recently “rights based approach”. The United Nations Development Programme has set so-called Millennium Development Goals in order to “monitor” the implementation of the goal for human development. But those are neither our approach nor our goals. As it can be seen in Dalit women’s situation, people are struggling for their livelihood, and the movement should reject those meaningless mercies from the top. The movement, in fact, pursues “struggle based approach” and “People’s Goals”. The “Right based approach” is a language of donors. This makes movements isolated in each cells. People’s movements are compromising not confronting. We should rather keep up the “Struggle based approach”, which leads movements to bring changes in people’s lives.

The peoples around so-called ‘civil society’, therefore, do not share the problem with Dalit women. The civil society is narrowing down by becoming fundamentalists under the name of “rights based approach”. At the citizens’ forum for celebrating 60th years of independence, which was taken place at Bangalore, for example, there are a lot of oppositions to serve beef cutlet as a choice of the meal service. As the reality, however, there are people who have beef. Inclusiveness is important and not to exclude efforts of various initiatives. There is a need to join hands to stay with the people in multiple struggles against multiple discriminations and exploitations.

3-2. Dalit Women’s Challenge- for Dalit Children

SRED, thus, extends the area of activities in various levels: from local to international level. For local level, if there are caste based oppression against Dalit women, immediately stay at the side of the people to protest against the oppression. In Rangapuram village, Dalit children are not allowed to go to school because the Non-Dalits blocked the way to go to school. SRED immediately sent fact finding mission of people’s movement, such as Tamil Nadu Dalit Women’s Movement, and made a petition to make a safe road to school-going children. When making a petition, police forces was sent from many place to the district educational office of Kancheepuram, and they immediately arrested unlawfully activists of Dalit women. This year, at last, the new road for children was successfully launched at the village.

In Anandapuram, village, without the bridge over the river, Dalit children are not able to cross the river in rainy season to go to the school. Dalit mothers, meanwhile, who work in the field, definitely need the place to send children whilst they are working. Since 2004, SRED launched Dalit day care centres, to provide space for children to play, to sing, to paint, to learn and to prepare for the formal school. Primarily the centres are used for day care centre, which enable Dalit women who have to go

to the field to leave the children at safer place. After this day care centre, they will go to primary school.

The centres are, however, used for multi-purpose. Working children can get education after work in evening class. The centres are playing crucial role for school going children as the safer place after school for doing further learning. Some times the centres are used for meeting purposes. At Anandapuram, with the warm support from Nagano branch of Buraku Liberation League, successfully established a centre. But meanwhile, have limitation of the budget to launching the centre for many villages, therefore re-arrange meeting room to Day care centre. Actually Sred staff members are doing secretary work just by hearing children's voice, and also frequently have a discussion where there are a lot of paintings and learning materials for children.

In the community based work, found out that the similar situation to other children, namely, Irulas, Tribal people as well as quarry workers. When families remain as bonded labourers, when parents have to take children to quarry work place because of lack of finance to prepare for their study, families migrate seeking for their work. Children's rights to education are denied. The centres and the programmes in the centres are particularly designed by paying attention with caste-free environment, and children are ensured to be away from any discriminated thoughts, practices, and behaviours.

Dalit communities, particularly girl children, face difficulty also in higher educations. Just only with falling to financial difficulty affected by Tsunami, Dalit girl students were sent back to their home without continuing the second year of the course whilst they managed for the first year of the course. Even getting the best scores at the twelfth grade, Bharati, a Dalit girl faced difficulties to find appropriate scholarship schemes and resulted to give up their education (nursing course). SRED collects supports for those Dalit girls and help them to continue their higher education.

3-3. Dalit women's challenge to Dominant culture

Supporting of Dalit women by providing services: children's day care centre, and urgent scholarship is of course one of our struggle against dominant culture of globalisation. Likewise, SRED and TNDWM also directly support the struggles for the victims of culture of casteism and patriarchy: such as Mathammas.

Our approach to Mathamma begins with their name and status. Mathammas refused to be called as Mathammas. The first change with in them is to have new names, and to remove the 'Sacred Pottu

Thali'. The movement of Mathammas: Mathamma Liberation Movement was formed primarily to stop the practice of giving the Dalit girls to Mathammas. During the festivals, Mathammas from the movement were vigilant that no woman, no Mathamma dancing is taking place publicly. Now the temple festivals dress up men as women and the dance continues.

In Kaverirajapuram during temple festival the leaders stopped Mathamma dance with the help of police. But the movement found that it was the wrong strategy as it created incredible views from the villagers from other movements. The Mathamma movement is, now, visiting villages where Mathamma temples are, and conducting meetings, cultural programs, explaining the hurdles they went through by themselves. They keep persuading by saying that 'Stop the practice of Mathammas'.

Mathamma leaders from the movement contested in election with many threats and boycotts. They, however, claimed equal status, and went through all the procedure of the election which itself is an empowering process challenged the system, the community and the men in the villages. Devi, the leader of the movement who was contested, explains her experience in the election as follows;

During the election campaign, those who are against me strongly said: "why do you nominate yourself for the election? You are Mathamma and who will vote for you?" But I didn't accept any words in the remarks. I did not win this time, but it was brilliant experience. There are a lot of problems that Mathammas are facing. If I become a ward member, I will give the rights for the mathammas and totally I would like to stop this practice. I will make employment, education and housing, and all basic needs- I will try to get them through government.

They stopped dancing of exploitation but started to dance to liberate others because she is to be liberated. Now, some of them have leadership and empowerment training with the support of Yasuda literacy foundation of Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institution. With the training, the women gains more force to struggle against the dominant culture.

Kollathur women are also challenging to the huge dominant entity by empowering themselves in the movement. They organised Kollathur Dalit Women's Sangam, and are fighting in the struggles in legal process as well as in their livelihoods. They keep embracing a slogan: "Close the Aqua Farm". Globalisation emphasises efficiency and competitive culture. Thus it appears that for the majority of Dalits and poor, globalisation has meant further deprivation. (Jalandhar: 2007, p.20) The struggles

against globalised economy are also, for Dalit women, struggle against culture of dominant casteism and patriarchy.

3-4. Invitation from Asian Rural Women's Conference: as a consolidated forum for rural, minority women, including Dalit women

Apart from the community and grassroots based challenge for overcoming the difficulty surged up to Dalit women, the SRED and Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement are trying to organising forums on rural women. Amongst Dalit women 81.45% lives in rural area. The globalisation, meanwhile, affects firstly the vulnerable sectors in rural area, where, obviously, Dalit women are working. But also, the rural women in other community, such as Irulas Tribes, Narikuravars, Dhobis, and fisherfolks are suffering in the similar situation. Not only in India, but also, there are many rural women who are struggling in current political economy of globalisation. The concerns on international trade, international agro-business, and patents to traditional seeds are all rural Dalit women's agenda as well as women from other community. Actually, Dalit women flew to Hong Kong to take an action at the 6 ministerial meeting of WTO to protest against promotion of pesticides and genetically modified foods. The forum, Asian Rural Women's Conference, which is taking place on 6-8th March, 2008 in Arakkonam/ Chennai, India, is putting together marginalised women in the region who are against imperialist oppression. By asserting dignity of rural women, which cannot be seen in any other rights-based documents, many marginalised women in the region create the power to struggle.

The conference will develop a unity of analysis from the experiences of rural women and the situation of women in the context of a globalised world. Last July, some Indian women's organisations gathered at our office, and conducted National consultation on rural women, which of course include latest developments on rural Dalit women. On 31 July to 2 Aug, presenters from some Asian countries gathered in Manila, and have issued rural women's declaration. Of course caste based discrimination was clearly mentioned in the context of the struggle against patriarchal globalisation. Meanwhile, the Manila conference did not have any Japanese participants, particularly from Buraku community. It would be grateful for Dalit women to share the issue with Buraku women in March for "Rights, Empowerment and Liberation", which is the main slogan of the conference.

Asian Rural Women's Conference would also be the occasion for cultural expression of oppressed rural women. Dalit women are using '*Thappu*', the drums, to show that drums can be beaten up by women not only by men. Drum beatings are to give life to the Dalit culture which was killed by the

Brahminical culture. There are Dalit women's dances as well, such as *Kolatam*, *Oyilatam*, *Karagattam*, *Thappattam*, *Paraiyattam*, which all accompany with the drum music. The drums have languages that the Dalit women beat all rituals. *Parai* the drum is beaten by *Paraiyer* is the myth and the *parai* was treated like the Dalits as 'untouchable' by the dominant culture. The Dalit women revived the beating of *parai* and revolted against the dominant culture by giving new, revolving meaning to *Parai*.

Dalit women beat drum to oppose the domination which is systematic, structural and multiple. Beating drum is to destroy the ideology of domination. Beating drum is to beat up the monoculture and to bring inter-culture of the oppressed, downtrodden, the broken, people together towards liberating humanity, transformation to achieve Equality, Freedom, Justice for a 'Humane' society through cultural and social society. Dalit women in Tamil Nadu are ready to drum out the globalised patriarchal fundamentalism, which produces casteism and gender discrimination, with the solidarity of other minority women.

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