



THE STATUS OF DALIT WOMEN IN TELANGANA ARMED STRUGGLE (1946 TO 1951)

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ABSTRACT

Dalit women suffer from the interconnections of multiple oppressions of class, caste, gender and cultural at all levels by both men and women, from all castes and classes. Dalit women is downtrodden among downtrodden she suffers in the family, first, because she is a women; and then she has to face society as she is a Dalit. Sexual control and systematic rape of Dalit women by men of the dominant castes forced her into prostitution in the name of religion through Davadasi system which widely prevalent in the region. Dalit women not only grapple with the discrimination due to caste hierarchy and untouchability but they live in poverty coupled with political, legal and religion cultural discrimination. Access to resources such as land, water is out of reach to these women. The extreme perennial economic derivation has also resulted in illiteracy, malnourishment, poor health conditions, besides this they are also overworked, oppressed and victimized by a number of factors, including patriarchal attitude within the family and community.

Introduction

The historical and political importance of the Telangana region grew along with the rise of the Marathas. However, the Moghal rulers at Delhi appointed able governors to keep the Deccan under the control so that they could keep a watch on the development in south India and check the Marathas in Deccan. By the 18th century it was politically stabilized under the AsafJah dynasty for initiating development in the region thus a powerful bureaucracy was set up on the top creating various jagirs and the local chiefs were also integrated into the political set up and administrative.

Dalit women suffer from the interconnections of multiple oppressions of class, caste, gender and cultural at all levels by both men and women, from all castes and classes. Dalit women is downtrodden among downtrodden she suffers in the family, first, because she is a women; and then she has to face society as she is a Dalit. Sexual control and systematic rape of Dalit women by men of the dominant castes forced her into prostitution in the name of religion through Davadasi system which widely prevalent in the region. Dalit women not only grapple with the discrimination due to caste hierarchy and untouchability but they live in poverty coupled with political, legal and religion cultural discrimination. Access to resources such as land, water is out of reach to these women. The extreme perennial economic derivation has also resulted in illiteracy, malnourishment, poor health conditions, besides this they are also overworked, oppressed and victimized by a number of factors, including patriarchal attitude within the family and community.



Dalit women are victims of social, religious and cultural practices like Devdasis and Jogins in Telangana region. In the name of these practices, village girls are married to god by their helpless parents. These girls are then sexually exploited by the upper caste landlords and rich men and directed in to trafficking and prostitution. A ritual called 'chira'. The literal meaning of the word 'chira' is to cut or break. In this ritual when a girl from the lower caste community reaches the age of puberty, an elderly prestigious man from the higher caste breaks the hymen of the girl child by sexual act. This ritual is performed in a way to make the girl accept this fact as a routine practice. Practices such as chira, Jogins, and Davadasi, which are prevalent even today, are harmful, threaten the dignity of Dalit women, and violate their human rights. Most of Dalit women in the Nizam state worked as manual scavengers and forced to earn their living through scavenging, cleaning dry latrines by using metal pans and a short broom to scoop up the night soil. The human excreta were carried in baskets on their heads. This kind of dehumanized practice has killed dignity of Dalit women at the same time these women believe that without this job they will be no where to their livelihoods.

The Dalit women in Telangana joined the armed struggle along with their husbands and sons to serve in the dalams (guerilla squads). Thus the Dalit women served the Communist cadres by providing food and shelter during the periods of the underground struggle. The Telangana women looked at their movement from the folk cultural perspective in order to gain for their psychological and social autonomy and acquired a different connotation in the history for their militancy and distinctiveness. For them struggle meant not just organization to get the people together or the structure of the leadership, but a complete involvement of entire life and family. Considering her position, she felt that it was a question of life and death, with a sense of sacrifice that puts together body and soul to bear physical torture and mental agony and further without having a position in organizational structure. For them it was collective fight against the goondas by publicly dragging them into streets by holding their hair and shirts. It was a resistance against the police raids, with slings and it were raids on landlord's godowns to seize food grains and credit documents and further women cooked and served food for squads, washed their clothes, treated the wounded men / women acted as informers and couriers. They sang songs of valour sacrifices of martyrs in advocating the struggle culture. These actions and commitment produced culture of collective resistance and insaneness opposition with which they kept the people united and destroyed the regime of Doras. They wielded guns to lead squads in a spirit of gender equity. Their role was not minimal in opposing the land seizures and against landlord zulum (highhandedness), they joined the armed (dalams) squads and underground struggle and even conducted armed battles during the Telangan struggle. The real challenge to the ruling establishment was from these Telangana women. The position of Dalit women in this context was worst to that of Dalit men. In this context, the main aim of this study is to understand the role and place of women in this historical struggle in general and Dalit women in particular.



TELANGANA ARMED STRUGGLE: AN OVERVIEW:

The subsistence agrarian system in Telangana region has undergone and gradually transformed into the new market or cash economy without any corresponding changes in the social arrangements. The “modes of production and exchange remained pre-capitalist or semi- feudal and emerged as the major source of dissent among the poor peasantry”. However, the breakdown of the traditional pattern of extraction of work, the emergence of new relations of production based on profit- motivation further induced the labourers to take an antagonistic stand against the dominant in the villages. The people who were subjected to vetti took to various means of protests during the twentieth century as result the government passed a vetti Relief Act in 1923 and it received wide publicity during the height of the protest through pamphlets and newspapers published in vernacular language. Their protest and boycott of work, however, did not help them free; they were expected to serve the village for as long as they belonged to their respective castes. pward mobility.

ROLE OF THE DALIT WOMEN IN TELANGANA ARMED STRUGGLE:

Telangana peasant armed struggle has liberated thousands of villages from the autocratic rule of the Nizam. This historic struggle was also responsible for the liberation millions of vetti labors from the inhuman practice of vetti beggar. The Telangana peasants played an important role in building and carry forwarding the movement despite severe repression of the Nizam rule. All the more the contributions of the Telangana peasant armed struggle are illustrious and their sacrifices are immortal. According to Pucchalapalli Sundaraiiah the ideologue and one of the hero of the movement says that the single biggest contribution of the Telangana revolt is that it brought to the forefront all the basic theoretical and ideological questions. And he says that it raised a series of issues and tried to resolve them on the ground. The role of peasants in people’s democratic revolution, the place and significance of resistance, the rural revolutionary bases, the concrete analysis of the classification among the peasantry and the role played by the different strata of the society, the specific role of working class and urban centre, the role of women all have been dealt in the struggle. All their problems and questions scientific and realistic practical solutions were found only in the people’s struggle.

In this historic revolt, women participated and played an important role. They occupied front positions in demonstrations and processions whenever the party called such an act. However, the role of Dalit women played in this historic struggle was not depicted in a fitting manner. Dalit women the least of the oppressed in the hierarchical society played an important role. They took part in the land struggle, equal status and wages, they took up weapons along with men, they were part of the dalams as a guerilla, they acted as couriers, they provide shelter for their men folk when they were attacked by the police and private militia Razakars.

Resistance and opposition to unjust practices and domination are not unknown to history. The labour communities have tried to defend their customary rights when they were violated by anyone including kings. The break down of the traditional patterns of extraction of free work, the emergence of new relations of



production of profit- motivation further induced the labourers to take an antagonistic stand against the dominant villages. They subjected to vetti and took various means of protests during the 20th century. To find a solution to the continues disturbances at work place, to halt the recurring boycott of work and regularize vetti extraction the government passed a vetti relief Act in 1923. It received wide publicity during the height of the protests through pamphlets and news paper published in vernacular language.

Caste subjected to vetti perceived their exploitation as inherent in the system as it was institutionalized on the basis of caste. Their protests and boycott of work however did not help them become free. They are expected to serve the village as long as they belonged to their respective castes. Therefore these out castes, found conversion to Islam as a way out of their exploitation. They thought that they would then be in a position to take revenge against their oppressors. Low caste and class Hindus who were converted to Christianity and to Islam was the subject of social boycott by village officials. It was alleged that these converts were deprived of their rights and that they were compelled by Deshmukhs to work for them and that they received practically no remuneration for their services. The conversions were thus form of class struggle between the vetti extracting landowners and the vettilabourers.

CONCLUSION

The Telanagana Dalit women understood the gender justice as conventional dharma from the folk, tribal and peasant point of view. Their objective being such human equity (not class equity), which they readily accepted the Communists talk of fairness (justice), and people's rajyam, and became part of the movement within a very short time. The women joined the movement and made their sons to join and serve in the movement. They served the Communist cadres by providing food and shelter during the periods of underground struggles. The women looked at the movement from the folk cultural perspective in order to gain for their physiological and social autonomy. Women acquired different connotation in history for their militancy and distinctiveness.

For them struggles meant not just organization to get people together or the structure of leadership, but a complete involvement of the entire life and family. It was question of life and death with a sense of sacrifice. It was a sacrifice that puts together body and soul to bear physical torture and mental agony, and further without having a position of organizational structure. For them it was neither a struggle for a position or fame. But it was collective fight against the goondas by publicly dragging them in to streets by holding their hair and shirts. It was a resistance against the police raids with slings and it were raids on landlords' gowdowns to seize food grains and credit documents. And further women cooked and served for squads, washed their clothes, treated the wounded men and women, acted as informers and couriers. They sang songs of valour, sacrifice of martyrs advocating the struggle culture. These actions and commitments produced culture of collective resistance and instantaneous opposition with which they kept the people united and destroyed the regime of Doras in 1946.



The root cause of the backwardness of the Dalit women was Caste system. But the Communist leaders did not focus and awakened the people against untouchability. So at the end the question arises that what Dalit women has got from the struggle as their positions remained the same except they are relieved from the vetti. These Dalit women were main participants in the Struggle but they did not find any place in the main stream history.

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